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**Saving Recess and Lunch:
What states are doing to combat the impact of education reform on the structure of the
school day**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) passed by the Bush Administration in 2001 rated schools based on student test results. The cost of implementing testing and reconsidering the value of the tests themselves have caused a number of states to reconsider how they devote class time and measure student performance.¹

recognition to those that are succeeding and providing large new amounts of money to help improve or close failing schools.”⁵ If NCLB overhaul did not occur, thousands more schools would be labeled as failing each year until 2014, the NCLB deadline by which schools were required to bring every student to proficiency in reading and math. The Obama administration has proposed a new goal of all students being “college or career ready” upon high school graduation to replace the 2014 universal proficiency deadline.⁶

The Effects of Reduced Recess and Lunch Time

Since the 2001 enactment of NCLB, forty four percent of school districts increased time for English/Language Arts (ELA) and math in their elementary schools and decreased time in other subjects, according to the Center on Education Policy’s 2007 survey.⁷ Twenty percent of all districts reported decreasing time for recess. “Schools that cut recess time reported reductions from 184 minutes per week pre NCLB, or 37 minutes per day, to 144 minutes per week in 2007, or 29 minutes per day.”⁸

Schools struggling to meet proficiency requirements on testing have seen sweeping changes to allotted time in unstructured student activity to extra in class time. Two areas have been increasingly affected, and include mainly unstructured physical activity (recess), but also lunchtime. For example, in Massachusetts, Superintendent Nadine Binkley has changed the lunch/recess time from 40 to 30 minutes, while simultaneously eliminating a 20 minute silent reading program. This school district will then add 30 minutes a day, or 2 hours a week, to their academic classes.⁹

In the U.S., an estimated 20 percent of elementary schools have dropped physical education in favor of extended classroom time.¹⁰ According to the Center of Education Policy, 20 percent of school systems have decreased time for recess, with cuts averaging 50 minutes per week.¹¹ Another recent study in *Pediatrics* used a national data set of 11,000 children and found that 30

⁵ Dillon, Sam. "Obama to Seek Sweeping Change in 'No Child' Law *The New York Times*". (2010), <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/01/education/01child.html?adxnnl=1&fta=y&adxnnlx=1296676847ZtH7mRVR37MpoFn2U/7P7A>. (accessed February 2, 2011).

⁶ Dillon, 2010.

⁷ Patte Barth, "Time out: Is recess in danger?" Center on Education Policy, <http://www.centerforpubn2>

Extending the School Day

healthy food *does* taste good. These garden and cooking programs were funded by the Network for

allows for a four day school week, but do not currently any schools that implement such a calendar.³⁸

In a report by the Center for Education Policy, Applied Research and Evaluation, at the University of Southern Maine Christine Donis Keller and David L. Silvernail listed the drawbacks of the four day school week would include lengthened school days for four days out of the week, which there has been concern expressed that this may lead to student exhaustion, possibly not meeting requirements for the number of hours school must be in session, and difficulty for parents to find adequate child care for the students on the additional day off.³⁹ However, they listed advantages of the program as improved morale and attendance by both students and teachers, fewer classroom disruptions, increased efficiency in class room time, increased time students are able to spend on extra circular activities and as a result increased participation in extra circular activities due to the additional time allotted for them, increased flexibility with planning for snow days and other unexpected school closures, budgetary savings, and overall satisfaction by “stakeholders” in the education system.⁴⁰

While there does not appear to be any direct correlation between the institution of a four day work week and lengthened time allocated for unstructured student