

Thinking About Time

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Time, Teens and Test Scores

As a high school student, I started class at 8:00 and finished at 2:30, the only time change I had to deal with was the mid-year shift from early lunch (10:48) to late lunch (12:19), the time slots are even still programmed in my brain. I was always envious of my friends who attended nearby high schools and got to sleep in and start a few hours later. Although the early end time came with some perks, a few more hours of sunshine, and some alone time before my parents got home. During our class discussion about time, I took some time to reflect on the ways in which time shapes students learning and the innovative ways people purpose to change it. The question that stood out to me the most was: How does the start time affect student performance?. This report will not be able to fully dissect this complex question, but it will attempt to tie in my thoughts alongside academic research.

In 2016, The Journal of School Health put out a report that utilized 38 different studies to analyze the effects of school start time. In the report, they say that “two studies found that students with later start times reported fewer problems concentrating and paying attention” (Wheaton et al., 2016, p. 8). In their report findings, they also state that later start times “generally correspond to improved attendance, less tardiness, less falling asleep in class, better grades, and fewer motor vehicle crashes” (Wheaton et al., 2016, p. 1). With the study’s findings, it is easy to say we should start all schools later, but of course, there are scheduling factors, such as a limited amount of school buses. The study also concludes that later start times led to “fewer depression symptoms” (Wheaton et al., 2016, p. 10).

In the report written by Wheaton and al. (2016), they state that there is “no consistent association between school start time and homework time” (p. 8). Homework then comes into question, if students start early but are assigned tons of homework, does it not defeat the point? In Ayers’s (2019) novel he says teachers must continually learn but that “the point is not to fill up your already overburdened schedule, or to engage in meaningless busywork. No. The purpose is to continually practice the art of learning new things,” (p. 36). I think that this quote has validity in the context of students’ learning, they should not be overburdened with menial homework, but focus on learning. In Cooper and Robinson’s (2006) study on homework, they concluded that the “optimum benefits of homework for high school students might lie between 1.5 and 2.5 hours” but “will be dependent on many factors, including the nature of the assignment and student individual differences” (p. 52). I think that it is important to question if students are really going to reap the benefits of later start time if they are still given two hours of homework each night.

I think that if a later school start time can be intelligently adapted, alongside less homework, it will benefit students’ quality of life. If a few extra hours of sleep and less homework correlates to lower rates of student depression and better attendance, time spent in the classroom can be put to better use.

References

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