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Billions Lost Making Up for Summer Learning Loss, Say Business Leaders

By Kathryn Baron on December 30, 2014 6:07 PM | [1 Comment](#)

American schools waste \$21 billion a year due to summer learning loss by sticking with outdated schedules, according to a new research review published this month by [ReadyNation](#), a nonprofit that supports business by promoting education reforms to improve career and college readiness.

"[Not Getting Our Money's Worth](#)," argues that the traditional 10-month calendar used by most schools was designed more than 100 years ago for an economy and family life that no longer exist.

"That schedule was designed when many more students had to get home to milk the cows, air conditioning hadn't been invented, and most mothers worked in the home—not outside it," write authors Kara Clifford, William Christeson, and Jenn O'Connor. "Times have changed, but too often our school schedules and approaches to education have not."

Just between 1975 and 2010, the number of working mothers jumped from 47 percent to 71 percent, according to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). That leaves many children unsupervised after school and during the summer, unless their parents can find affordable, quality programs. And it puts already-at-risk students even further behind classmates whose families have the resources to provide enrichment classes in the arts, sports, and hands-on learning opportunities in mathematics, science, and computer coding.

"Time off in the summer alone amounts to an average drop in test scores equivalent to two months of lost math skills among middle-class children," according to the report. It also cites [research](#) indicating that, over time, summer learning loss accounts for as much as two-thirds of the academic achievement gap between low-income students and their wealthier classmates.

By falling two months behind in school, low-income students essentially get only eight months of education during a 10-month school year. In New York State, for example, ReadyNation found that comes to more than \$3,900 per student in lost learning time.

In schools and districts that have expanded learning time, students score better on state exams, are more likely to attend college, and are less likely to engage in risky and criminal behavior.

In Massachusetts schools that have had expanded learning schedules for at least four years, twice as many students scored proficient or advanced on state math and science exams as those in schools on a traditional calendar.

Although a growing number of schools are expanding the school day or year, or are reconfiguring the schedule to give students more learning time, the business leaders that make up ReadyNation's membership say the preponderance of research shows that to make sure America has an educated workforce to remain competitive, policymakers need to "invest in more and better learning time for more children," and communities must "continue to support the funding necessary to wisely ramp up these efforts over time."

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