



Are We Maximizing Every Minute for Instruction at the Expense of Building Strong Student Relationships?

By Educator Barnes – August 23, 2019

The achievement gap between black and white students is one of the many reasons why school districts are pushing for maximizing every possible minute of the day to ensure students have plenty of opportunities to learn content. Two content areas of high focus are English and math

since they are assessed on state standardized tests and counts towards school accountability. Reading and math blocks have been increased to 90 minutes. Increasing the time students are learning content comes at a cost. That time has to come from another portion of the school day. Many times, those are the parts of the schedule that allow students to build relationships with each other and their teachers.

Recess used to be a time of at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted fun. Some schools now have 20, 15, or only 10 minutes allotted for recess. Ten might not seem like a lot, but that's better than zero minutes. Some schools have determined that gym class can count and have eliminated it completely from the schedule. If a school is lucky enough to have recess, students don't get to play during the entire time on the schedule. If a class has 20 minutes of recess, the 20 minutes includes walking to the playground and the time it takes to return back to class. The last thing teachers want is to return late from recess and to have a note on their desk or an email from the principal informing them of how many instructional minutes were lost while their students were still on the playground.

Speaking of special area/elective classes like gym, these classes typically get the short end of the stick. Those teachers have less time with students than their colleagues. Their time is constantly hijacked to accommodate testing or bootcamps to get ready for the many assessments that occur throughout the year.

I must admit that one opportunity students typically enjoy was labeled as wasting instructional time caught me by surprise. Yesterday was the back-to-school night at my sons' school. Last year, my twin sons were in the same class, so my husband and I attended the session together. This year, our sons are back in separate classes, so my husband and I had to divide and conquer. During the presentation I attended the teacher shared, "There is a new school-wide policy: no birthday parties or treats at school, but you may send in pencils or party favors." Some parents looked baffled. The teacher continued by explaining that student allergies were an issue and that it wastes instructional time.

I chuckled quietly when she said the instructional time part. I can understand student allergies. Since my sons have been in school, their teachers have let parents know what to avoid so that was not an issue. However, wasting instructional time is a point I couldn't agree with. Then, I think about the previous school year. My sons don't really like cupcakes. Instead, I sent in donuts and orange juice. I brought in the good donuts, Long's Donuts (don't bother debating this point; those comments will be ignored). It wasn't an issue. Students were still able to learn.

We keep taking stuff away in the name of learning and maximizing instruction but at what cost? Kids shouldn't be treated as robots only at school to receive information. They need to have fun.

Yes, instruction should be fun, but there is value and worth to having fun for a few minutes without academic content being the sole focus. Kids need time to be kids and time to get to know each other. We shouldn't forget about that.