

# **Extended School Year Introduction**

By the time the average student finishes eighth grade, he or she will have attended approximately 1,550 days of school! That's a tremendous amount of schooling. According to the United States Education Department, while more than half of the states in our country operate their schools on a 180-day schedule, some districts are experimenting with an extended school year that will add approximately 20 days of instruction in the summer. The belief is that this will improve the education of their students. However, extending the school year into the summer will have more negative than positive effects on the school district and the education of students.

# Once Upon a Time, You Were Wrong

*Start by telling a story...*

Once upon a time in a land far away, there was a kingdom where everyone dressed the same. It all started as a great idea. After all, girls and boys were spending hours deciding what to wear each day, and some girls and boys could afford expensive clothes while others could not. Dressing the same helped everyone to feel equal and good about themselves, until one day they had to leave school. What would they wear to that job interview or that date? Some of the young women showed up in blazers and ties; others wore jeans in a statement of their newfound freedom. They all made terrible first impressions, and all the jobs went to students from schools where there were no dress codes.

There was one exception, however; these were the students who joined the army. They packed their real clothes away for another three years.

**(CNN)** -- No one who works full-time -- in this, one of the wealthiest nations on Earth -- should have to raise a family in poverty. That is the fundamental principle behind our work to increase the national minimum wage. And today, on 10/10, National Minimum Wage Day, we are saying louder than ever that hard work should be rewarded with fair pay of at least \$10.10 per hour.

Every day for low-wage workers is filled with struggle and anxiety. We have heard from and visited with people making heartbreaking decisions about which bill to pay, which meal to skip, which growing child will get a pair of shoes this season and whether to buy a gallon of milk or a gallon of gas. For many of us, an unexpected car repair is an inconvenience; for a minimum-wage worker, it is a catastrophe.

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Let's face it -- it's tough to find the motivation to exercise outside these days. During the work week, sometimes *both* legs of our daily commutes are completed in utter darkness. And while weekend sunshine is appreciated, it doesn't do much to warm up our wintry surroundings. But before you throw in the towel and restrict yourself to the crowded, stuffy gym for the next few months, it may be worth giving the idea of a winter workout a second thought.

Exercisers are often concerned about the internal safety hazards that come along with chilly sweat sessions, but there is surprisingly little to worry about.

Simply suiting up appropriately with enough layers made of moisture-wicking fabrics keeps the body at a healthy temperature and functioning the same way it would in any other workout environment. Sure, a slippery moment on an icy running path could lead to injury, but circumstantial (and potentially clumsy) moments aside, exercising outside during the wintertime actually boasts benefits that may not be achieved as efficiently elsewhere.

If you can pull yourself away from that cozy seat in front of the fireplace, you'll reap these seven bonus benefits of sweating it out in the cold weather -- and you might even learn to love it.

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# Give kids a daily dose of nature

Today more than 80 percent of the U.S. population lives in urban areas. It's therefore fortunate we now understand many of the physical and psychological benefits healthy trees provide urbanites: Our parks and trees are more than aesthetically pleasing areas that help address pollution problems.

Unfortunately, life for everyone these days can be demanding — even for children. School, societal pressures and even relationship challenges with family members or friends can be stressful for kids and young adults. Also, children are spending more time



**Cynthia Orlando**

GUEST OPINION

than ever indoors and on electronic devices, including laptops, cell phones and electronic games.

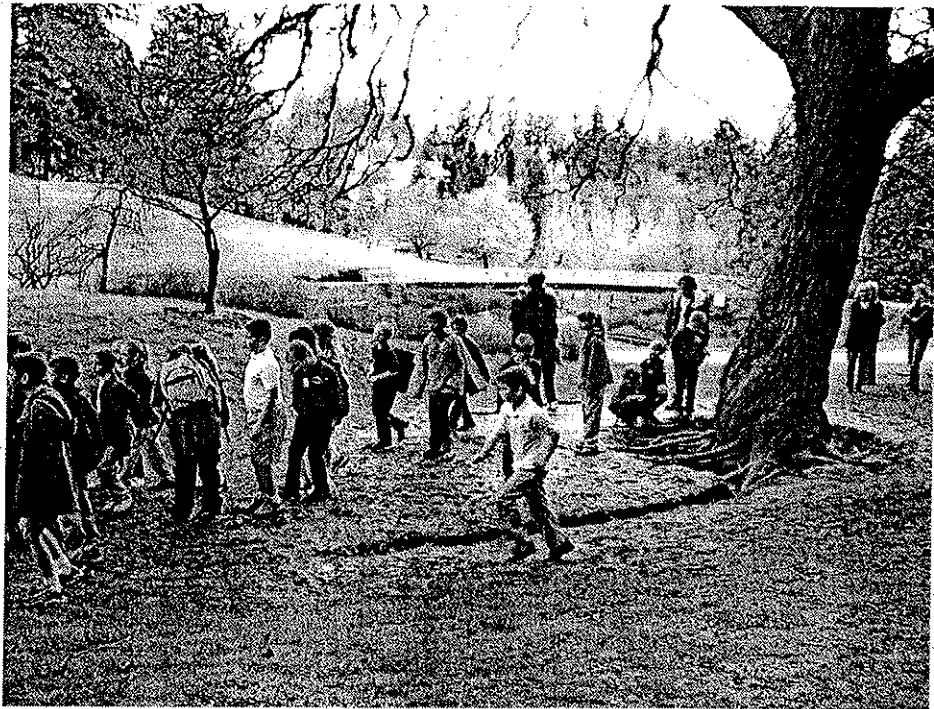
In the last 10 years or more, the medical field has found these sorts of habits and stresses are unhealthy and

can affect the immune system.

A renewed focus on the many health benefits children receive from exposure to nature and play in the natural environment is called for. Besides alleviating emotional and mental stresses, living closer to nature also benefits kids physically. For example, a U.S. Forest Service study showed that people who live around trees have fewer acute respiratory symptoms and are physically healthier.

Studies cited by researchers such as Kathleen Wolf of the University Washington College of Forest Resources are showing contact with nature helps alleviate mental fatigue by relaxing and restoring the mind. This helps children develop cognitive, emotional and behavioral connections to their environment — even empowering creativity and social skills — and can improve school performance. Regularly scheduled time spent outdoors is vital and can even alleviate depression and reduce attention deficit hyperactivity disorder symptoms in children.

Physicians and schools are begin-



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Research shows kids need time to unwind from stresses of laptops and electronic devices. Our parks and open spaces provide a much-needed respite.

ning to reach the same conclusion: Contact with the natural world promotes children's mental, emotional and social health, and daily activities in the natural environment go a long way toward keeping kids healthy. Some city libraries, including Salem's, offer rewards like popular library "sleepovers" to encourage children to give up electronic games and activities in favor of outdoor activities or reading. And many schools now offer nature experiences as part of a class or special activity to promote healthy behaviors in students.

There are lots of outdoor activities that are fun for small children, kids and young adults, even during winter. A nature walk through the neighborhood is one; have kids first make a list of nature-related things they might expect to see. Or get hearts pumping with a little exercise on a path or trail close to town; check weather ahead of time and dress accordingly. Bring snacks, water, a cell phone and a camera, too, to capture those spur-of-the-

moment memories that family-time creates.

For a special treat, watch the weather for clear nights when you can bundle up the kids, go outside and do some stargazing. There are many phone apps, magazines and books to help identify things in the natural world, including the night sky.

The lives of kids today are, in many ways, far different than those of their parents when they were growing up. However, let's strive to leave a legacy of special moments kids are far more likely to remember than staying indoors with the video game. Let's help them thrive by providing wholesome outdoor activities on a daily basis.

Cynthia Orlando of Springfield has a degree in forestry and is a certified arborist for the Oregon Department of Forestry. Contact her at [cynthia.a.orlando@oregon.gov](mailto:cynthia.a.orlando@oregon.gov). For information about the Children and Nature Network, go to [www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org)

# Go Outside and Play

by Tom Dawson

Lead

Have you ever been bored out of your mind? So bored that even homework or chores would be welcomed. I know I have. Did it ever cross your mind to go outside and play? Well it should! Playing outside is beneficial for all children because it helps to develop better cooperation skills, better coordination, and better overall health. Spending all your free time indoors, in front of the TV or at the computer, is not the way to live.

In the past 30 years, young people's lives have largely moved indoors. According to one study, people who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s spent 10.5 hours playing outside during the work week and another 9 hours on the weekend. Today's kids average about 5.5 hours during the week and an additional 4.5 hours over the weekend. Another study found that children between 8 and 18 spend 6.5 hours a day using television, computers, and gaming.

This trend has had a serious impact on kids. Richard Louv, an outdoor play advocate and author of *Last Child in the Woods*, calls it "nature deficit disorder." Louv says indoor kids are more likely to be obese, depressed, or have attention disorders. "I'm not saying that a child who grows up without nature is going to have terrible problems," Louv said. "But if you look at the studies that show what nature does give kids, it's unfortunate that so many children are missing out on that."

A variety of studies have shown the disadvantages of a sedentary indoor life.

- Childhood obesity has doubled in the past 30 years for preschoolers and tripled for kids aged 6 to 11.
- Kids who spend more than 2 hours a day watching TV are almost twice as likely to develop asthma as kids who watch between 1 and 2 hours.
- An estimated 70 percent of kids do not get enough vitamin D, which can cause rickets, osteoporosis, and heart disease. The human body produces its own vitamin D, but it must receive 10–15 minutes of sunlight twice a week.
- Spending time outdoors has been associated with improved eyesight and lower body weight.

At the same time, a number of studies have detailed the benefits of an active outdoors life.

- A 4-day hiking trip without cell phones or laptops has been shown to dramatically increase creativity and problem-solving.
- Spending time in nature reduces stress, and the more time you spend the more your stress is reduced.
- Free play and positive contact with nature can help a kid's emotional, intellectual, and social development.
- Outdoor time makes kids more environmentally aware and more likely to become environmentalists when they grow up.

The practice of using technology to hurt someone's feelings — is turning computers and cell phones into weapons of personal destruction among America's youth. Imagine being a 13-year-old girl facing classmates after discovering a cell phone picture of her changing for gym class is being circulated among the seventh grade. Or imagine being an 11-year-old boy who is scared to go to school because an unknown bully sent him an Instant Message saying that he is so fat that he should kill himself. Cases such as these are happening every day, leading kids to be depressed and unable to concentrate.

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