



# RECESS FOR LEARNING

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

## 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 — post safety rules and check play areas for safety hazards regularly



## Promote Active Recess

- Provide inexpensive playground equipment to encourage students to be active (jump ropes, hula hoops, bean bags, etc.).
- Train teachers and playground monitors on how to interact with students to encourage active play and increase physical activity during recess.
- Create stations or set areas for activities (e.g., ball bouncing, walking/running, fitness circuit, jump rope, field games, etc.).
- Encourage older students to role model and support younger students by teaching new activities during recess.
- Provide games that have minimal wait time and that emphasize turn-taking, helpfulness, rule following and emotional control.
- Ensure students have choices about how to use their free time and encourage physical activity for all students, regardless of skill or ability.
- Offer a variety of options including non-competitive and more competitive activities, team and individual choices.

**ACTION** FOR HEALTHY KIDS 

## 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.



## Benefits of Active Recess

The benefits of active recess include reduced bullying, better behavior and easier transitions from recess to learning.<sup>3</sup> 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. Make sure parent volunteers receive training — either from school staff or other experts. Playworks offers trainings and a free online Game Guide 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 wellbeing (97%).<sup>4</sup>

## 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.

## 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.<sup>5</sup> Although schedule changes can be challenging, many schools are doing it successfully and reaping many benefits. Visit Peaceful Playgrounds and Game On for resources.

## Make Your Recess Inclusive

When planning your recess program, give special consideration to children 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 Playworks for tips on making recess inclusive.

## 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—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

### Action for Healthy Kids Game On Activities

[actionforhealthykids.org/game-on-activity-library](http://actionforhealthykids.org/game-on-activity-library)

Active Outdoor Recess, Active Indoor Recess, Recess Before Lunch, Alternatives to Denying Physical Activity as Punishment

**SHAPE America:** [shapeamerica.org/recess](http://shapeamerica.org/recess)

**Playworks:** [playworks.org](http://playworks.org)

**Inclusive strategies:** [playworks.org/resource/tips-for-making-play-inclusive/](http://playworks.org/resource/tips-for-making-play-inclusive/)

**KaBOOM:** [kaboom.org](http://kaboom.org)

**Peaceful Playgrounds:** [peacefulplaygrounds.com](http://peacefulplaygrounds.com)

<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>See [ActionforHealthyKids.org/References](http://ActionforHealthyKids.org/References)



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