



A College Tradition: Subject to Change

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Could the traditional university schedule be on the way out?

Newsweek Magazine explored that in a recent story penned by former U.S. Senator and Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander, who documented that some colleges that have laid out a three-year option to students. That option saves the students thousands of dollars and allows the school to utilize space that was previously unused.

As Alexander spelled out “the idea of the fall-to-spring ‘school year’ hasn’t changed much since before the American Revolution, when we were a nation of farmers and students put their books away to work the soil during the summer. That long summer stretch no longer makes sense.”

Sound familiar? It is the same argument facing K-12 education as outlined by Jay Mathews of the Washington Post this weekend. Earl Martin Phalen, founder of the BELL Foundation and a Fellow at The Mind Trust, has committed his career to summer mentorship and now oversees Summer Advantage USA, based here in Indy.

The traditionally lower-cost public higher education offering has itself become less affordable, with the average cost of tuition rising 63 percent in a recent seven-year span. For many, that makes the three-year option even more attractive.

Alexander — who was also a former president of the University of Tennessee — explained the demise of the American automobile industry and drew parallels when he suggested that “there are signs of peril within American higher education.”

But there are some colleges and universities which are ahead of the curve, creating Early College High School programs intended to dramatically change the outlook for students whose backgrounds predict a lack of educational success.

“Early College is one innovation where schools and higher ed are collaborating to provide smart options for students and families looking for tuition relief,” said Patricia Melton, the Chief Community Builder at Schools Building Communities. “SBC sees Early College as a smart strategy for any student.”