



Recess for Learning

SHAPE America and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that schools provide 20 minutes of recess per day. Yet, up to 40 percent of U.S. school districts have reduced or eliminated recess in order to free up more time for academics.¹ Scaling back recess comes at a cost to learning. Research shows that recess helps students to focus and learn better.² It's time for education policy makers to take play seriously and enhance recess to improve learning and school and student health.

ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS

TIP SHEET

Advocate for More Recess

If your school does not offer recess, does not meet the recommended 20 minutes a day or allows recess to be withheld as a form of discipline, start a campaign to bring it back. Check out Playworks and Peaceful Playgrounds for campaign resources.

Advocate for Better Recess

An effective recess program should include:

- Enough trained adults to enforce safety rules and prevent aggressive, bullying behavior
- Enough space, facilities and equipment
- A physically safe environment

Advocate for Active Recess

Sometimes called “structured recess,” this is a planned and actively supervised recess period where:

- Students engage in organized “play” or games that emphasize turn-taking, helpfulness, rule following and emotional control.
- Each game or activity has pre-set rules that the entire school population follows.
- Older students may be trained to help lead activities for younger students

The benefits of active recess include reduced bullying, better behavior and easier transitions from recess to learning.³ The goal is to get all students moving and engaged. Staffing can be one of the biggest barriers to implementing an active recess program. Parents can volunteer to lead activities and supervise at recess. Schools can always use help in this area. Make sure parent volunteers receive training — either from school staff or other experts. Playworks offers trainings and a free online “playbook” with hundreds of games and activities.

Principals agree...

- Four out of five principals report that recess has a positive impact on academic achievement.
- Two-thirds of principals report that students listen better after recess and are more focused in class.
- Virtually all believe that recess has a positive impact on children’s social development (96%) and general well-being (97%)⁴.

Playground Design

Playground enhancements can help decrease safety concerns and promote increased activity. When you’re ready to revamp your playground, check out KaBOOM! and Peaceful Playgrounds for playground improvement guides, planners, blueprints, stencil sets and fundraising support.



Every kid healthy, active and ready to learn

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Recess for Better Health

Enable Active Indoor Recess

Students don't have to sit around inside just because the weather is bad outside. Indoor recess can include physical activity, regardless of space or equipment constraints. Check out Game On and SHAPE America for ideas.

Advocate for Recess Before Lunch

Just as it sounds, this is the practice of switching school schedules so that students play at recess first, then eat lunch. Kids tend to eat a better lunch if they've already had their time on the playground, leading to less waste, better behavior and better performance in the classroom.⁵ Although schedule changes can be challenging, many schools are doing it successfully and reaping many benefits. Visit the HealthierUS School Challenge: Smarter Lunchrooms, Peaceful Playgrounds and Game On for resources.

Recess for Secondary Students

According to some teenagers, recess is for younger kids! So Apex Middle School students in North Carolina don't have recess, instead they have 12 minutes after lunch called "Blacktop Time." The PTA painted the blacktop to mark out various activities to inspire more movement, and adults are on hand to encourage participation. Panther Creek High School in North Carolina offers SMART Lunch, an extended, single lunch period for all students. Students spend half their time eating lunch and half their time participating in a variety of activities, including rotating sports activities that are set up in the gym. Your school could also include active video games, yoga or exercise videos.

Resources

SHAPE America: shapeamerica.org/recess

Game On: ActionforHealthyKids.org/GameOn

Spark PE inclusive strategies: sparkpe.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/K2_R_Inclusive_Strategies.pdf

USDA HealthierUS School Challenge Recess before Lunch Resources: healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/healthierus-school-challenge-resources/recess-recess-lunch

KaBOOM: kaboom.org

Playworks: playworks.org

Peaceful Playgrounds: peacefulplaygrounds.com

Make Your Recess Inclusive

When planning your recess program, give special consideration to children with particular physical activity needs and those who are at risk for a less active lifestyle, including children with chronic illnesses, physical and other disabilities, as well as those who are overweight. Most activities can be modified to ensure that all students can enjoy the benefits. Check out SPARK PE for inclusive recess strategies.

Action for Healthy Kids® is a nationwide grassroots network mobilizing school professionals, families and communities to take actions that improve school foods, nutrition education, physical activity and physical education for all students. Through funding opportunities, expert technical assistance, and our flagship program, Game On, Action for Healthy Kids supports schools in becoming healthier places where children thrive.



1, 2, 3, 4, 5: See ActionforHealthyKids.org/References