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## **As the Majority of School Districts Spend More Time on Reading and Math, Many Cut Time in Other Areas**

*Instructional Time for Subjects Not Tested Under No Child Left Behind Has Fallen by Nearly One-Third Since Law Was Passed*

WASHINGTON – July 25, 2007 – A majority of the nation’s school districts report that they have increased time for reading and math in elementary schools since the No Child Left Behind Act became law in 2002, while time spent on other subjects has fallen by nearly one-third during the same time, according to a report from the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Education Policy.

The report, based on a nationally representative survey of nearly 350 school districts, finds that to make room for additional curriculum and instructional time in reading and math – the two subjects tested for accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act – many districts are also spending less time in other subjects that are not the focus of federal accountability.

About 62 percent of districts reported increasing time for English language arts and/or math in elementary schools since school year 2001-02, and more than 20 percent reported increasing time for these subjects in middle school during the same time.

Among the districts reporting increased time for English and math, the average increase was substantial, amounting to a 46 percent increase in English, a 37 percent increase in math, and a 42 percent increase across the two subjects combined.

Meanwhile, 44 percent of districts reported cutting time from one or more other subjects or activities at the elementary level, including science, social studies, art and music, physical education, lunch and recess. On average, the cuts amounted to about 30 minutes a day.

The report, *Choices, Changes, and Challenges: Curriculum and Instruction in the NCLB Era*, also finds that overall, the decreases represent an average reduction of 31 percent in the total amount of instructional time devoted to these subjects since 2001-02.

“What gets tested gets taught.” said Jack Jennings, CEP’s president and CEO. “Under No Child Left Behind, there is reading and math and then there is everything else. And because so much is riding on the reading and math included on state tests, many schools have cut back time on other important subject areas, which means that some students are not receiving a broad curriculum.”

The report notes that the increases and decreases are more prevalent in districts that are home to struggling schools.

School districts with at least one school identified for improvement under NCLB reported in greater proportions that they had increased time for English and/or math at the elementary and middle school levels and had cut back on time for other subjects since 2001-02 (78 percent) than did districts without schools identified (57 percent).

## What is Tested is What is Taught

In addition to increasing time spent on English and math, many districts appear to be changing their curriculum to provide a greater emphasis on content and skills covered on high-stakes state tests used for No Child Left Behind purposes.

In elementary reading, for example, 84 percent of districts reported that they have changed their curriculum “somewhat” or “to a great extent” to put greater emphasis on tested content. Seventy-nine percent of districts made a similar change in middle school English, while 76 percent did so at the high school level.

Similarly, 81 percent of districts reported changing their math curriculum at the elementary and middle school levels to more closely match the content of state tests, while 78 percent of districts reported doing so at the high school level.

The report is from CEP's *From the Capital to the Classroom* series of reports tracking the implementation of the law in its fifth year. Based on five years of research on how the No Child Left Behind Act has affected instruction and curriculum in states, districts and schools, the report includes the following recommendations to ensure that students receive a well-balanced curriculum and adequate instructional time in all core subjects.

- **Stagger testing requirements and include tests in other subjects.** Students should be tested in English language arts and math in grades 3, 5, 7 and once in high school, and in social studies and science in grades 4, 6, 8 and once in high school.
- **Encourage states to give adequate emphasis to art and music** and to include measures of knowledge and skills in art and music as one of the multiple measures used for NCLB accountability.
- **Require states to have an independent review of their standards and tests** at least once every three years to ensure that they are of high quality and rigor.
- **Provide federal funds for research to determine the best ways to incorporate and support the teaching of reading and math skills into social studies, science, and other subjects** to ensure students will have access to a rich, well-rounded curriculum.

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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.*