



NEWS RELEASE

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As Schools Spend More Time on Reading and Math, Magnitude of Curriculum-Narrowing Effect is Revealed

Shifts Appear Quite Large in Districts Reporting Change in Educational Priorities

WASHINGTON—February 20, 2008—Last summer, a groundbreaking report verified what many in the education and policy communities had long suspected: that a majority of the nation's school districts were increasing time spent on reading and math in elementary schools since the No Child Left Behind Act became law in 2002, while most of these districts cut back on time spent on other subjects. Today, a follow-up report issued by the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Education Policy provides an unprecedented look at the magnitude of those changes.

In its earlier report, CEP found that a majority of school districts—62 percent— had increased time for English language arts (ELA) and/or math in elementary schools since school year 2001-02. Meanwhile, 44 percent had increased time for ELA and/or math at the elementary level, while simultaneously cutting time from one or more areas including science, social studies, art and music, physical education, recess, and lunch.

CEP's new report, *Instructional Time in Elementary Schools: A Closer Look at Changes for Specific Subjects*, examines the size of the shifts in those districts, in order to determine just how extensive the changes were.

According to the report, districts increasing time for ELA and math had done so by an average of 43 percent, or about three hours each week. To make room for the added time for ELA and math, districts reducing time in other areas averaged cuts of about 32 percent across those subjects, nearly 2.5 hours each week. Some of the districts reduced their time in one subject, while other districts decreased instructional time in several areas.

"We knew that many school districts had made shifts in the time spent teaching different subjects since the No Child Left Behind was enacted, but we had little evidence of the magnitude of these changes within those districts," said Jack Jennings, president and CEO of CEP. "Digging deeper into the data, we now know that the amount of time spent teaching reading, math and other subjects has changed substantially. In other words, changes in curriculum are not only widespread but also deep."

According to the report, eight out of 10 of the districts that increased time for ELA did so by at least 75 minutes per week, and more than half (54 percent) increased by 150 minutes or more per week, or at least 30 minutes per day. Of the districts adding time for math, 63 percent increased by at least 75 minutes per week, with 19 percent adding 150 minutes or more per week.

Of the districts that both increased time for ELA or math and reduced time in other subjects, a large majority—72 percent—cut time by at least 75 minutes per week for one or more of the other subjects. For example, more than half (53 percent) of these districts cut instructional time by at least 75 minutes per week in social studies, and the same percentage (53 percent) cut time by at least 75 minutes per week in science.

Both of CEP's reports on curriculum, including *Instructional Time in Elementary Schools: A Closer Look at Changes for Specific Subjects*, and *Choices, Changes, and Challenges: Curriculum and Instruction in the NCLB Era* (July 2007) are based on CEP's nationally representative survey of 349 school districts conducted between November 2006 and February 2007. Both reports are part of CEP's multiyear effort to track the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act since it became law in 2002, and are available online at www.cep-dc.org.

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Based in Washington, D.C. and founded in January 1995, by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent any special interests. Instead the Center helps citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.

The report, along with additional information from CEP, is available online at www.cep-dc.org.