



EXTENDED RECESS PILOT Impact Report

August 2019

Extended Recess Pilot

Based on a growing body of scientific literature indicating positive associations between physical activity, learning behavior, and cognitive skills, the Arkansas General Assembly in 2017 passed Act 1062 to authorize the completion of a one-year pilot program to extend the amount of recess time in elementary schools. The pilot program conducted during the 2018-2019 school year included 26 schools (serving students in grades K through 6) throughout the state, each of which voluntarily applied to participate. Selected schools were required to offer a minimum of 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity per day for students in grades K through 4 and 45 minutes per day of unstructured physical activity for students in grades 5 and 6. Physical education instruction time did not count toward the total unstructured physical activity time; schools were still required to offer 40 minutes of physical education instruction per week. Unstructured physical activity was defined as active time in which students are not required to participate in a specific activity, though games and equipment were typically made available to students. Adults, typically teachers, supervised the activity. The additional recess time had to be offered during the school day, and waivers were approved for participating schools to adapt instructional time to accommodate the increased physical activity time.

Pilot schools were asked to complete brief surveys in the fall and again in the spring of the school year, providing information about the strategies used to implement the program and the successes and challenges observed during the implementation. Data regarding academic performance in participating schools for the 2018-2019 school year was obtained from school report cards and compared to the data from the previous two years to determine the possible impact on academic performance.



FINDINGS

A preliminary report (December 2018) summarized the findings from the fall survey of teachers and building administrators. Overall, survey respondents indicated that they felt the extra recess time had:

- Been positive or very positive for their classes (79%)
- Benefited student engagement and focus (78%)
- Had a positive impact on classroom disruptions (71%)
- Positively impacted student conflict resolution skills (63%)
- Had no impact (53%) or a positive impact (34%) on bullying behavior.

Teachers acknowledged that instructional time had been reduced because of the extra recess time, but most indicated that the benefits of less disciplinary time and more focus during instruction helped to compensate for the lost time.

Narrative comments by teachers and building administrators were, not unexpectedly, mixed. Some teacher and administrators were very positive about the program, noting that students enjoyed the extra recess time and were more focused and engaged during instructional time. Others were less positive, citing concerns about disruptions associated with the more frequent transitions and the loss of instructional time.

Impact on classrooms

Findings from the spring survey were very consistent with those of the fall survey. Both teachers and building administrators maintained a high level of satisfaction with the program and assessments of the impact of the extra recess time on classrooms overall, student engagement and focus, classroom disruptions, bullying behavior, and conflict resolution skills are comparable to those observed in the fall.

Additional analyses indicated that:

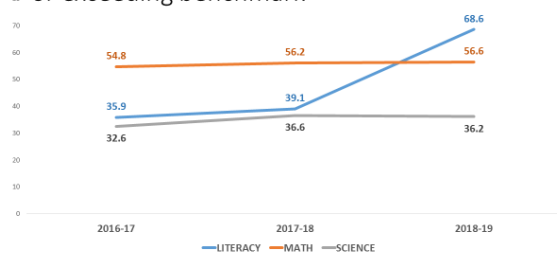
- There were no differences in responses received from those personnel who were engaged in playground supervision and those who did not supervise recess.
- There were no differences in responses received from those who taught older students and those who taught younger students. Teachers of older students were more likely to express concerns about the impact of reduced instruction time.

Impact on academic achievement

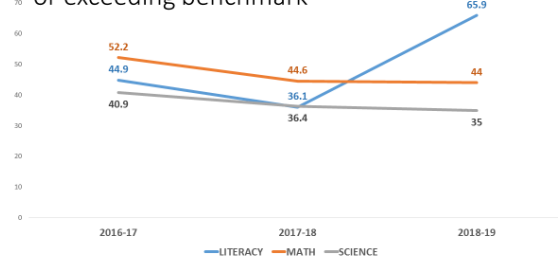
A review of benchmark achievement in grades 3 through 6 was undertaken to assess the impact of the extra recess time on academic achievement. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding the benchmark in literacy, math, and science in each grade (grades 3 through 6) was averaged for participating schools. In general, it was noted that the percentages either maintained a consistent level or rose over the period (comparing 2018-19 to the previous school year, 2017-18). Specifically, it is noted that:

- For all grades, there was a substantial increase from the previous school year (2017-18) in the percentage of students ready or exceeding the benchmark for **literacy**.
- **Math** scores were steady for grades 3, 4, and 6 but there was a slight decrease for grade 5.
- Similarly, **science** scores were steady for grades 3, 4, and 6 but slightly lower for grade 5.

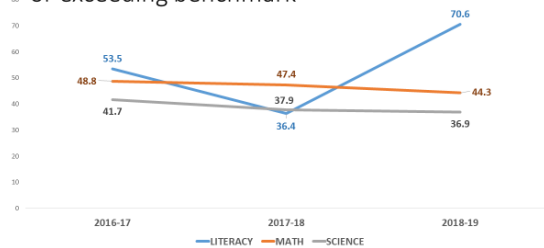
Grade 3 – Average percentage students ready or exceeding benchmark



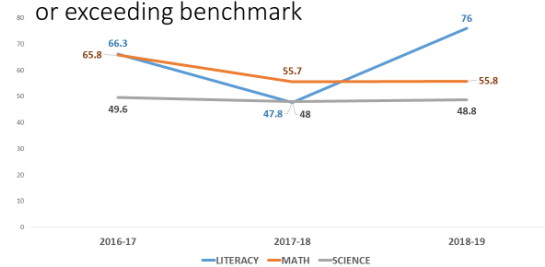
Grade 4 – Average percentage students ready or exceeding benchmark



Grade 5 – Average percentage students ready or exceeding benchmark



Grade 6 – Average percentage students ready or exceeding benchmark



Overall it appears that the extended recess time did not have a significant negative impact on student performance in this year. However, these data should be interpreted cautiously. Test scores are somewhat variable across years, since each year the grade score reflects the achievement of a different cohort of students and can be influenced by a large number of factors other than instructional time. Factors such as instructional methods, textbook adoptions, teacher experience, level of student mastery at the beginning of the year, supplemental instructional programs and student supports, and the like can have significant impact on student performance and create variability in test scores over time.

Impact on behavior

As noted above, the majority of teachers and building administrators indicated that classroom disruptions and office referrals for playground behavior were either not impacted at all or were positively impacted by the extended recess time. State data regarding disciplinary referrals were reviewed but it was determined that the data are not precise enough to provide a valid assessment of changes that might have been observed.

Summary

Overall, building administrators and teachers are positive about the extended recess pilot after initial efforts to implement the program. There were some concerns expressed, particularly about the time needed for transitions and the time taken from instruction. Data regarding academic performance over the past 3 years (2 years prior to the extended recess pilot and this most recent academic year) indicated that there was no significant reduction in student performance in grades 3 through 6 in the areas of literacy, math, or science. The majority of school personnel reported

that there were no increases in negative student behavior that might be associated with increased recess time.

Taken together in summary, this information suggests that, on average, the extended recess pilot has not resulted in negative consequences in participating schools.