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Sen. Kirk announces new legislation for year-round schools at a press conference at Alain Locke Charter School. Eighth grader, Kaneshia Henderson, left, also voiced her support for year-round schools at the meeting.

## Senator Kirk proposes pilot for year-round schools in U.S.

by **EMILY WEINSTEIN**

Jan 23, 2014

Sen. Mark Kirk, R-Ill., announced legislation Thursday that would endorse pilot programs for year-round schools throughout the nation. Kirk announced the news during a press conference at Alain Locke Charter School in Chicago's East Garfield Park neighborhood.

"Several countries already operate all-year schools," Kirk said at the press conference. "Those countries include Japan and Singapore, all of whom radically outperform the United States."

The legislation, which is being called The All-Year School Study Act, would target underperforming schools in low-income neighborhoods.

The Rev. James Meeks, former chairman of the Illinois Senate Education Committee, said Thursday that he supports Kirk's proposed legislation 100 percent. Meeks said he is not only excited about the opportunity for more learning time, but also for the safe havens schools will provide.

"Just imagine kids being in an environment where they are safe, they are protected and they are learning," Meeks said.

Alain Locke 8th grader Kaneshia Henderson also shared her support for year-round schools.

"Rather than being outside in the neighborhood where people don't make all the right choices that they should," Kaneshia said at the conference, "we're learning more and we become better as students and as a person because of the help that we have all around us."

Kirk's All-Year School Study Act would be supported by \$4 million taken from already existing funds from the Fund for the Improvement of Education, which supports grants to state and local education agencies.

According to Kirk, four schools across the country would be awarded grants for the pilot program.

Kirk announced the new legislation at Alain Locke Charter School, which has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as one of seven schools that is best at closing the achievement gap.

Alain Locke Charter School has an extended school year, with 190 academic school days. According to Kirk, schools like Alain Locke that have extended school years, give children more time with core subjects such as math and science.

At the conference, Alain Locke Charter School Principal Patrick Love talked about the benefits his school has had from an extended school year.

"The longer school day and year allows more time for differentiated learning, enrichment opportunities, physical education and recess, community building, teacher planning time and collaboration, as well as more planning time for weekly professional development of our staff," Love said.

According to Kirk, The All-Year School Study Act was inspired by schools such as Alain Locke and year-round schools in some Pacific Rim countries.

If approved, the pilot will begin in the 2015 fiscal year.



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Sen. Kirk talks to students in a sixth grade classroom at Alain Locke Charter School. Two student greeters presented Kirk with a t-shirt and inducted him as an honorary member of the Alain Locke community.



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*Sen. Mark Kirk, R-Ill., poses with 8th grade Alain Locke Charter School student, Kaneshia Henderson at her school in East Garfield Park. Kirk announced legislation Thursday to fund a pilot program that would promote year-round schools.*