**More School, Less Vacation?**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** ). Students beware: Summer vacation could be cut short. President Barack Obama says U.S. students spend too little time in school. This, he said, is putting them at a disadvantage with other students around the globe. The president is therefore calling for schools to increase class time and stay open late. He is also urging schools to extend the school year by shortening summer vacation.

"Now, I know longer school days and school years are not wildly popular ideas—not with [my daughters] Malia and Sasha, not in my family, and probably not in yours. But the challenges of a new century demand more time in the classroom," Obama said.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan supported Obama's suggestion to extend class time. Duncan said that it makes sense—especially since many students in the 21st century have fewer demands on their schedule than did students of yesteryear. In the past, many students needed to take the summer to help out on their family farms.

"Our school calendar is based upon [a farm-based] economy," said the education secretary. "Not too many of our kids are working the fields today."

According to Obama and Duncan, increased time in school will enable students in the U.S. to compete with students in other parts of the world. Students in some Asian countries, for example, spend up to 201 days in school. These students persistently perform better on math and science tests than do U.S. students. Students in the U.S. spend 180 days in school.

"Young people in other countries are going to school…longer than our students here," Duncan said. "I want to just level the playing field."

The education secretary did not address the fact that U.S. students actually spend more time in the classroom overall than students in Asian countries. Students in the U.S. spend 1,146 hours in the classroom per school year. Students in Taiwan attend class 1,050 hours per school year. Students in Hong Kong spend 1,013 hours in the classroom each year. Japan's students attend class 1,005 hours per year. Students in Singapore spend 903 hours in school each year.

Regardless, the argument for extending the school day is a reasonable one. The U.S. schools that have extended hours have the academic achievement to show for it. For example, eighth graders in KIPP schools score above average on state tests. KIPP students attend school from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays. (This is more than three hours longer than the typical school day.) They also go to school every other Saturday and for three weeks during the summer.

In Massachusetts, the Expanded Learning Time (ELT) program is having a positive effect on test scores. The majority of students involved with ELT are performing better on state tests than students at regular public schools. Schools taking part in ELT added two hours per day to their school year. This time is used for three things: core academics, additional time for teachers, and enrichment activities for students.

Extended school days and years may indeed be the way of the future. Some regular public schools in the U.S. are already changing their schedules. Many are remaining open year-round. Others are increasing class time. The additional time, however, is optional. It is not usually part of the regular school day.

Students do not always accept the change initially. However, many eventually admit that the new approach is both practical and effective. Nakany Camara is a fifth grader at Brookhaven Elementary School in Maryland. Her school added a four-week summer program to its schedule. Nakany credits the program for boosting her grades from two Cs to the honor roll. She said she also enjoys the opportunity to visit with friends during the summer.

Domonique Toombs is a sixth grader at Clarence R. Edwards Middle School in Massachusetts. Domonique was upset when she first learned of her school's decision to add three hours to each school day.

"I was like, 'Wow, are you serious?'" Domonique said. "That's three more hours I won't be able to chill with my friends after school." But now, three years later, Domonique recognizes that it has been time well spent. "I've learned a lot," she said.

*The Associated Press contributed to this story.*