

RECESS ROCKS!

“We must enhance the duration and intensity of physical exercise in order to allow the human body an optimal learning experience.”





- Heather Beck, Chief Academic Officer, Jefferson County Public Schools



Experts agree that physical activity can be just as vital as classroom time to a child’s social, emotional and educational development. However, due to school budget cuts and an increased focus on academic standards, millions of American students do not meet the minimum requirements of ≥ 60 minutes of physical activity daily.

Recess functions successfully as an established school-based activity and should be carefully considered as part of any school health and wellness policy. Schools strive to meet student needs and provide them with the tools and opportunities to succeed. This includes the promotion of physical activity and healthy eating through policies, practices and supportive environments.

DID YOU KNOW?

-  **Colorado is ranked 23rd for Childhood Obesity with one of the fastest rates of increase.**
-  **Approximately 1 in 5 (18%) high school students are overweight or obese.**
-  **45% of all school-aged children could be insulin dependent and will be the 1st generation to die 5 years younger than their parents.**
-  **Overall, 62% of Colorado middle school students were physically active for at least 60 minutes on five or more of the past seven days; and only 53% of Colorado high school students were physically active for at least 60 minutes on five or more of the past seven days.**

Punishing children by taking away recess or physical education classes reduces their already-scarce opportunities for physical activity.

Healthy students are better prepared to learn and succeed in school. Yet, the current education system misses several simple, vital opportunities to boost academic success through health promotion and school wellness.

We can create a better future for our children and our nation by improving health in schools.





In Colorado, we have [House Bill 11-1069](#), the Physical Activity Law, which requires all public elementary schools to provide students with a minimum of 600 minutes of physical activity a month, or approximately 30 minutes per school day.

- Physical activity can help improve academic achievement, including grades and standardized test scores, better school attendance and decrease disciplinary problems.
- Physical activity positively impacts cognitive skills, attention, and on-task classroom behavior. **In fact, daily recess of 15 minutes or more is associated with better teacher's rating of classroom behavior.**
- In students with attention deficit disorder, greater moderate to vigorous physical activity is associated with improved attention, memory, information processing and decreased impulsivity.
- Neuroscientists have shown that **physical activity literally activates the brain to learn.** Twenty minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity will increase dendritic growth causing synapses within the brain, leading to increased ability to focus and learn. **Studies have shown children scoring approximately a full grade level higher in reading comprehension after physical activity breaks than after a period of rest.**

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF RECESS

- **Kids who lose recess all together are frequent offenders.**

A nationwide study on how first through fifth grade children spend their time at school found that on a randomly selected day, 21% of children did not have any recess (Roth et al. 2003). The study noted demographic disparities:

- **39% of African American students versus 15% of White students did not have recess;**
- **44% of children living below the poverty line versus 17% of those above the poverty line were deprived of recess; and**
- **25% of the children scoring below the mean on a standardized test versus 15% of those above the mean did not have recess.**

An [NCES survey](#) (2006) also found disparities, with rural schools and affluent schools more likely to have recess. A 2003 survey of Georgia school systems (unpublished data collected by Jarrett and colleagues) found the same patterns but with 25% of kindergartners having no recess.

“No matter how well teachers are prepared to teach, no matter what account-ability measures are put in place, no matter what governing structures are established for schools, educational progress and closing the achievement gap will be profoundly limited if students are not motivated and able to learn. This is why reducing health disparities must be a fundamental part of school reform. Healthier students are better learners.”

**- Charles Basch,
Richard March Hoe Professor of Health Education,
Teachers College Columbia University**

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Consider alternative strategies to disciplining students in respect to classroom difficulties. If a student gets into an argument each day in class, try limiting them to the field area or blacktop during recess. Rather than taking recess away completely, a better solution may be, "I can see you are having trouble remembering your homework or walking quietly down the hall. In order for you to be successful, no football for the next week. On Monday, you can return to flag football at recess and we'll see if you have a better week."

Use Peaceful Playgrounds' [No Cost, Low Cost and Discipline Alternatives to Withholding Recess](#) for preventative action measures.

ZERO-COST ALTERNATIVES

1. Sit by friends
2. Watch a video
3. Read outdoors
4. Teach the class
5. Have extra art time
6. Extra music and reading time
7. Homework coupon
8. Coupon for prizes and privileges
9. Enjoy class outdoors
10. Play a computer game
11. Read to a younger class
12. Get a no homework pass
13. Make deliveries to the office
14. Listen to music while working
15. Play a favorite game or puzzle
16. Earn play money for privileges
17. Walk with a teacher during lunch
18. Be a helper in another classroom
19. Get "free choice" time at the end of the day
20. Listen with a headset to a book on audiotape
21. Have a teacher perform special skills
22. Have a teacher read a special book to the class
23. Recognition with morning announcements
24. Chat break at the end of class
25. Taking care of the class pet
26. Extra recess
27. Small playground equipment to check out
28. Leading the class to lunch, recess, or other adventure
29. Music concert at school
30. Walk break from class
31. Have lunch or breakfast in the classroom
32. Private lunch in classroom with a friend

33. Show and tell
34. Play favorite game
35. Teacher performs special skill
36. First to line up
37. Teacher's helper

LOW-COST ALTERNATIVES

1. Select a paperback book
2. Enter a drawing for donated prizes
3. Take a trip to the treasure box
4. Get stickers, pencils, and other school supplies
5. Receive a video store or movie theater coupon
6. Get a set of flash cards printed from a computer
7. Receive a "mystery pack"
8. Certificate/trophy/ribbon/plaque
9. Gift certificate to local food merchants
10. Free pass to sporting event or play
11. Pencil toppers
12. Game Day: Students earn letters to spell game day after the letters have been earned, play reading or phonics type board games
13. Friday Free Time: Students have thirty minutes at the beginning of the week and they can earn or lose free time according to their behavior
 - User a timer and turn it on (they can hear it) if they are too loud working, lining up, etc. Add time when their behavior is good. Adding time is the most effective. You will save time by not waiting for them to settle down so their free time is really reclaiming time that would have been lost

DISCIPLINE ALTERNATIVES

1. Write a letter of apology to the person who has been wronged and discuss with teaching the importance of apologies
2. Write a letter to parents/guardians explaining why behavior is inappropriate or disruptive and stating what student will try to do to change behavior
3. Take away privilege of choice for class or individual activity when choice is built into activity
4. Do make up work during free choice time
5. Have students sit away from the group to do class work and have them "earn" their way back into the group activities
6. Have student work with teacher to develop a plan for behavior change tied to incremental privileges
7. Create a behavior chart with students that identifies a target behavior and agreed upon reinforcements and rewards for chronic behavior issue

Bennett School District worked to gain staff buy-in by listing seven reasons why schools should keep recess and increase physical activity and working with teachers on easy and effective alternatives to try.

1. **Everyone benefits from a break.** As far back as 1885 and 1901 the research is quite clear on this: Both children and adults learn better and more quickly when their efforts are distributed (breaks are included) than when concentrated (work is conducted in longer periods). More recently, the novelty-arousal theory has suggested that people function better when they have a change of pace. Because young children don't process most information as effectively as older children (due to the immaturity of their nervous systems and their lack of experience), they can especially benefit from breaks.
2. **Recess increases on-task time.** Dr. Olga Jarrett and her colleagues approached an urban school district with a policy against recess. They received permission for two fourth-grade classes to have recess once a week so they could determine the impact on the children's behavior on recess and non-recess days. The result was that the 43% of children became more on-task and less fidgety on days when they had recess. Sixty percent of the children, including the five suffering from attention deficit disorder, worked more and/or fidgeted less on recess days. Dr. Jarrett's research demonstrated that a 15-minute recess resulted in the children's being 5 percent more on-task and 9 percent less fidgety, which translated into **20 minutes** saved during the day.
3. **Children need outside light.** The outside light stimulates the pineal gland, which is the part of the brain that helps regulate our biological clock, is vital to the immune system, and simply makes us feel better. Outside light triggers the synthesis of vitamin D, and a number of studies have demonstrated that it increases academic learning and productivity.
4. **Unstructured physical play reduces stress.** The National Association for the Education of Young Children recommends unstructured physical play as a developmentally appropriate means of reducing stress in children's lives – and studies show that stress has a negative impact on learning as well as on health. For many children, especially those who are hyperactive or potentially so, recess is an opportunity to blow off steam. Outdoors, children can engage in behaviors (loud, messy, and boisterous) considered unacceptable and annoying indoors. And because recess is a break from structure and expectations, children have an opportunity to take control of their world, which is a rarity in their lives.
5. **Children need to learn to be social creatures.** Recess may be the only time during the day when children have an opportunity to experience socialization and real communication. Neighborhoods are not what they used to be, so once the school day ends, there may be little chance for social interaction. And, of course, while in school, children are generally not allowed to interact during class, while lining up, or when moving from one area of the school to another. Some school policies even prevent children from talking to one another during lunch. How can children with so few opportunities to socialize and communicate be expected to live and work together in harmony as adults? When and where will they have learned how?
6. **Our children's health is at risk.** We're all aware that many of our children are suffering from overweight and obesity, but even children who have no weight issues require physical activity to sustain optimal health. The outdoors is the best place for children to practice emerging physical skills, to experience the pure joy of movement, and to burn the most calories. Research has even shown that children who are physically active in school are more likely to be physically active at home. Moreover, children who don't have the opportunity to be active during the school day don't usually compensate during after-school hours.
7. **Physical activity feeds the brain.** Thanks to advances in brain research, we now know that most of the brain is activated during physical activity – much more so than when doing seatwork. Movement increases the capacity of blood vessels (and possibly even their number), allowing for the delivery of oxygen, water, and glucose ("brain food") to the brain. This optimizes the brain's performance! Furthermore, numerous studies have shown that students who are physically active have improved academic performance, achieve higher test scores, and demonstrate a better attitude toward school.



COLORADO SUCCESS STORIES

“At Red Hawk Elementary, we know physical activity leads to an increase in a student’s ability to learn, focus and retain information. It also has a profound effect on classroom behavior. Therefore, we encourage staff members to find alternative consequences to taking away recess; and further, suggest that these consequences involve some kind of movement, as these are precisely the students who need the opportunity to get their energy out the most. Without the opportunity to move these same students find themselves in a downward spiral of misbehavior and missing recess. For example, if a student is ignoring directions in the lunchroom, they may be asked to walk for the first ten minutes of recess instead of sitting out or sitting inside. The consequence of not being able to play freely with their friends is a strong deterrent, yet they are still able to burn off some of their energy.”

~ **Cyrus Weinberger, Principal, Red Hawk Elementary, St. Vrain School District**

“In Jeffco, we have wellness policies that discourage taking away recess as punishment and we have teachers that ‘get it’. As we continue exploring research-based avenues for increasing student achievement, Dr. John Ratey’s research clearly and simplistically outlines the body-mind connection and how the brain learns. The premise of his research proves our brain needs chemicals that are produced in our body’s muscles, in order to learn. In education, we address student learning with teaching strategies, curriculum and educational techniques. Dr. Ratey highlights that there is a physiological reaction that

must occur in order for our brains to respond to academic strategies effectively.”

~ **Heather Beck, Chief Academic Officer, & Emily O’Winter, District Healthy Schools Coordinator of Jefferson County Public Schools**

“This is difficult but important to tackle. This past year more schools have been trying to limit activities on the playground as the punishment instead of just making them sit. So if students misbehave they walk a path around the playground and think about their actions. It’s tricky because we don’t want the walking to be the punishment, but we’re trying to approach it more as ‘you can no longer play with your friends, but you can still be active.’ It seems to be an effective compromise with the school staff to still have a way of dealing with behavior without forcing kids to be sedentary.”

~ **Kaitlin Wasik, Health and Wellness Coordinator, Adams 12 School District**



OPPOSING RECESS AS PUNISHMENT: MESSAGES FOR TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND ADMINISTRATORS

Given the value of recess in a student’s physical and social development, and the need for periodic breaks from classroom instruction, using recess as punishment is inappropriate. Talk to your school, district, or state education office to ensure your child’s physical activity is not being linked to punishment and that he/she is getting recess and PE time at school. Here are some resources to get you going.



Right to Recess Campaign Presentation Documents and Position Statements

<http://www.peacefulplaygrounds.com/right-to-recess-campaign>



Using Physical Activity and Recess for Success - Not Discipline in Schools by LiveWell Colorado

https://about.livewellcolorado.org/sites/default/files/using_phys_ed.pdf



Administrators - Alternatives to Taking Away Physical Activity as Punishment

<http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/standards/upload/Physical-Activity-as-Punishment-to-Board-12-10.pdf>

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