

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

