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NYC to try longer school day in 20 middle schools

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NEW YORK — School days will get more than two hours longer for 2,000 sixth-graders next fall as the nation's biggest public school system experiments with having students spend more time in class, officials announced Monday.

The plan, which echoes moves to lengthen school days in other school districts around the country, will involve students in 20 schools yet to be chosen, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn and Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott said.

Pupils will get 2 1/2 extra hours a day of reading tutoring and other educational activities, run by The After-School Corp., a nonprofit group that works on extending school days in cities. The City Council and private foundations are paying for the extra instruction, as part of a \$4.6 million effort to improve middle school reading.

"Improving our city's middle schools is vital" to improving children's prospects, Quinn said. "... Both students and teachers will soon benefit immensely."

There's already some variation in the length of school days in the city. A teachers' contract provision allows for extending school hours if teachers vote to do so, and the city and union agreed more than a decade ago to add instructional time in some struggling schools. But the new program would mark a major extension of the day.

For now, the project involves a fraction of the city's 1.1 million public school students, but it aims to assess whether the idea should spread to other schools.

The plan envisions all sixth-graders in a chosen school participating. It wasn't immediately clear whether there might be exemptions for children already in tutoring or other afterschool programs.

The idea of boosting students' class time has gained some traction around the country in recent years.

The National Center on Time & Learning has estimated that about 1,000 schools nationwide have adopted longer school days or years. Five states, including New York, announced in December they would add at least 300 hours to the academic calendar in some schools beginning this year.

Some working parents favor longer school schedules, which can offer more opportunity for learning and cut down on scrambling for afterschool programs, baby sitters and camps. But parental complaints — and tight budgets — also contributed to decisions to abandon year-round school in some places, including Salt Lake City, Las Vegas and parts of California.

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