

This week's issue:

S. STU



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 p.m. 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 per year. Test scores suggest that 180 days may not be enough. In 2012, fifteen-year-olds from the U.S. scored lower on an international math test than students in 33 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 "Ted" Kennedy also supported extending the school day. He proposed an **initiative** that was tested in Massachusetts. Schools that were part of this initiative added about two extra hours to every school day. In some schools, students spent the extra time on Mondays through Thursdays focusing on academics. They used the extra time 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** gradelevel reading and math skills.

Some people think extending the school day is insufficient to improve student performance. They argue that just adding hours will not make a difference in student achievement 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 will be well-qualified for the subjects they must teach. 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 students' attainment of crucial academic skills?



USE THE FOCUS WORDS

extend (verb) to stretch out; to make longer

- Sample Sentence: You can extend your goldfish's life by keeping its water clean.
- Turn and Talk: What are some steps you could take to extend a plant's life?

radical (adjective) extreme

- Sample Sentence: The 1990s rap group Kris Kross had a radical style: They wore their clothes backwards!
- Turn and Talk: How would you feel if your teacher had a radical hairstyle, like an unusual color or a Mohawk?

crucial (adjective) very important, essential

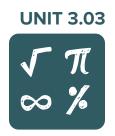
- Sample Sentence: Reading and writing are crucial skills for doing well in school.
- Turn and Talk: Is owning a cell phone crucial to having a good social life?

attain (verb) to achieve or reach a goal

- Sample Sentence: It took a year of hard work as class president for Vicky to attain the admiration and respect of her classmates.
- **Turn and Talk:** What are some goals that you would like to **attain** by the time you graduate from high school?

initiative (noun) a plan to solve a problem

- Sample Sentence: The late Senator Ted Kennedy proposed an **initiative** that included extending the school day.
- **Turn and Talk:** Propose an **initiative** to improve the health of middle school students.



DO THE MATH

Option 1: Senator 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. 1,080
- 680 B.
- C. 6,080
- D. 186

Option 2: Senator Kennedy's initiative proposed extending the school day by 30%—a radical increase. If each 6-hour school day were extended according to Senator Kennedy's plan, each day would be how many hours?

There are alternative ways to attain the goal of extending school time by 30%. For example, schools could add days to the school year instead of changing the length of each individual school day. If the 180-day school year were extended according to this plan, each year would be how many days?

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





THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

Principal Tim Wernentin 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 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 arrived. Ninth graders got 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 got tours of the school, met with the teachers they would have, and received free tutoring sessions for any academic areas they struggled with.

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 school 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 the following questions as a group, and then write down your responses individually.
What would be your approach for addressing the problem?
Do you think that elementary school students entering middle school would like your idea?
How would you be able to tell if your approach was effective?







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DEBATE THE IS	SUE	
	tions (or create your own).	Jot down a few notes on how to support your position
A	The school day in the United States should not be extended .	during a discussion or debate.
0	R	
B	The school day in the United States should be extended .	
	PR	
CREATE	'K	
YOUR U		
OWN		

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:



believe that...

You make a good point, but have you considered...







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