

A LINE ON LIFE

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Extended-Year School *

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There have been many comparisons between school achievements of Japanese students and students from the United States. Typically our students have not fared too well in comparison to the Japanese students. What can we do to increase the learning of our children?

Recently some local schools have changed to "*year-around schooling*," which spreads the school sessions throughout the year. However, students still attend school for the same 180 days per year.

**With one of the shortest school years
among Western industrialized nations,
we are behind others in academic achievement.**

In 1991 in Greensboro NC, a public school started the **only extended-year program** in the United States. Rather than the typical 180 days, students attended school for 210 days per year. In the extended-year school, the children attended school from late July to early June. Psychologist Julie Frazier has been studying the progress of students in his school.

Frazier is comparing the progress of 90 children in the extended-year school to 91 children in traditional school. These students were matched on 18 relevant variables. When they started school, the children were given a group of tests of general knowledge, reading, math and vocabulary. The acceptance of the children by peers and parents was also measured. Other areas of physical and mental competence were assessed. Parents were asked to fill out demographic information (numbers and ages of children, economic status, etceteras). They were also asked about their child's health and preschool experiences, and even the literary environment in the home.

The initial group of tests was given to the children again in the following spring, at the beginning of the first grade and at the end of the first grade. Even though Frazier has analyzed this information, she is still continuing her study. Her first group of students is now in the third grade.

At the end of traditional kindergarten, there were no differences in reading, math and vocabulary. However, extended-year children scored higher than traditional students in general knowledge.

Frazier proposed that – since teachers have students longer – they can provide more activities that will improve the children's learning. In turn, this will increase their general knowledge. This was supported by the information from informal talks with the teachers. For example, extended-year teachers took their children on more field trips.

At the end of the summer, the effects of the extended-year were more dramatic. Although there was still no difference in vocabulary, the extended-year children made *twice* as much progress in reading, general knowledge and math. That gap "*was maintained over the traditional first grade.*"

Frazier was worried the extended-year students might suffer socially, because they did not have the longer summer period free to play with other children. Here she got a surprise. There was "*not a hair's breadth of difference*" between the two groups in peer acceptance, physical competence and maternal acceptance – the children's perception of their mothers' nurturing.

If these differences continue as the children progress, Frazier states, "*By the time they come out of the fifth grade, they'll have a whole other school year.*" If the trend continues throughout school, the children will have the academic equivalent of a two-year degree from a community college by the time they graduate high school. Rather than the additional 30 days per year in this study, Asian students have 62 more days on the average. According to Frazier, "*When they get out of high school, they have the equivalent of a four-year college degree.*"

The parents of the extended-year children are so excited by these results, "*They're lobbying for an extended-year middle school and also a high school.*" Frazier thinks – if the trends she found continue through schooling – the extended-year school might help the United States with some of our educational problems. What do you think?

* Adapted from Tori DeAngelis' article, "Students in extend-year school learn better," in the [*APA Monitor*](#), December, 1994, page 37.