

# ECF Education Briefs

Issues in Public Education: Research and Analysis  
from the Education Consumers Foundation

October 2001 • v1n10

## Home Environments for Learning

By Halbert J. Walberg and Susan J. Paik

Walenberg, H. J. Haertel, G. D., eds. *Psychology and Education Practice*,  
p. 356-68, CA, McCutchan Publishing, Summer 2001.

Found online at [http://education-consumers.org/research/briefs\\_1001.htm](http://education-consumers.org/research/briefs_1001.htm)



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# Home Environments for Learning

*Herbert J. Walberg and Susan J. Paik*

Americans spend more on the schooling of our students than nearly all other affluent countries. Yet, our students make the least gains in reading, mathematics, and science. Although they score about average on tests in the early grades, they come in last in high school. How can the most productive country on the planet have the least productive schools?

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education reported what they considered the chief reason. This distinguished group of citizens pointed out negative effects of the short U.S. school year of 180 days compared to 190 to 210 days in Europe and 240 in Japan. Subsequently, I found that 88 percent of 376 estimates of the effects of study time supported the common observation that the longer students study, the more they learn.

Psychology rarely produces such consistent findings. Because of the National Commission's report *A Nation at Risk*, legislators increased spending on schools, and educators carried out many reforms. Achievement, however, remained stagnant during subsequent years. Recent international surveys show that U.S. students continue to make the least progress, and the U.S. still has the shortest school year.

The number of days in the school year, however, tells only part of the story. I analyzed 33 psychological studies that compared U.S. students' time use with that in Korea, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan--countries that top the achievement charts. Asian students went to school more days per year (including partial days on Saturdays), had a longer school day, typically attended private tutoring schools, and did more homework for both their regular and tutoring schools. Within and outside school, Chinese students averaged twice the total study time of U.S. students. Korean students put in 83 percent more study time.

After immigrating to the U.S., many Asian students continue private after-school lessons and prodigious study time as reason for their breathtaking achievement in school mathematics and science and later in university engineering, science, medicine, and other challenging fields despite what would seem severe economic and language handicaps.

The comparative studies I analyzed offered other time-related comparisons. During their short summer vacations, for example, many Korean students study English, computers, and martial arts. What do U.S. students do with their substantial non-study time? Comparisons with Chinese students suggest they spend twice as much time playing and much more time watching television. Yet, a national survey of American high school students showed that three-fourths believed tougher examinations and graduation requirements would lead students to study harder, longer, and more effectively.

Our national difficulty is following the obvious implications of consistent research findings, common sense, and what students know. Educators have yet to increase the length of the school year. Nor have they established high standards that would induce our students to study harder.

[This Briefing was written by Herbert J. Walberg, Ph.D., University Scholar, University of Illinois-Chicago. It was published July 23, 2001 as a Hoover Institution Weekly Essay, copyright Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University, [www-hoover.stanford.edu/pubaffairs/we/current/walberg\\_0701.html](http://www-hoover.stanford.edu/pubaffairs/we/current/walberg_0701.html) ]

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