

## Education: Parental Involvement Is Crucial

Kudos to The Post for reporting the timely study calling for a longer school day and more school hours. The National Education Commission on Time and Learning has hit the nail on the head. The report has unveiled a common reason why students in Germany and Japan surpass average American students.

Also, consider education in Taiwan. Most of the 37,400 Taiwanese students now pursuing advanced studies in the United States have gone through the forge of seven- to eight-hour school days, six days a week for 210 days per school year. Cultural tradition and respect for education are key factors for demanding that all core subjects be given as many hours as possible so as to enable students to pass competitive entrance examinations and to be prepared for future career development as well as possible overseas studies.

While focusing on expanding the school schedule, one should note that in Japan and Taiwan, success in high school is based primarily on parental support. In societies that espouse Confucian work ethics—such as Taiwan, Japan and Korea—parents take it for granted that they will supervise and monitor the homework their children's teachers assign. Besides, the centralized educational system has successfully enforced the 210-day school year, which is in striking contrast to the 180-day year in the United States.

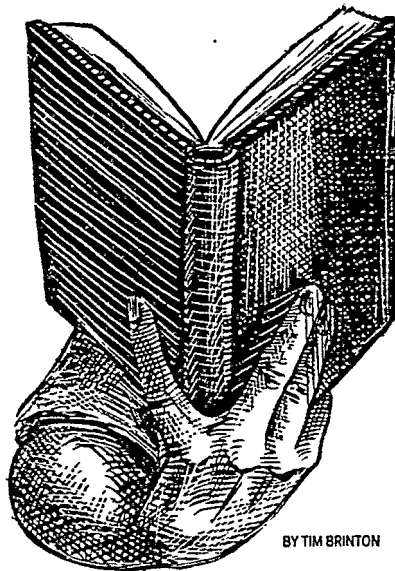
As for such vexing issues as sex education, AIDS prevention, counseling on drug and alcohol abuse—all these should partially be the responsibility of parents. To ensure success in primary and secondary school, teachers are supposed to be fully respected and supported by parents, not overburdened or intimidated.

Education in this country has been polarized. There are innumerable internationally recognized high schools such as Thomas Jefferson High School in Virginia, Punaho School in Hawaii, Bronx High School of Science in New York, Blair High School in Maryland and many others. It is essential to note that these elite schools are operated in exactly the same way, or even better than, their counterparts in Germany, Taiwan and Japan.

There is every reason for each school district to reexamine at least the issue of time. It is also imperative that all parents be advised on how to

help teachers supervise children's homework. In this manner, children will learn to be able to tackle the diversified challenge of the 21st century and compete internationally.

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I am a teacher who tried (unsuccessfully) not to respond to the report of the "experts" of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning, who conclude that not enough time is spent on core subjects in school ["Study Calls For Longer School Day; U.S. Students Trail Germans, Japanese in Core Subject Time," front page, May 5]. I shudder to think of the cost of that report; teachers could have imparted that "wisdom" without charge.

Everything that's wrong with the country somehow becomes part of the school curriculum's "umbrella"—AIDS awareness, peer mediation, tornado drills, prom safety, violence etc. When I think of the nonteaching things I do in a week—surveys, assignments for disruptive/suspended students, conferences, phone calls, hall duty etc.—I forget my enthusiasm for teaching, so I try not to think about these things. And I try to forget the irony of this report, which proclaims its "insight" in the middle of "Teacher Appreciation Week."

Ever since "A Nation at Risk" in 1983, we have attempted to patch the tattered mess in education, noting that other nations have surpassed us. But we have stifled the voices of the educators "in the trenches," who ev-

ery day see the folly of pouring peroxide on the festering diseases that infect education. These chronic diseases will not respond to quick-fix "cures" such as a longer school year. A 1991 report used the same incomplete reasoning to deduce this solution: Japan has a longer school year; Japanese children score higher; therefore, a longer school year will lead to better scores here.

Did the recent study look at socioeconomic factors when it praised Thomas Jefferson High School? Did it consider the impact of smaller classes for all core subjects? Did it recommend freeing teachers from nonteaching tasks? Did it discuss the responsibility of students and families to understand the importance of *practicing* at home what was learned in the classroom? Did it evaluate how much down-time was spent on "discipline" for students who flaunt their right to an education as they disregard the rules?

When I was a student, I learned that I should spend at least one hour working at home for every hour I spent in school. Now that I have two undergraduate degrees and a Master's in education, I have not forgotten that early lesson. I still work at least an hour at home for every hour at school—but it's starting to wear a little thin when most of the "experts" in the country think teachers have short days and short years—ignoring what the day is like and what must be accomplished during the two summer months (recertification, planning for new courses etc.).

For every class I teach, I try to spend an hour daily to prepare myself—planning, photocopying, obtaining resources. If I spent just one hour for every class to evaluate students' work, that would allow only a few minutes per student. So very often I spend more—on weekends, too. As I do these things, I try not to think about nonprofessional salaries that pay more—with no homework!

Let's end this school year by being a little more informed about schools and education. Better yet, let's learn some real lessons from the Germans and the Japanese by looking at their expectations of students. And, before we spend another dollar on the advice of "experts," let's stop applying Band-Aids when major surgery is needed!

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