

**REPORT OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**Study of the  
Feasibility and  
Appropriateness of  
Lengthening the  
Public School Term**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



**HOUSE DOCUMENT NO. 69**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
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## **PREFACE**

House Joint Resolution 66, approved by the 1992 Virginia General Assembly, directed the Department of Education to study the feasibility and appropriateness of lengthening the public school term.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education systems within the United States receive considerable criticism from education reformers. One criticism centers on the length of the school term or year, traditionally 180 days. Other countries offer up to 240 days of school. Reformers say that the current school year does not allow sufficient time for students to master basic skills. In addition, they contend that time is not available to address the ever-increasing expectations placed upon students. Some see increasing the length of the school year as a solution to improving the outcomes and achievement of students in the United States.

Responding to the charge that American public education is not providing an adequate amount of instruction to be competitive in the global marketplace, Delegate Judy Connally (Arlington) introduced House Joint Resolution 66 in the 1992 Virginia General Assembly. This resolution called for a study of the feasibility and appropriateness of lengthening the public school term.

The Department of Education formed an interdisciplinary team to conduct the study required by the resolution. The team reviewed recent research on time and learning, analyzed the impact on personnel, transportation, and facilities, and gathered data on the impact on family schedules and lifestyles. The team integrated information on educational opportunities, curriculum, and student learning with recent developments related to Virginia's World Class Education initiative and the Virginia Common Core of Learning.

Research on time and learning yields mixed findings. Although time is required to master skills, time is but one factor influencing learning. Little evidence exists to indicate that a specific amount of time is necessary for students to learn. Student learning is most productive when the time allocated for instruction and the quality of instruction meet student needs. Thus, different students require different amounts of time to meet expected outcomes. However, students who are at risk of educational failure demonstrate the greatest potential for gains in learning as a result of increases in the school term. There is no evidence of research devoted to the cumulative, long-term effects of increasing instructional time through lengthening the school year alone.

Extending the school year requires additional resources. Personnel costs present the most significant fiscal impact. In 1990-91, public school divisions in Virginia spent approximately \$2.241 billion in salary costs for 69,700 teachers statewide. Fringe benefits accounted for an additional estimated \$472

million. Each day added to the current school calendar would cost an estimated \$13.6 million in state and local funds for the instructional staff. Substitutes accounted for an additional \$35 million in 1990-91, with an average daily cost of \$194,350.

Costs associated with housing and transporting students would also increase. Current energy costs are estimated at \$127,000 per day statewide. The total cost of transportation for school activity statewide is \$1.48 million per day. Many schools would require air conditioning if the school year is lengthened. Currently, 44 percent, or 804 school buildings lack air conditioning. The estimated costs for installing air conditioning in a typical school with 600 pupils is \$600,000.

School administrators predict that extending the length of the school year could adversely affect their ability to complete building-level tasks normally completed during the summer months (e.g., maintenance, planning, and personnel recruitment). Therefore, more resources may be required if days are added to the school year.

A 1991 Commonwealth Poll found that most Virginians oppose extending the length of the school year by 20 days. This report found that families have distinctly different lifestyles in the summer than during the school year that may be affected by a longer school year (e.g., family focused activities; time for religious activities; summer employment and summer leisure). A 1992 Commonwealth Poll of families with school aged children revealed that 79 percent of parents of children enrolled in public schools in Virginia said that a 200 day school year would cause no disruption or slight disruption in their summer activities. There was variance in the degree of perceived disruption among specific subgroups.

Local educators are currently considering a variety of reform efforts to improve student achievement, including increasing the time allocated for instruction. Proposals and initiatives include: optional additional instructional days for enrichment and remediation, a longer school day, and increased availability of instructional resources for students and families.

Virginia's World Class Education initiative concentrates on the knowledge, skills and abilities students must have to be productive citizens in the 21st century. This education philosophy shifts from one of mandating certain inputs or resources to one of measuring student outcomes. The Common Core of Learning serves as the foundation for allocating and organizing resources. Time is but one resource involved as educators strive to 1) enable all students to meet the goals and objectives of World Class Education and 2) ensure Virginia's educational system is equal to any in the world.

The Department of Education concludes that a decision to extend the length of the school year should be delayed until:

- Common Core of Learning outcomes are further delineated and time requirements for instruction and student mastery are identified;
- data from pilot schools that are implementing models for increasing instructional time are evaluated; and,
- sufficient funds to cover the additional costs for implementation can be identified at state and local levels.

Within the resources available, the state should support localities that wish to implement and evaluate models for extending instructional time, including a longer school year. School divisions should be responsive to the attitudes and values of the individual community and tailor instructional schedules accordingly.

Increasing instructional time is one strategy that may allow some students to achieve desired outcomes of education. School divisions should consider offering increased instructional time for those students who are educationally at risk. Summer school programs offer an especially viable option for meeting the needs of these students. Programs targeting increased instructional time should be developed and, at the same time, attention should be given to curriculum choice, instructional methods and student learning styles. Rigorous evaluation should be provided, for selected efforts throughout the state, by the department as a component for ongoing research efforts.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Overview

Increasing the number of days that American students spend in school as a method for improving student achievement has been at the forefront of education reform for decades. Virginia's 1961 Commission on Public Education called for "searching examinations of the adequacy of the present school day, school week and school year" in response to the explosion of knowledge required by the Space Age. More recently, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, in its 1983 report, recommended both longer school days and years.

Public debate has increasingly focused on the need to compare the academic achievement of Virginia's students with their international counterparts as a measure of competitiveness in the global market. One result of this global comparison is an examination of the relationship between instructional time and student learning, including a study of the length of the school year.

The Honorable Julia A. Connally, Member, Virginia House of Delegates (Arlington) introduced House Joint Resolution 66 in the 1992 Virginia General Assembly, requesting the Department of Education to study the feasibility and appropriateness of lengthening the public school term. This resolution responded to the reform initiatives calling for a longer school year. Reformists point to the disparity between the length of time students in America attend school in comparison with foreign students. Studies of educational achievement find that American students frequently receive lower scores on achievement tests than their international counterparts. Reform initiatives have also expanded the responsibilities placed upon schools and students. New content areas have been added to the curriculum as expectations of students increase. A common result of such expansion is the assumption that there must be more time for students to meet increased expectations.

The Department of Education has completed previously a study of Instructional Time and Student Learning, undertaken at the request of Governor Wilder's Secretary of Education, James W. Dyke, Jr. In a fall 1990 address, the Secretary of Education cited the responsibility of public education in Virginia to prepare students for competition in the international marketplace.

He recommended investigation of the need to increase the days of instruction for all students.



Delegate Connally's resolution requests an examination of the potential state and local fiscal impact of extending the school term, as well as the impact of such an effort on facilities, transportation, and family lifestyles. The resolution further requests a review of implications for curriculum and increased educational opportunities for students.

#### Purpose and Scope

The goal of this study is to investigate the feasibility and appropriateness of lengthening the public school term in Virginia. The study has the following major objectives:

- to reflect recent developments in Virginia's World Class Education initiative and the Common Core of Learning in the discussion of the relationship between instructional time and student learning;
- to examine the potential state and local fiscal impact of extending the length of the school year, especially on personnel and transportation;
- to examine the impact that extending the school year would have on school facilities;
- to examine the impact of such an extension on family schedules and lifestyles; and,
- to identify the increased educational opportunities available through an extension of the school year.

The study provides conclusions regarding the feasibility and appropriateness of lengthening the school term.

#### Study Approach

A team comprised of staff from the Department of Education conducted this study. In addition, Delegate Connally and a local school division superintendent advised in the development of the report.

Methods employed in conducting this study include:

- an analysis of fiscal impact, especially on personnel and transportation;
- an analysis of the impact on school facilities, especially air conditioning;

- ❑ an analysis of input received from focus groups of parents regarding the impact of extending the school year on family schedules and lifestyles;
- ❑ a survey of public opinion in Virginia regarding the impact of a longer school year on family schedules and lifestyles via the Commonwealth Poll, conducted by Virginia Commonwealth University's Survey Research Laboratory;
- ❑ identification of other administrative factors to be considered in extending the school year, as presented by selected administrative personnel in school divisions;
- ❑ review of applications for Early Childhood Transformation grants and other local initiatives focusing on extending instructional time; and,
- ❑ integration of information from a previous Department of Education study of instructional time and student learning with developments in Virginia's efforts to transform public education through the World Class Education initiative.

#### Organization of Report

This report is organized into five chapters. Following the introduction, Chapter II summarizes the results of the Department of Education's recent study of instructional time and student learning. Chapters III and IV examine the impact of extending the school year on personnel, facilities, transportation, family schedules and lifestyles, and present implications for the total school curriculum. The final chapter presents findings and conclusions.

## Chapter II.

### INSTRUCTIONAL TIME AND STUDENT LEARNING

The Department of Education completed a comprehensive study of Instructional Time and Student Learning in 1991. The primary goal of that study was to investigate the relationship between instructional time and student learning. The study identified the following factors which interact to produce student learning:

- the actual amount of time allocated for instruction in the school day and the school year;
- the quality of instructional time, in both school and home environments;
- student self-concept, effort or motivation and willingness to engage in learning; and,
- the time students need for learning, based on student aptitude, prior learning, intellectual development, and chronological development.

With the goal of drawing conclusions regarding productive learning time, the study assessed a variety of options associated with instructional time: extended school year, extended school day, year-round schooling, summer school, and better management of allocated time.

#### Time and Learning

Research supports the importance of allocated time for learning, but does not identify the optimum allocation of time needed for productive student learning. Studies addressing the impact of increases in allocated instructional time lack the scientific rigor necessary to draw causal relationships about the cumulative, long-term effects of providing additional time in school.

Research to date reveals the importance of matching the time students need for instruction with the amount of instruction provided. Specifically, increased time offers advantages for students who are educationally at risk. This effect is obvious in research that targets students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students with limited proficiency in English, and students with academic or cognitive disabilities. In contrast, research has yet to demonstrate that the performance of other students significantly increases with additional instructional time.

### Length of the School Year

The length of Virginia's school year is less than that in many foreign countries by as much as 60 days. However, the length of Virginia's school year (180 days) is consistent with the days required in other states. Virginia school divisions have the option of extending the length of the school year. However, in 1990-91, only 21 school divisions offered additional days of instruction. The longest school year was 185 days.

Virginia's private schools typically follow the length of the public school term. Although there is no data source regarding the length of the school year for private schools, certain accreditation standards require a school year comparable to that of public education. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools requires that elementary schools offer terms of at least 175 days in length.

A community's attitude toward the school year is important when changes are considered in the length of the school term. Many school divisions in Virginia and throughout the country report the lack of community support for any increase in the number of days of instruction required in public schools. School divisions that have successfully increased the length of the school year have done so with extensive community support and involvement in planning. Public opinion in Virginia in 1991 did not support extending the length of the school year.

### Length of the School Day

The length of Virginia's school day is also consistent with that of the remainder of the United States. Although most Virginia school divisions exceed the mandated five and one-half hours of instruction for grades one through 12, few exceed the mandate by more than 30 minutes. Most Virginia school divisions exceed the mandated three hours of instruction for kindergarten.

Lengthening the school day is often met with skepticism, in part, because of concern over children's ability to attend school for longer periods of time. In fact, some research supports these concerns and suggests that learning fatigue may adversely influence efforts to provide additional instructional time. Fatigue may reduce student effort that may have, in turn, an impact on student performance. Like the school year, the length of the school day is a community issue. School divisions that have successfully increased the length of the school day enjoy significant community support. Public opinion throughout the Commonwealth does not support extending the length of the school day.

### Year-Round Schooling

Year-round schooling is a method for altering the school calendar, rather than increasing instructional time. This method disperses the total days of instruction throughout 12 months, rather than following the traditional 10-month school year. A few year-round schooling programs offer a voluntary fourth quarter of instruction.

Nationwide, year-round schooling is used most frequently when school divisions experience population growth and lack adequate school facilities. Most school divisions, in Virginia and throughout the nation, discontinue year-round schooling after problems associated with population growth are alleviated. Evaluation of student achievement in year-round schools shows that students generally do no better or worse than they do in schools with traditional calendar arrangements.

### Summer School

Summer school provides an opportunity for additional instructional time. Ninety-three percent of Virginia school divisions use voluntary summer school programs for remediation, acceleration, and promotion. Programs for at-risk students are common.

Many divisions offer reading improvement programs at no cost as an incentive for enrollment. Extended year programs for certain special education students must be made available, where appropriate. Virginia summer school programs for reading frequently provide the opportunity for teachers and students to experience alternative instructional techniques. Local educators believe state funding for remedial summer programs is essential to ensure the availability of such programs.

### Management of Time

Requirements to compel school attendance also influence the amount of time required for instruction. These mandates establish the entry and exit ages for public education. Virginia's requirements exceed those of most states, mandating attendance for students of ages five through 18. Virginia currently exempts five-year old students from school attendance, with parental consent.

Attendance policies also impact on time available for instruction. These policies are the prerogative of school divisions in Virginia; no consistent attendance policy is used statewide. Educators and others agree that management of allocated time is of the utmost importance in assuring productive learning. School administrative and instructional practices

influence the use of scheduled time for student instruction. Learning is enhanced when educators use instructional practices that foster students' efforts and match learning needs with the instructional task.

### Special Populations

During the 1991-92 academic year, 89 school divisions in Virginia offered English as a Second Language (ESL) programs to 16,290 students. Certain areas of Virginia have large numbers of immigrants. There are differences in the number and types of students requiring ESL in each of the participating divisions. Some school divisions served as few as two students; others as many as 7,858 students. More than 95 different native languages are reflected in Virginia schools. While some divisions may have a community of persons from one culture, speaking one language, others may represent many different cultures. As a result, there is no typical ESL program in Virginia.

However, many school divisions recognize that one of the additional resources ESL students need is more instructional time. Researchers suggest that persons require as many as five to seven years of instruction to attain mastery of the language. With the requirement that students learn English simultaneously with content areas, many students require more instructional time to learn English. Offering ESL support through extension of the school day or school year provides opportunities for increased time to meet these objectives.

### Conclusions

The Department's earlier report concluded that schools in the United States and Virginia reflect the social, economic, and cultural values of the community. School divisions that successfully change the time allocated for instruction have widespread support from their communities before implementing the changes. Absent such local support, initiatives to increase the school year or day, or alter the school calendar generally fail.

The Department of Education further concluded that decisions regarding the need to increase instructional time must begin with an evaluation of the purpose of the proposed increase. If inadequate time for instruction is the cause of deficits in student learning, then it is logical to assume that increases in time may promote student achievement. However, if other factors are contributing to problems with student achievement, then merely increasing instructional time will not be an effective strategy. Maximum learning outcomes for individual students will result when the instructional time allocated is matched effectively with time needed for students to meet curriculum requirements.

## **CHAPTER III.**

### **IMPACT OF EXTENDING THE LENGTH OF THE SCHOOL YEAR**

Any initiative to improve student learning by extending the length of the school year must take into consideration its impact on school finances, personnel, transportation, and facilities. This chapter presents an analysis of these cost issues.

#### Personnel

Increasing the number of days of instruction provided students requires a corresponding increase in the number of days teachers are employed. The current 10-month contractual period includes 200 days as follows: 180 teaching days; 10 days for activities such as teaching, planning, evaluation, record keeping, and conferences, and 10 days for these or other activities assigned by the local school board (Board of Education Regulations Governing Contractual Agreements with Professional Personnel, §1.5.).

In 1990-91, school divisions spent \$2.241 billion in salary costs for the 69,700 teachers statewide. In addition, local school divisions spent an estimated \$472 million on fringe benefit costs (Retirement, Social Security, and Group Life Insurance) for these positions. Based on these expenditures, and assuming a 200-day contract, each additional day added to the current school calendar would cost an estimated \$13.6 million for teacher salary and fringe benefit costs.

It is assumed that the use of substitutes would continue for the additional days of instruction. In 1990-91, school divisions spent \$35 million for substitute teachers. The average cost per day for substitutes was \$194,350. Additional personnel costs are not anticipated for the central office staff, principals and assistant principals, administrative support, and janitorial staff. These positions currently are 11- or 12-month positions, and thus, do not require additional compensation if the school year were extended.

#### Facilities

Extending the number of days students attend school has a potential impact on school facilities. As the school year extends further into the summer months, the need to install air conditioning in schools becomes evident. Of the approximately 1,800 public schools in Virginia, 44 percent (804) currently lack air conditioning (Virginia Department of Education, 1992).

The estimated cost for installing air conditioning in a typical 600-student elementary school in Virginia is \$600,000.

This figure is based on a representative elementary school of approximately 60,000 square feet in area. The cost factor to install air conditioning is estimated at \$10.00 per square foot.

The diversity of school buildings and climate in Virginia limits the ability to project the total statewide cost of installing air conditioning. Some schools may not require air conditioning; the costs of installing air conditioning vary depending on the size and structure of the school buildings.

Depreciation from wear is negligible since administrative and maintenance staff use the buildings year-round. Additional costs associated with utilities are also negligible, as telephones, gas, water, and sewers are used by the year-round staff and paid for on a monthly basis.

There would be additional cost for electrical energy from the increased use of electricity during summer months. Calculations are based on current engineering practices for school design and general electrical consumption for typical schools with and without air conditioning. The only energy cost for schools without air conditioning are for lighting and miscellaneous equipment. The additional cost for lighting and miscellaneous equipment is estimated at \$30 per day per school. The estimated added cost for lighting and cooling the remaining 56 percent of the schools with air conditioning exceeds \$100 per day. The total statewide cost per day for additional electrical use is estimated at \$127,000.

Extensions of the school term also impact on building maintenance projects. Interviews with school building administrators indicate that large-scale maintenance projects (e.g. painting, floor refinishing, repairs, and capital construction) are completed during the summer months when students are not in the buildings. Extending the length of time students are in school limits the time available for completing important maintenance tasks. This may mean that school maintenance projects would have to be completed in shorter time periods or while students are present, resulting in higher costs due to the payment of overtime compensation.

### Transportation

Student transportation must be provided for each attendance day. Each element of daily pupil transportation (Figure 1) is required.

In 1990-91, 10,491 buses were used to transport 768,601 pupils to and from school each day. The total cost statewide was \$195,868,475, or \$1,085,372 per day. This total cost increases to \$265,827,754, or \$1,476,820 per day when special trips, use of other vehicles, the cost of replacement, and capital outlay are added.



FIGURE 1. ELEMENTS OF DAILY PUPIL TRANSPORTATION	
Regular Home-to-School	Approved school buses used to transport pupils from home to school and school to home
Exclusive Home to School	Approved school buses used exclusively to transport handicapped pupils of ages 2 to 21 from home to school and school to home
Public Carriers: Transit	Transporting eligible pupils from home-to-school in transit buses through contracts with public transit systems
Special Arrangements Transportation	Transporting eligible handicapped pupils of ages 2 to 21 by contract with approved private schools, taxicabs, airlines, intercity/interstate passenger buses, school board-owned cars, or by parents in lieu of the school providing transportation
Special Trips: School Buses	Total miles and cost of trips (e.g., athletic teams, bands, classes, clubs) paid from regular transportation funds
Federal Programs/Service from Another School Division	Total miles and cost for federal programs and payments to other school divisions for school bus service
Summer School Buses	Miles and cost for pupils transported to and from summer school
Other Public/Private Vehicles	Miles and cost of vehicles that are not approved school buses (e.g., activity buses, cars, charter buses) used for purposes other than home-to-school transportation
Capitol Outlay Replacement	Number and cost of buses purchased that do not increase the total in the fleet
Capitol Outlay Additions	Number and cost of buses purchased increase the total in the fleet

The cost of student transportation has increased approximately 10 percent each year since 1986-87 (Figure 2). This inflation is attributed to increases in the cost of specialized transportation and the provision of benefits to bus drivers in many localities

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**FIGURE 2. COST OF PUPIL TRANSPORTATION**

	<u>1986-87</u>	<u>1989-90</u>	<u>1990-91</u>
Cost per pupil per day	.93	1.31	1.41
Cost per bus per day	70.83	95.78	104.46

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Summary of Fiscal Impact

A variety of other costs associated with extending the school year exist, although these costs will vary from division to division. These include liability and hazard insurance; purchase of instructional materials and supplies; and loss of income from summer activities.

The total costs of lengthening the school year are substantial. The estimated daily operating cost of extending the school year is \$15,363,200 (Figure 3).

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**FIGURE 3: ESTIMATED DAILY OPERATING COST**

Teacher Salaries and Fringe Benefits	\$13,565,000
Cost of Substitute Teachers	194,400
Transportation	1,476,800
Utilities	<u>127,000</u>
Total Cost	\$15,363,200

\* The projected state share of this estimated cost is 41%.

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## Impact on School Administrative Duties

Typically, local education administrators are 12-month employees who are responsible for completing certain duties during the summer months. The Department of Education team interviewed selected administrators from a variety of school divisions throughout the state to ascertain their perception of the impact that extending the school year might have on their summer administrative duties.

Central office staff report that their administrative duties remain essentially unchanged at the conclusion of the regular school term. They anticipate that extending the school year would not impact on their ability to complete their own administrative responsibilities. They did suggest that there would be an impact on principals if the school year is lengthened.

In general, principals report that their summer activities differ greatly from academic school year activities. Principals cite a number of administrative duties that relate to the summer months:

- class scheduling (for school year and for summer school);
- personnel recruitment, interviewing and selection;
- building maintenance;
- ordering materials and supplies;
- curriculum planning;
- staff development;
- program evaluation;
- end-of-year reporting requirements; and,
- administration of summer schools.

Usually, principals complete these duties with the assistance of maintenance staff, secretaries, assistant principals and some instructional staff. Such personnel are typically 11- or 12-month employees. Instructional staff may participate in planning activities with or without extra compensation.

The principals interviewed believe that lengthening the school year could adversely affect their ability to complete certain administrative responsibilities, particularly building maintenance and capital improvements. Principals believe that extending the school year would adversely affect the cleanliness of school buildings and result in higher costs for completing maintenance

tasks in shorter time periods. The principals further predict that extending the school year would make it difficult to complete their other administrative duties without hiring additional staff.

The Survey Research Laboratory of Virginia Commonwealth University conducted a Commonwealth Poll to ascertain public opinion regarding the impact of extending the length of the school year on family schedules and life styles in November 1992.

#### Impact on Family Schedules and Lifestyles

The Department of Education conducted four focus groups for parents during July 1992. The Virginia Parent Teacher Association nominated the participants. Department staff asked these parents to comment on their typical summer lifestyle and how it would be affected by extending the school year. Results indicate that the typical summer lifestyle of Virginia families is distinctly different from their school-year lifestyle. Many parents reported an increase in family activities during the summer months. Participants reported a variety of summer activities (Figure 4).

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**FIGURE 4: TYPICAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES  
DURING SUMMER MONTHS\***

- summer vacation
- religious activities
- family visits
- summer employment for youth
- school/enrichment
- summer and sports camps
- leisure activity (e.g., reading, family games, swimming)

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\* Source: Staff Analysis of Focus Group Information

The perceived impact of extending the school year on family lifestyles varied among participants. Half of the respondents either favored or were neutral toward extending the school year. These parents indicated they could adjust their own schedules to the school year and spoke of the importance of public education. Respondents who opposed extending the school year commented that educators should focus on educational quality before quantity. Others argued that the need for student and family relaxation and family activities overshadowed the need for more time in school.

The 1991 Commonwealth Poll also elicited public opinion regarding the length of the school year. That survey revealed that over two-thirds (67 percent) of the general public across Virginia favored keeping the current 180 day school year. Virginians with children in public schools were less supportive of change than the general population. Married, divorced, and single respondents were similarly opposed (66 percent, 66 percent, and 68 percent respectively).

To further identify the response of parents to any Virginia initiative to a longer school year, the Commonwealth Poll, conducted in November 1992, queried parents of children in public schools. The poll surveyed opinion regarding the impact of a longer school year on family lifestyles and schedules. Figure 5 displays the questions and Appendix B presents the Commonwealth Poll Methodology.

Overall, 20 percent of the parents of children enrolled in public schools in Virginia indicated that an extended school year would cause a fairly serious or very serious disruption to their family. Forty-three percent said it would cause no disruption. Family visits and vacations were perceived as disrupted by more parents than other family activity (20 percent said it would be a fairly or very serious problem). An extension was more problematic to parents with family incomes of less than \$15,000 (42 percent said it would present a very serious problem), and to single parents (52 percent said it would present a slight, fairly serious or very serious problem).

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**FIGURE 5: PUBLIC OPINION QUESTIONS**

As you may have heard, the Department of Education has been studying the possible impact of a longer school year in Virginia. We'd like to tell you about one possible plan and ask you how it might affect different things you or your children do during the summer.

One plan being considered would call for a school year of 200 days, compared with the current year of 180 days. School would start after Labor Day, just as it does now, but it would continue until the end of June. Vacations during the school year would be the same as now, with the probable addition of a 4 day Memorial Day weekend. Summer school would continue to be offered in July and August.

To what extent would such a change in the school year affect your child's participation in structured summer camps ... would you say it would create no problem, a slight problem, a fairly serious problem, or a very serious problem?

And how would it affect your child's participation in religious activities such as Bible School, Hebrew School, church camps, and so forth?

How would it affect your child's participation in summer employment activities?

And how would it affect family visits and vacations?

Overall, thinking about the kinds of activities I've mentioned, to what degree would the change in the school year create a disruption in your family's summer schedule ... would you say it would create no disruption, a slight disruption, a fairly serious disruption, or a very serious disruption?

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Seventeen percent of parents said that lengthening the school year would cause a fairly or very serious disruption in their child's participation in structured summer camps. This was a greater problem for single parents (52 percent indicated it presented a slight, fairly serious or very serious problem). In addition, an extension was said to be more of a problem for parents at opposite ends of the family income spectrum, than parents of other income levels. Twenty-four percent of respondents with family incomes under \$15,000, and 25 percent with family incomes of \$70,000 and above, said this was a very serious problem, with no more than 14 percent of any other income level similarly viewing an extension.

Thirteen percent of parents stated that an extended school year would cause a fairly or very serious disruption in students' summer employment activities. This category had the higher number of parents saying this would present no problem because their child does not work (75 percent), reflecting the number of parents who had children under the employment age. However, the impact on student employment was perceived as greatest by parents with family incomes of \$70,000 and above (28 percent viewed this as a very serious problem, with 56 percent reporting no problem because their child does not work).

Eight percent of parents said that an extended school year would cause fairly or very serious problems for their child's participation in activities such as Bible school, Hebrew school, and church camps. There are no trends according to family demographics or income.

### Conclusions

Extending the school year in Virginia would require an estimated increase in state and local funds of \$15,363,200 per day. The greatest costs are in the area of personnel, with other costs in the areas of energy and transportation. Some localities may incur other costs.

Families acknowledge the importance of education and are generally willing to consider changes in their lifestyles if these changes can be tied to improvements their child's education. Families do emphasize the importance of the time spent with their children during summer vacations. Public opinion shows that the majority of parents of children in school do not view a 200-day school year as causing a problem for their family. However, certain parents perceive an extension as very problematic for their families. Parental involvement and support for any decision to alter the school calendar remains critical.

Thirteen percent of parents stated that an extended school year would cause a fairly or very serious disruption in students' summer employment activities. This category had the higher number of parents saying this would present no problem because their child does not work (75 percent), reflecting the number of parents who had children under the employment age. However, the impact on student employment was perceived as greatest by parents with family incomes of \$70,000 and above (28 percent viewed this as a very serious problem, with 56 percent reporting no problem because their child does not work).

Eight percent of parents said that an extended school year would cause fairly or very serious problems for their child's participation in activities such as Bible school, Hebrew school, and church camps. There are no trends according to family demographics or income.

## CHAPTER IV.

### QUALITY CURRICULUM AND EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR

Traditional models designed to improve education usually focus on the addition of components to the educational program. Curriculum, assessments, teachers, and classes may be added in response to demands of various education constituencies. Frequently, the quality of education is measured by the amount of resources available (e.g. books, teachers, classes). Extending the school year runs the risk of being another add-on educational change that, by itself, may not affect the overall quality of education. Time allocated often drives the curriculum rather than the curriculum and student needs driving the time in school.

In traditional models of education, curriculum is organized with the expectation that some students will excel, some will achieve basic mastery, and some will fail. This philosophy assumes a fixed amount of time is needed for students to perform. However, all students may not obtain mastery within the allotted time. As a result, excellence and mastery are obtained by only a few. Too many students fail and too many do not acquire needed skills.

#### World Class Education

Virginia's World Class Education initiative strives to transform education into a model that rejects traditional assumptions about students. These proposed reforms expect all students to achieve certain objectives. This transformation is outcome-based and rejects simply measuring resources allocated by schools. The World Class Education philosophy involves an assessment of achievement and holds schools accountable for results.

The Common Core of Learning (CCL) is fundamental to World Class Education. CCL is based on the premise that every child has the right to learning experiences that are essential to a sound education. CCL is not a curriculum, rather it is the foundation upon which curricula, instructional strategies and assessment of students are based. Decision making, including the allocation of resources, is focused on needs of individual students.

These new assumptions should be considered in decisions to extend the school year or school day. Allocation of time based on the demands of the curriculum and the needs of the students will follow.

Adding days to the school year may not automatically result in curricular changes. With additional days, teachers may extend the instructional period for a topic, spend more time in review, or may move forward to cover new material.



The Common Core of Learning represents a shift from the traditional paradigm of resources driven curriculum. Instead, student exit outcomes become the foundation for curriculum development. Consequently, mastery of educational outcomes define the time needed for instruction. Depending on individual student needs, schools that can respond to this new paradigm will need the flexibility to offer more instructional time to some students, if maximum individual achievement is to be obtained.

### Local School Division Initiatives

The Early Childhood Transformation Projects are one component of the World Class Education initiative. In May 1992, 74 elementary schools from 55 school divisions submitted applications for Early Childhood Project grants. Twelve schools were funded for staff development and planning for the 1992-93 school year.

The proposals submitted included variations in instructional time. Some schools proposed alterations to the school day. Some schools planned to provide additional time during the day for tutoring, library use, homework, parent training classes, or programs for latchkey children. Other schools proposed offering increased days of instruction, using summer school, or extending the school year. One proposal would add enrichment days at the end of units of study, with voluntary attendance. Selection of classes would be made by the students and parents, although teachers could recommend specific instruction for certain students.

The ideas for additional instructional time presented in the Early Childhood Project grant proposals are being explored by other school divisions in Virginia. For example, a number of schools in Prince William County identified the need to offer additional days of instruction to students (Kelly, 1992). Also, the Hanover County public school system is considering a pilot project for increasing the days of instruction.

### Conclusions

Instruction is based upon student needs, desire and readiness for achieving results. The time for instruction is managed by the student, school personnel and parents, with the goal of promoting the greatest degree of achievement possible.

Decisions regarding instruction are best made at the level closest to the individual student. Site-based management places decision making within the individual school, with less central office control. This education management style is well suited for decisions to increase instructional time.

Increased educational opportunities may be maximized when they are accompanied by expanded instructional approaches designed to meet individual student needs.

## **CHAPTER V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Findings**

Time, although important, is but one factor influencing learning. Effective instruction accommodates variances in the amount of instructional time needed by students. Extension of time alone may not lead to improved achievement for all students. However, at-risk students appear to benefit most from more time and additional opportunities for learning. Currently, 93 percent of Virginia school divisions extend the amount of instructional time provided students by offering optional summer school programs. In addition, many local educators, in their efforts at reforming education at the early childhood level have proposed a variety of approaches for increasing instructional time. These proposals include offering optional additional days for enrichment or remediation, extending the length of the school day, and increasing the availability of instructional resources for students and their families. Similar options for students at other levels are under consideration elsewhere in the state.

Traditionally, time is one factor driving the curriculum offered by schools. Quality is often assessed via measurement of resources provided, including scheduled time. In contrast, Virginia's World Class Education (WCE) initiative rejects an emphasis based solely on measuring resources. Rather, WCE focuses on outcomes, rather than resources. The Virginia Common Core of Learning assumes that all children have the right and ability to learn. The prevailing philosophy is one of providing resources to enable students to meet desired outcomes. Time is one of these resources that should be manipulated differentially for different student populations.

### **Impact on Families**

Parents of students attending public school in Virginia report distinctly different lifestyles during the summer than during the school year. Time for family focused activities, summer camps, student employment and religious activities is important to certain Virginia families. However, in a public opinion survey, only 20 percent of the parents of children enrolled in public schools in Virginia said that a 200 day school year would cause a fairly serious or very serious disruption in their summer activities. There was variance in the degree of perceived disruption among specific subgroups.

### **Fiscal Impact**

There are substantial financial costs associated with lengthening the school year. The total estimated daily operating cost of extending the school year is \$15,363,200. The projected state share of this estimated cost is 55 percent.

Personnel costs comprise the majority of daily operating expenses for schools. In 1990-91, school divisions spent approximately \$2.241 billion in salary costs for 69,700 teachers statewide. An additional estimated sum of \$472 million was spent on fringe benefits. Therefore, each additional day would cost an estimated \$13.6 million in state and local funds for teacher salaries and fringe benefits. Support for substitute teachers currently averages \$194,350 per day.

Energy costs are estimated at \$127,000 per day statewide. Many schools may require the installation of air conditioning as 44 percent of Virginia's schools are not air conditioned. The estimated cost for installation in a typical 600-pupil school is \$600,000. Pupil transportation presents an additional expense, with the total cost statewide at \$1.48 million per day.

School administrators predict that extending the length of the school year could adversely affect their ability to complete many of the administrative and maintenance tasks typically performed during the summer. These administrators speculate that additional resources, financial and personnel, may be needed to accomplish these tasks in a timely manner.

### Conclusions

The time provided for instruction is viewed as one of the resources to be manipulated to ensure student mastery of the expected outcomes. The fiscal impact of adding days should be given careful consideration as policy-makers consider the relative value of extending the length of the school year in comparison with other options for education reform. Further, community support for extending the school year remains mixed, with certain parents viewing such an extension as disruptive.

Therefore, the Department of Education recommends:

- 1) A decision to unilaterally lengthen the school year in Virginia should be delayed until:
  - the Common Core of Learning standards and general time requirements for instruction are identified;
  - data from localities implementing models for increasing instructional time are evaluated; and,
  - sufficient funds to cover the additional costs can be identified at state and local levels.
- 2) Within the resources available, the state should support localities that wish to implement and evaluate models for extending instructional time, including extending the length of the school year.

3) Increasing instructional time is one strategy for providing the resources necessary for some students to demonstrate desired education outcomes.

- ❑ Programs targeting increased instructional time should not be developed in isolation. Modification of school schedules should be incorporated with instructional modifications, in accordance with student learning styles and needs.
- ❑ School divisions should be encouraged to consider offering increased instructional time options for those students who are educationally at risk. Summer programs are an especially viable option for meeting the needs of these students.
- ❑ School divisions should be responsive to the attitudes and values of the individual community, and tailor instructional schedules accordingly.

Increasing the length of the school year for students in Virginia remains an option for consideration in education reform efforts. There is little support either in research or public opinion for the assumption that a longer school year is a panacea for deficits in student achievement. Nonetheless, the time needed for mastery must equate with the time scheduled for instruction if all students are to achieve the goals of readiness for living and working in the twenty-first century.

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APPENDIX A

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA--1992 SESSION

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 66

*Requesting the Department of Education to study the feasibility and appropriateness of lengthening the public school term.*

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 9, 1992

Agreed to by the Senate, March 4, 1992

WHEREAS, responsibility for ensuring that a public education system of high quality is "established and continually maintained" rests with the General Assembly pursuant to Article VIII, Section 1 of the Virginia Constitution; and

WHEREAS, subject to the ultimate authority of the Legislature, the Board of Education is responsible for effectuating the Commonwealth's educational policy, which authority includes the adoption of regulations as are necessary to ensure the effective operation of a quality system of public education; and

WHEREAS, the prescribed length of the public school term is currently 180 teaching days, pursuant to regulations of the Board of Education and as referenced in § 22.1-98; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to § 22.1-79, local school boards are empowered to determine the length of the school term "insofar as not inconsistent with state statutes and regulations of the Board of Education"; and

WHEREAS, while extending the public school term may afford increased educational opportunity for Virginia's young people, a thorough examination of the potential impact of such an extension on existing summer programs and family schedules and lifestyles, as well as consideration of the shared duties, interests, and responsibilities of the Board, the General Assembly, and local school divisions is necessary to determine the efficacy and appropriateness of any extension; and

WHEREAS, currently the Department of Education is assessing the need to lengthen the school year and has begun the research and analysis of certain aspects of this important issue; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Department of Education be requested to study the feasibility and appropriateness of lengthening the public school term. The Department shall consider, among other things, an examination of the potential state and local fiscal impact of an extension; implications for the curriculum and the impact on school facilities and transportation; the impact on family schedules and lifestyles and increased educational opportunities.

The Department shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1993 Session of the General Assembly in accordance with the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

## APPENDIX B

### METHODOLOGY OF THE COMMONWEALTH POLL

The Commonwealth Poll is a telephone survey on numerous topics. The Survey Research Laboratory (SRL) at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond completed interviews between November 4 and 18, 1992. The survey used a randomly-selected sample of 803 Virginia residents aged 18 and over. Survey Sampling Incorporated of Westport, Connecticut prepared the sample. All residential telephones had a known chance of inclusion.

Respondents with children enrolled in Virginia public schools were asked the questions regarding extending the school year. The answers from these 200 respondents are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus approximately seven percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. The sample error is higher for the responses in various geographic subgroups (e.g., age, region).

Telephone surveys typically underrepresent population groups without telephone service. A weighting is used to compensate for the omission of households without telephones. In addition, the SRL gathers information from households that report interruptions in telephone service during the past year.