

### Recess Periods

Recess periods, which are regularly scheduled periods within the elementary school day for unstructured physical activity and play, provide another opportunity for daily physical activity, along with social and cognitive benefits. Some large school districts have, in recent years, eliminated recess altogether, reportedly due to safety concerns and a desire to increase time for academic instruction. However, studies have found that (1) students who do not participate in recess become fidgety and less able to concentrate on tasks and (2) the longer children sit in classrooms without a recess break, the less attentive they become. Recess also offers students one of their few opportunities during the school day to interact and develop social skills, such as negotiating and cooperating, with minimal adult interference. The National Association of Elementary School Principals has endorsed recess as “an important component in a child’s physical and social development.”

To make recess periods effective, schools should

- Have enough trained adults on hand to enforce safety rules and prevent aggressive, bullying behavior.
- Work with police departments and community agencies to address safety concerns about children playing in school playgrounds in high-crime areas.
- Provide space, facilities, equipment, and supplies that can make active participation in physical activity during recess appealing to children.
- Have staff encourage students to be active during recess.
- Schedule recess before, rather than after, lunch; studies have found that students eat more of their lunches when recess comes before lunch.

Source: Wechsler H, Devereaux AB, Davis M, Collins J. Using the school environment to promote physical activity and healthy eating. *Preventive Medicine* 2000;31:S121-S137.