

Research Brief

Time in School: Opportunity to Learn

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While the number of days that children spend in school varies little from district to district, the actual number of hours they spend on campus varies greatly. In this working paper, Walsh uses data she is gathering from collective bargaining agreements and school board personnel policies, among other documents, to examine the total number of hours that children spend in school in the 50 largest districts in the United States. The preliminary results offer some shocking numbers. For example, the number of days students spend in school varies little (from a low of 174 days to a high of 186), but the difference in the number of hours is considerable. These differences in time may not seem substantial (a few minutes per day more in one district over another, for example), but over the

course of a year, it adds up to quite a lot. Children in Chicago schools, for example, spend the equivalent of 8 fewer weeks in school than do students in New York City. To be sure, these data are not without problems. The number of hours outlined in these documents represents policies and not necessarily practice. (Walsh sent the data both to the districts as well as the NEA and AFT, who verified the data and corrected errors.) Whether more time in school relates to better achievement scores is not addressed. But it seems clear that children who attend schools with shorter school days are being deprived of valuable time that could be used for any number of worth-while activities, including offering more instruction in classes other than reading and math.

| District | Days in student school year | Length of student day | Hours per year |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Chicago | 174 | 5 hours, 45 minutes | 1001 |
| Dade County, FL | 180 | 6 hours | 1080 |
| Broward, FL | 180 | 6 hours | 1080 |
| Hawaii | 180 | 6 hours | 1080 |
| Los Angeles | 180 | 6 hours, 10 min | 1110 |
| Hillsborough, FL | 184 | 6 hours, 15 minutes | 1150 |
| Cleveland | 178 | 6 hours, 40 min | 1187 |
| Cobb, GA | 180 | 6 hours, 30 minutes | 1170 |
| Wake County, NC | 180 | 6 hours, 30 minutes | 1170 |
| Brevard, FL | 180 | 6 hours, 30 minutes | 1170 |
| Gwinnett, GA | 180 | 6 hours, 30 minutes | 1170 |
| Virginia Beach | 180 | 6 hours, 30 minutes | 1170 |
| Detroit | 176 | 6 hours, 40 min | 1173 |
| Denver | 174 | 6 hours, 45 minutes | 1175 |
| Fairfax, VA | 183 | 6 hours, 30 minutes | 1190 |
| Baltimore | 180 | 6 hours, 40 minutes | 1200 |
| Nashville | 176 | 7 hours | 1232 |
| Dallas | 176 | 7 hours | 1232 |
| Northside, TX | 177 | 7 hours | 1239 |
| Philadelphia | 181 | 6 hours, 54 minutes | 1249 |
| Mesa, AZ | 180 | 7 hours | 1260 |
| Houston | 180 | 7 hours | 1260 |
| Jordan, UT | 180 | 7 hours | 1260 |
| New York | 186 | 6 hours, 50 minutes | 1271 |



Total Hours Spent in School by District

