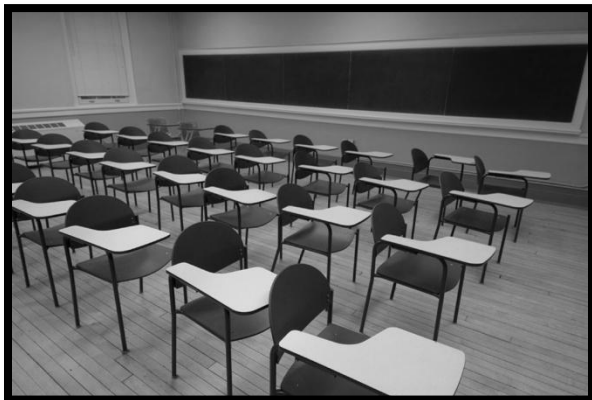


Is Summer Break Necessary?

For many kids, summer break is the best time of the year. They are free from classes. They are free from waking up to an alarm clock. And they are free from homework. An old rhyme says, “No more pencils. No more books. No more teachers’ dirty looks!”

But is summer break good for students? Would it be better if school went all year?

Many schools in the United States have 180 days of school. Then they have a long summer break. This schedule was first used in the early 1900’s. Before that, the school calendar was much different. The largest cities used to have 240-260 days of school each year. There were four quarters. One quarter was each season of the year. They had short breaks between each. But children were not required to go to school. Many students only came to school part of the year. They spent less time in class than students today.



Back then doctors thought too much time in school could harm a child’s health. They believed children were physically and mentally weak. They didn’t think kids should spend so much time in a classroom.

By 1900, the school year had been shortened by sixty days. They got rid of the summer quarter. Summer became the break time for several reasons. The heat of the summer made school buildings too hot. Some people thought that being in hot, crowded places spread disease. Also, rich families took vacations to get away from the summer heat. Other families were starting to do the same.

School in areas away from the cities was different. Children there spent two or three months of school in the winter. Then they spent two or three more months in the summer. In the spring and fall, they worked on their farms. The population grew. The distance between the cities and the rural areas got smaller. Some worried that the rural students weren’t getting enough time in the classroom. They made the school year longer. They switched to a summer break. They wanted to be more like the city schools.

One hundred years have passed. For many schools the schedule hasn’t changed. We know more about how children learn. We know that students are not too weak. They are able to attend school year round. Air conditioning helps. It lets people live and work even in the hottest parts of the country.

So why do students in the USA still get a summer break?

Traditions are hard to change. Summer break is a time for family vacations and activities. Families do things that they don’t have time for

during the school year. Summer break is time for students to take extra classes to get ahead. They may also retake classes they struggled with before. Summer is a chance to get a part-time job to earn money. Summer gives students time to attend a camp. It's time to focus on something like music or sports.

Schools benefit from the summer break too. During summer, schools save money. They don't have to provide transportation. They don't have to provide meals and other services. Teachers use the summer break to take classes. These classes are required for their school jobs. Some may get another job to make more money.

But summer break also causes problems for students. Students' scores on tests often drop over the summer. Many teachers spend time every year reviewing material from last year. Is this class time being wasted? Would students learn and remember better without the long summer break?

Schools in many other countries have a longer school day. They also have a longer school year. In Australia, students attend school 200 days a year. They have four quarters. There are short breaks between each. In China, students start school from early September. They end in mid-July. Their school day starts at 7:30am. It ends at 5pm. They have a two hour break for lunch. The school year in Japan starts in April. It ends the next March. Their schedule is divided into three terms. There are short breaks between each. Japanese students are in school for 243 days a year.

Officials worry about less time in school for U.S. students. They think this means that U.S. students learn less than those in other countries. Students in the U.S. have lower test

scores in math and science than students in many Asian countries. In those countries students are in school longer during the day. They are also in school for more days each year.

Some believe that more time in school won't help. They believe that the current schedule should be changed. They want time used better. They feel less time should be spent in classes like art and music. More time should be spent in math and science. This would give students the extra instruction they need. But it wouldn't add days to the school year. Others believe that elective classes are necessary. These classes give students a well-rounded education. They give the students more interest in school. Activities such as band and choir increase school attendance. They decrease the drop-out rate.

Some schools are trying different kinds of schedules. Some schools are using an extended year calendar. They spread the school days out throughout the year. They have bigger breaks between each quarter and a shorter summer. Other schools are trying schedules that have a longer school year. But they have half days of school once or twice a week. This gives students time for jobs. It gives them time for sports and other activities.

So, is summer break necessary? The answer depends on who you ask.