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SPECIAL REPORT

CALLS FOR MORE EDUCATIONAL TIME-ON-TASK

The issue before us with this Special Report is, “How much time is being devoted to true educational activities and how much time should be devoted to them?” This is a subject worthy of thought. Habits and tradition alone are not reliable.

We cannot escape the fact that students in the U.S. are increasingly falling behind students in the industrialized countries (and even some non-industrialized) of the world. Math. Languages. Science. History. The fair, objective standards all point to our U.S. culture as falling further and further behind in educating the students.

There are some heightening discussions that the children in the U.S. are not investing as many hours in classroom and homework tasks as they should be if they are going to match both their ancestors and their contemporary peers in other industrialized countries. There some standard responses:

Many in conservative circles say it is a ruse to get more tax dollars into the public school establishment.

Many teachers deflect the idea, for they would just as soon earn their annual salaries while working fewer days.

Many parents and students complain that increased school hours would interfere with family priorities and other worthy projects outside the school’s orbit.

Many accuse that the schools or the teachers are already requiring too much of “Johnny.”

The list could go on and on.

You and I will not impact the national debate; but we must be conscious that our movement, and our schools, are being pressured from forces that are coming from opposing directions.

We do have some parents who are utilizing our schools as the “softest” alternative. Some gladly pay our tuition, for they have found that they can get away with more with us than they are allowed elsewhere.

We do have parents who have left our schools with the concern that we are too lax in our academic rigor. They assert that we are not pushing our students to the extent they need to be challenged.

We do have parents who praise our policies but are the first in line to criticize us if we enforce our policies with *their* children.

We do have parents who can articulately argue that the academic level of their Christian school is not up to standard.

We do have parents who like our environment, and give us general praise, but criticize us for assigning homework, for giving grades like F, D, and C when merited under the school's scope and sequence, and for generally being "tougher" than what they believe is necessary.

We do have parents who believe their students will end up as "world-class quality" in their life-long endeavor and that this can be accomplished without work, challenge, or discomfort.

We do have parents who want shorter school days and more activities outside the core curriculum; and they will pressure the school to implement their ideas.

We do have some godly parents who would love to have their children where they can get their Bible training and avoid the poisons dispensed at the secular schools, but they do not see the current-day Christian education movement producing the academic product that is expected by Jehovah. There are well-informed leaders who assert that all too many fundamentalist institutions, from colleges down through elementary schools, may be fulfilling their aims for impacting the students with the urgency of salvation and a godly walk but are not where they should be academically. As they balance things in their minds, the family that chooses the secular school is no more "wrong" (for exposing the children to biblical error) than many Christian schools are "wrong" (for not implementing the academic rigor that should be present).

On first blush, it would appear that the school administrator cannot win in this tug of war over standards. Conversely, we believe there are steps that can be taken to teach the parents who are pestering for us to lower standards and to impress parents who are fearful that we are too lax. What can we do? Here is a beginning list:

1. PLAN AND EXECUTE A FULL SCHOOL YEAR THAT ENCOMPASSES A FULL 180 DAYS OF INSTRUCTION.

We must talk more of pursuing academic excellence for the future benefit of the students. Too many of us have fallen into the trap of planning and conducting fewer days than what our culture says is a full year. Too many of us have fallen into the trap of meeting the minimum requirement below which we would transgress civil law instead of setting our school year based upon what it will take to accomplish excellence. The 900/990 hour minimum limit on instructional time is a minimum below which the students are truant, not a number indicating that students have received quality.

2. ADMINISTER THE SCHOOL TO HEIGHTEN THE TIME-ON-TASK.

We have been functioning for some time with some poor habits. It is all too easy to give into the request for students to drop their classroom tasks in favor of other activities. Such pressures will come from parents and also from a full range of well-meaning adults and students, including coaches, pastors, and church leaders. It is as though class time is dispensable, and all of the challenges of adult life will be achieved automatically. We need to be leaders who will work against those old poor habits.

3. ADMINISTER A SOUND ATTENDANCE PHILOSOPHY AND SUBSEQUENT RULES WITH RENEWED DEDICATION.

Here again, we have increasingly fallen into poor habits. All too many times we have set

aside school attendance, sanctioning our students' absence from the most important priority of their weeks, substituting less important activities. As soon as we approve of an absence, we are relieving the parents and students of their responsibility before God and man. We should be upholding high standards, not sanctioning low standards.

4. SUPERVISE THE TEACHERS SO THAT THE SCHOOL'S CURRICULUM IS APPLIED AS FRUITFULLY AS POSSIBLE.

Our veteran, conscientious teachers point to many illustrations when they do not have as much time as they wish they had to impart the knowledge that should be assimilated by the students. Choices have to be made. Teachers need to be guided by their supervisors to do the things that will make the most difference. There are many times when the best choice will mean that the teacher will create more work for himself. The object of schooling is not making life easy for the teacher but to create learning opportunities for the students. Again, the principal is the key, supervising the teaching corps.

The attached article illustrates an important truth that is often missed by principals, teachers, and parents. A school's curriculum is not just the "textbook basics." There are many areas of knowledge that can and should be included in the school's curriculum. A standard definition of education should be remembered: Schooling is, "Learning what is important for life." That is very far-reaching.

5. SUPERVISE THE TEACHERS SO THAT THEY EFFECTIVELY USE THE CLASS HOURS THAT ARE AVAILABLE.

It should not be unnoticed that some teachers waste a lot of class time through lack of forethought and planning. When they do so, they are not just wasting their time, they are wasting the time of every student in the class. When this occurs, it should be no surprise if some parents assert that school is secondary to other things or that school is irrelevant. The principal must get involved.

6. EXPECT THE TEACHING CORPS TO ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES TO SPUR THEIR IMPROVEMENT.

Administrators should not only encourage professional development, but expect it. We should not expect of our students what we are not expecting of our teachers. They should be doing their best. They should have some required readings for in-house staff in-service. They should be required to attend educational seminars and conferences. It is not the option of the teacher to "option out" of these professional development activities.

7. SUPERVISE THE CURRICULUM AND THE TEACHERS TO MATCH INDIVIDUAL ABILITY AND ACHIEVEMENT.

Many of us have fallen into the trap of misapplying achievement test data. It is "easy" to see test result numbers for our movement, school, and class and think we have universally accomplished. It should not be forgotten that our movement, our schools, and our classes are typically composed of students with higher-than-average aptitudes. "Unto whom much is given, much is required." Many of us have also fallen into the trap of practicing a system wherein the textbook and the standard lectures become the norm for what the teacher is to require equally of every student. If we have students with better than average potential, and if they are not achieving at least as high as their potential, we must

reexamine and recalculate our efforts. Similarly, as we have students who truly do not have the aptitude for higher levels, we must design a program that will challenge them at the ability level where God has created them. Diagnosing the needs of individuals and groups of students must be a high priority of the principal, assisted by the teaching corps. An important part of this task, but not the only part, is the proper use of aptitude test score data.

It should be emphasized that research indicates that “skipping a grade” and “graduating early” are not options for a school to encourage or allow (aside from the true and rare cases when the child is a prodigy – think of Einstein-like people!). These ideas were on the cutting edge of “neat ideas” a few decades ago. The results of those “ideas” yielded ample evidence that they were bad, not good, for the students.

To meet the academic needs of the more advanced students, schools should have a policy of informing and encouraging parents with higher-performing students to prepare for, and take, nationally recognized exams as approved by the college of future enrollment. This writer is a “fan” of the CLEP due to its content neutrality. This is not a task to be put off until the student is nearing the end of high school. “Passing” a content-area test with acceptable scores allows the student to “jump over” one or more standard college freshman classes in that content area, moving on to other studies, usually without cost and usually with full college credit earned. At many colleges, a student can literally shorten his college experience by one or two semesters. It is a gross misnomer to believe that students should not undertake such tests unless they have been enrolled in a class with some type of “honors” title. There are ways for a student to excel and for classes to excel so that passing a CLEP is very doable. Schools will, however, need to educate parents and students of the virtues of taking/passing the tests and to guide the students into how to prepare for those exams. To succeed, students will typically be working with the “textbook basics” *and* extra readings and projects. Books and other resources are available to assist in test preparation. The faculty can, and should, assist in this entire process.

We should all keep our ears upon the national debate. We should even keep a file of articles that call for more rigor and class time. Posting these may assist those who complain that you are too tough. If our culture chooses to dedicate more time-on-task in educational matters, there does not appear to be any conflict with God’s priorities. Instead, we as leaders in Christian education should adjust. We do not need to lose any part of our constituency, let alone lose them because they believe we are not upholding the academic rigor that should be true of schooling.

It can be noted that KCEA has produced different KCEA Special Reports that address some of the topics addressed above.

TEC

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**Dues paid by affiliating schools made this Report possible.
KCEA continues in its purpose to protect and promote Christian education.**

Education: Learning Takes Time

Newsweek

Jan. 22, 2007 issue - It doesn't sound like much at first. Students attending a public school in urban Chicago go for 5 hours and 45 minutes daily, while the New York City school day is 65 minutes longer. Now, factor in that New York City kids attend school 12 more days than their Windy City counterparts. Add it up, and it's clear the New York kids have gained a distinct advantage—eight more weeks of instruction time a year.

Those striking inequities—and others—were highlighted by a new database produced by the National Council on Teacher Quality, a Gates Foundation-funded watchdog group. Researchers waded through phone-book-size union contracts and school-district policy booklets to come up with a portrait of how the 50 largest school districts are educating American kids (nctq.org/cb).

The dramatic disparities—for example, kids in Memphis get about five weeks less schooling than kids in Houston—have reignited enthusiasm for an old idea: close the achievement gap by making the school day longer. This week, as part of the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, Sen. Edward Kennedy is expected to propose legislation that calls for the federal government to carve out as much as \$150 million to help schools come up with a plan for longer school days.

The idea has been around for decades. Twenty-four years ago, the landmark "A Nation at Risk" report, which charted the course for school reform, noted that public schools in the United States lagged behind most of the industrialized world when it came to the amount of time kids spent in class—by as much as 30 percent. The report called for expanding the school day and year in public schools. While some districts moved to a year-round calendar to relieve overcrowding, longer school days aimed at improving student achievement was a notion that never took hold. These days, as test scores have become the yardstick by which public schools are measured, reformers say an increase in instructional time could help give kids the boost they need to succeed.

"We've put the burden on the children to improve," says Jennifer Davis, president of Massachusetts 2020, which is setting up model extended-day programs there. "We need to give them the time and sources to do it."

They also need to do it right. Rather than slapping on an extra hour of reading and math drills, researchers say, schools should offer more science, social studies, art and music, as well as creative projects like producing newsletters (to practice writing) or building model houses (to use fractions). Not everyone embraces the idea. Some parents say kids need their downtime. Teachers worry about exhaustion, and districts are concerned about additional costs—heartier snacks, extra materials for projects, teacher salaries.

But Markus Watson, an eighth grader who attends Matthew J. Kuss Middle School in Fall River, Mass., is convinced. His school was one of 10 public schools in Massachusetts that adopted an extended-day schedule this year. When he first heard his school day would end at 4:15 instead of 2:15, his heart sank. But the extended day has made school more appealing. Yes, he's gotten more instruction in English, but he's also become a ham radio operator and played the lead role in "Macbeth." "We're learning more than we usually do from teachers," he says. "And it keeps me out of trouble." That's a lesson that is worth repeating.

—Peg Tyre

URL: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16610015/site/newsweek/page/2/>