

# Recess for Learning

The Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE America) recommends 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.<sup>1</sup> Scaling back recess comes at a cost to learning. Research has shown that recess helps students to focus and learn better.<sup>2</sup> It's time for education policymakers to take play seriously and enhance recess to improve learning and school climate.



## 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 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. 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.

### Indoor Recess Kits

Von Linne Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois, put together indoor recess kits for inclement weather days as part of their *School Grants for Healthy Kids* program to increase student activity levels. The kits include Yoga in the Classroom activities, brain break idea cards, physical activity bingo, bean bags, and movement dice. The kits replace the old standard of showing a movie and board games to make sure students get a much needed movement break even though they can't go outside.

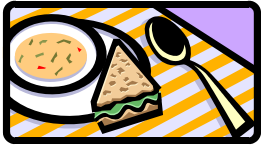
### Principals agree...

- 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%).

“The State of Play,” Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

### 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.



# Recess for Better Health

## 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.<sup>4</sup> Although major schedule changes can be challenging, many schools are doing it successfully and reaping lots of benefits. Visit the **HealthierUS School Challenge, Peaceful Playgrounds** and **Game On! The Ultimate Wellness Challenge** for resources.

### Make Your Recess Inclusive

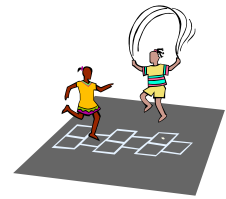
When planning your recess program, give special consideration to children with particular physical activity needs and those who are at-risk for a less active lifestyle, including children with chronic illnesses, physical and other disabilities, as well as those who are overweight. Most activities can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

## Recess for Secondary Students

Recess is for younger kids, according to some teenagers! 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 around 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 Dance, Dance Revolution, Wii Fit, yoga, or exercise videos.

### Resources

- SHAPE America [www.shapeamerica.org/](http://www.shapeamerica.org/)
- *Game On! The Ultimate Wellness Challenge* [www.ActionforHealthyKids.org/game-on/](http://www.ActionforHealthyKids.org/game-on/)
- SPARK PE inclusive strategies [www.sparkpe.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/K2\\_R\\_Inclusive\\_Strategies.pdf](http://www.sparkpe.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/K2_R_Inclusive_Strategies.pdf)
- USDA HealthierUS School Challenge Recess Before Lunch Resources <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/healthierus-school-challenge-resources/recess-recess-lunch>
- Let's Move Active Schools: [www.letsmoveactiveschools.org](http://www.letsmoveactiveschools.org)
- KaBOOM! <http://kaboom.org/>
- Playworks [www.playworks.org/](http://www.playworks.org/)
- Peaceful Playgrounds [www.peacefulplaygrounds.com](http://www.peacefulplaygrounds.com)



**Action for Healthy Kids**® partners with teachers, students, parents, school wellness experts and more to fight childhood obesity, undernourishment and physical inactivity by helping schools become healthier places so kids can live healthier lives. Our programs, tools and resources make it possible for everyone to play their part in ending the nation's childhood obesity epidemic.

[www.ActionforHealthyKids.org](http://www.ActionforHealthyKids.org)

The websites listed in this document are provided as a service only to identify potentially useful ideas and resources for creating healthier school cultures. Action for Healthy Kids is not responsible for maintaining these external websites, nor does the listing of these sites constitute or imply endorsement of their content.

<sup>1</sup>The State of Play. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, <http://www.playworks.org/files/StateOfPlayFeb2010.pdf>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/recess-makes-kids-smarter>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.playworks.org/research-reveals-playworks-reduces-bullying>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.peacefulplaygrounds.com/pdf/benefits-of-recess-before-lunch.pdf>

