IS AN EXTENDED SCHOOL DAY THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS?

Focus Words

extend | radical | crucial | attain | initiative

WEEKLY PASSAGE

Marisa Green knew sixth grade was not going to be easy. On the first day of class, Principal Hedges told the students of a **radical** change to their schedule. The school day was going to be **extended** until 5:00. Students would even have to attend classes on some Saturdays.

Principal Hedges explained that other countries such as Germany, Singapore and Japan have up to 280 days in a school year. Most American students attend school only 180 days a year. Test scores suggest that 180 days may not be enough. In 2006, fifteen-year-olds from the U.S. scored lower on an international math test than students in 23 other developed countries. Principal Hedges said U.S. schools need to improve if Americans want to compete in the global economy.

The late Senator Edward Kennedy also supported extending the school day. He proposed an **initiative** that is being tested in Massachusetts. Schools that are part of this initiative have added two extra hours to every school day. In some schools, students spend the extra time on Mondays through Thursdays focusing on academics. They use the extra hours on Fridays for enrichment activities,

such as art or music. People who support an extended school day believe it is **crucial** for students who need extra time to **attain** grade-level reading and math skills.

Some people think extending the school day is insufficient to improve student achievement. They argue that just adding hours will not make a difference to student attainment in reading, math, and science. They point out that teachers will need more time to prepare lessons for the extended day. Teachers may need more materials for the lessons as well. Also, extended days do not guarantee that the teachers who are hired to teach are teaching subjects they know best. For example, some schools don't have enough math teachers. In those schools, English teachers may have to teach material they have not been trained to teach. Many people argue that we need to focus on improving school quality, rather than just extending the day.

What is your opinion? Should schools extend the school day to improve student academic attainment?

Unit 3.11

Is an extended school day the right choice for middle school students?

FOCUS WORDS OF THE WEEK

extend : (verb) to stretch out; make longer

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

radical : (adjective) extreme

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

crucial : (adjective) very important

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

attain : (verb) to achieve or reach a goal

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

initiative : (noun) a first step; beginning action

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

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PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

Option 1: Senator Edward ("Ted") Kennedy thought it was **crucial** for Massachusetts schools to improve. He thought it would take **radical** change to **attain** that goal. He started an **initiative** to **extend** the school day.

Most American students now go to school for 180 six-hour days. How many total hours is this?

A) 1080

B) 680

C) 6080

D) 186

Option 2: Senator Kennedy's **initiative** to **extend** the school day proposed increasing each student's school time by 30% - a **radical** increase. Sadly, Senator Kennedy died in 2009. He was unable to **attain** his goal while he was in office.

If each 6-hour school day was extended, each day would be how many hours?

If the 180-day school year was extended, each year would be how many days?

Discussion Question: Which kind of **extended** school time would be a more **radical** change, more hours each day, or more days each year? Which kind of **initiative** would win more support from parents? Which one would do a better job of helping students **attain** excellence? Some students think it's **crucial** to have a long summer vacation. Do you agree?

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THINKING SCIENTIFICALLY

The principal at Rock Island High School in Illinois noticed that middle school students coming to his high school were not prepared to succeed in ninth grade. Many of his freshmen were not able to **attain** passing grades in **crucial** areas such as math and language arts. He considered **extending** the school day for all ninth graders, but that idea seemed too **radical**. Instead, he created an **initiative** for his incoming students called "Rock Solid."

For the Rock Solid program, Principal Tim Wernentin decided to offer students moving up from middle school an option to get started at Rock Island High before all the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders arrive. Ninth graders get the whole school to themselves during the last few weeks of summer. So instead of **extending** the school day, he **extended** a special welcome! During the Rock Solid session, ninth graders get tours of the school, meet with the teachers they will have, and receive free tutoring sessions for any academic area they need.

→ Mr. Seemy's class thought that this was a brilliant idea. In fact, they thought the middle school should offer a Rock Solid program for elementary students moving up to middle school.

In order to plan a program like Rock Solid effectively, you must identify the problems and think about solutions in a detailed way.

Step One: Think silently for a minute about what was difficult for you when you moved up to middle school from elementary school.

Write it down here: _____

Step Two: Get into groups of four. Share what you wrote. Ask other students in your group if you need to clarify anything for them.

Step Three: As a group, select one problem that you think might be solved by a program like Rock Solid.

Write it down here: _____

Discuss these questions as a group, and then write down your responses individually.

✎   What will be your approach for addressing the problem? _____

_____

_____

✎   Do you think that elementary students entering middle school would like your idea?

_____

_____

_____

✎   How would you be able to tell if your approach was effective?

_____

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DEBATING THE ISSUE

Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Schools are fine as they are now. We do not need a radical change.

B Schools need to be improved, but extending the school day is not the answer. First, schools should find a way to make improvements with the amount of time they already have.

C Schools in the United States should have an extended day and classes on Saturdays, if that is what is necessary for students to attain the skills necessary to compete in our global economy.

D Schools should have an extended day so students can either attain grade-level skills or start working on higher level skills. Most students just hang out after school. Extending the school day would help kids make better use of their time.

E _____
_____
_____

Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

_____
_____
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GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

In my experience...

That's similar to what I think.

What makes you think that?

When I reread the text, it reminded me...

Is an extended school day the right choice for middle school students?

WRITE ABOUT IT

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples.
Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

Focus Words
extend | radical | crucial | attain | initiative

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