

A photograph of a park scene with children playing on a large, colorful play structure. The structure is primarily yellow and orange with silver metallic-looking bands. Two children are perched on top of a large yellow dome; one is wearing a dark shirt and green pants, the other a light blue shirt. A third child is inside a yellow tunnel at the bottom, with a fourth child in a blue puffer jacket leaning over the entrance. In the background, there are trees, a brick building, and other people, including a woman with a bag and another child. The sky is clear and blue.

RECESS

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

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Play is any child-centered activity that affords the child an opportunity to explore and engage, usually in a fun way that fosters creativity and child-directed choices. It can be a release of physical energy or quiet and contemplative.

Play provides opportunities for children to reduce stress, explore feelings, and form relationships with peers. Yet for more than a year, children remained socially distanced from their peers and adjusted to a new way of schooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, more than ever, the importance of play and recess must be at the forefront of the conversation around reopening schools and helping children adjust to a changed educational environment.

While there is concern about a “COVID-slide” and catching children up for academic achievement, the Recess Advocacy Team urges educators, families, and policymakers to think of the whole child and consider the “[power of play](#)”¹ as the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends to enhance development of young children.

Academics and play are not a dichotomy; it’s critical to remember that children learn through play. Concerns for “learning loss” are understandable, however, this concept mainly focuses on academic skills like reading and math. The opportunities for emotional, social, and physical development that children have missed out on during remote learning are equally important. [Educational inequities](#)² already existed pre-pandemic and the terminology of “learning loss” may be particularly harmful to Black, Hispanic, and low-income students. Much of the extra support and resources students will need were likely needed before the pandemic as well; however Heather J. Hough, an educational expert at Stanford University’s Center for Education Policy Analysis

warns “against an approach that focused only on academics...young children needed recess, playtime and social time—some of which have been in short supply during the pandemic—to be able to absorb new information effectively.”

“ Recess can also be incorporated in learning by giving a task, such as counting how many times you go down the slide during recess, or writing letters in chalk on sidewalks.”

- Anita Mullen

Pre-k Teacher at Jefferson-Morgan
Elementary School

¹ bit.ly/recess-power-of-play

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/08/us/school-testing-education-covid.html>

With the current context in mind, the Recess Advocacy Team created a toolkit highlighting research, strategies, and advocacy opportunities for play at home and at school. The Recess Advocacy Team, co-led by [Trying Together](#) and the [Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative](#), is a group of organizations and individuals dedicated to health and wellness, education, and play with a focus on recess practices and policies in pre-k through sixth grade. Through discussions, resources and more, the team works with community stakeholders to advocate for recess and play. As community members, parents, educators and play advocates, the Recess Advocacy Team recognizes the importance of play and recess to a healthy school environment. Even (and especially) during the COVID-19 pandemic, play is crucial to children's daily lives.

"I hope we learn the lessons from this year and add more time for recess and play. Health and wellness matters. Our children need childhoods. I truly believe more play will benefit all kids."

- Emily Pocratsky

Parent at Greenfield Elementary PPS

This Recess Advocacy Toolkit is designed to be a resource for educators and families on the importance of recess and play in the lives of children. The toolkit is a continuously changing document that will continue to be updated with new information and resources as everyone moves forward out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Special thanks to the following organizations for their contributions and guidance in the creation of this toolkit. Their work on the Recess Advocacy Team has been instrumental in creating this toolkit and the ongoing advocacy efforts. Each organization brings to the table their own expertise and perspective.

[Action for Healthy Kids](#)

[Allegheny County Health Department](#)

[A+ Schools](#)

[ATL Parent Like a Boss \(Parent LAB\)](#)

[Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC](#)

[Department of Health and Physical Activity, University of Pittsburgh](#)

[Let's Move Pittsburgh](#)

[Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy](#)

[Women for a Healthy Environment](#)

As discussions continue about the summer and upcoming school year, please join the call for a "[summer of play](#)"³ in the western Pennsylvania region and consider the role of play and physical activity in the next school year. Children deserve joyful, [playful learning experiences this summer](#)⁴ and beyond.

The creation of this toolkit was made possible by The Grable Foundation and Remake Learning Tomorrow grants.

³ bit.ly/recess_summerofplay

⁴ bit.ly/recess_play

THE CASE FOR INCLUDING PLAY AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN SCHOOL REOPENING PLANS

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed teaching and learning the past two school years. Questions are arising about how to support children this summer and what the next school year will look like. While there will be many important safety and health precautions and important academic priorities, parents, caregivers, and educators are encouraged to ask how play and physical activity will be included in school reopening plans. Included below are research-based considerations for how play and physical activity can be included while balancing health and safety efforts. For children, play is learning and must be acknowledged in teaching and learning post-COVID-19.



“I hope that recess and free play are seen as one of the most valuable times for children, because they are. I hope for longer recess duration or play time. It promotes more focused learning.”

– Scarlett Sticca

Parent at Amos K. Hutchinson
Elementary School

Recess Should NOT Be Cut: Considerations for COVID-19 School Reopening Plans¹

**Kimberly A. Clevenger
and Karin A. Pfeiffer**

Translational Journal of the
American College of Sports Medicine

Key takeaways:

- As school buildings begin to reopen or plan for re-opening, all aspects of keeping children healthy need to be considered which includes participation in recess. Schools' plans can balance the logistics and health and safety with the benefits of play.
- Consider time, location, and activity with suggested strategies that provide descriptions, rationale, and benefits. Some examples:
 - Stagger recess times.
 - Separate school yard areas for each class.
 - Utilize other spaces for recess.
 - Encourage more individual play or more structured activities.
 - Assign children or groups their own equipment.
- Physical activities, especially those that can take place outside, should be highlighted in re-opening plans.
- Recess contributes to up to 70% of children's weekday physical activity. Consider children who may not have space to play outside in their neighborhoods because of space or safety concerns.
- There are long-term implications for a lack of

physical activity and the amount of sedentary instructional time, especially during COVID-19 which included sitting in front of a screen.

- Children have a fundamental right to engage in play as recognized by the UN Convention on the Rights of Children.

The Urgency of Now: Achieving Equity In School Physical Activity Policies and Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic²

**Taverno Ross, S.E., Hasson, R.,
Johnson, M., Nocera, V., Sallis, J.,
Simon, L., Wheeler, L., & the ACSM
Strategic Health Initiative on Health
Equity.**

American College of Sports Medicine
Blog post, 2020

Key takeaways:

- Unintended consequences of COVID-19 safety precautions greatly impact children - including limited social interactions, increased screen time, decreased physical activity, and the potential loss of some support services.
- Recognize the important roles schools play in student health and wellbeing. Ensure there is a plan for providing opportunities for encouraging physical activity whether students are learning remotely or returning to school.
- The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the health inequities, and it is likely that physical activity

¹ bit.ly/recess-considerations

² bit.ly/recess-urgent

disparities were magnified during this time as well. Schools should find a way to include physical activity every day - including physical education, movement breaks, and recess.

- Consider developing an Equitable School Physical Activity Plan with the goal of meeting CDC recommendations that schools provide 30 minutes of physical activity to all students every day.
- Consider options for online physical activity classes that can be done at home in small spaces with limited equipment.
- Consider sharing written materials for students and parents and email- or text message-based communication with guided recommendations and suggestions for physical movement.
- Physical activity has numerous, far reaching benefits that last into adulthood if sustained as a lifestyle behavior.

Road Map for K-12 Education—Recess and Physical Education³

Taverno Ross, S.E., Mussington, M., Roberts, L., Wheeler, L.M.

Perkins & Will Toolkit, 2020

Key takeaways:

- As schools change and adapt plans, consider reimagining how physical activity impacts learning and how incorporating play will support academic goals.
- Physical education and recess should not be optional aspects of the school schedule, rather viewed as essential parts of the school day to support healthy child development and learning.
- Eliminating physical education and recess will exacerbate health disparities and promote an inequitable and unjust environment for children.
- Many children rely on school to provide a majority of the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity.
- Consider how play and physical activity - through recess, physical education, and movement breaks - will help reduce the anxiety and stress children face as school plans continue to change.
- All students have the right to be physically active at school. Consider how your school environment can provide a safe and developmentally appropriate space to be active, especially for children living in under-resourced neighborhoods or those with special needs.

³ bit.ly/recess-roadmap

EXAMPLES OF PLAY

“ Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning but for children, play is serious learning.”

- Fred Rogers

“ Play is the opportunity children have to learn, grow, and explore the world. Children are inherently bent towards play. I want teachers who give ‘homework’ or ‘activities’ to be a kid and play. They get excited for those kinds of breaks.”

- Dr. Sharon Taverno Ross

Parent at PPS Greenfield Elementary and
Member of the Recess Advocacy Team



Whether it is participating in distance learning, or connecting with friends and family remotely, we are increasingly more plugged in. “Screen time” is a major concern for parents and educators. As schools have navigated the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of play has been brought to the forefront of conversations on physical and mental wellness.

There are many different types of play, but there is no “right” way for children to engage in play. Playful activities can still happen safely with minimal cost to families or schools. By learning the types of play in all settings, advocates can begin to understand and promote the benefits of play on the development of the child.

The following types of play and examples were adapted from [Encourage Play](https://www.encourageplay.com)¹, founded by Janine Holloran, to provide common examples of ways play may show up in children’s lives. This list is meant to serve as a starting point and is not exhaustive as there are many other ways that children can engage in play.

¹ www.encourageplay.com

Socio-Dramatic Play

Children pretend to act out real life social situations.

Examples:

Outdoor: Make up and act out scenarios in an open space.

Home: Play pretend a grocery store or restaurant scenario and go “shopping” in the kitchen and create “meals”.

School: Encourage children to act out a story that was just read.

Benefit:

Socio-dramatic play encourages children to use more advanced language that is specific to certain play scenarios or social roles.



Locomotor Play

Children engage in movement and physical activity.

Examples:

Outdoor: Climb a tree or play hopscotch.

Home: Dance or do jumping jacks.

School: Play tag, play a group sport, or bounce or throw a ball.

Benefit:

Movement and physical activity increases children’s attention span and productivity.

Exploratory Play

Children use their senses to explore objects and their functions. Things should get messy!

Examples:

Outdoor: Play with water in streams, puddles, or rain.

Home: Create sensory bottles or bins using household items.

School: Explore the available space and objects by incorporating more hands-on activities such as using the outdoor space or bringing plants into the classroom while reading about nature/life cycles.

Benefit:

Exploratory play boosts the development of critical thinking and self confidence skills in children.

Creative Play

Children use their imagination to play and create new ideas and things.

Examples:

Outdoor: Create a scavenger hunt.

Home: Build an obstacle course, make a fort/tent with blankets and pillows, paint, color, sculpt, or draw.

School: Promote students using their imagination to transport to a setting from a story read in class.

Benefit:

Creative play allows children to strengthen their sense of ego and gain a better sense of their identity through self discovery.

Symbolic Play

Children learn through play that things can be used for other purposes besides their intended use.

Examples:

Outdoor: Pretend that trees and rocks become living playmates.

Home: Build a robot, spaceship, or fort out of cardboard boxes, or reuse cardboard paper towel tubes as a microphone or telescope.

School: Use items in the play space to think of new ideas for how to use them. For example, steps could lead to a magical kingdom, and a pebble may be a magic seed.

Benefit:

Symbolic play can increase the development of abstract thinking skills in children.





Social Play

Children interact with others and follow the same set of rules to accomplish a shared goal.

Examples:

Outdoor: Play group games like hide and seek or capture the flag.

Home: Invite children to participate in cooking, board games, or card games.

School: Encourage group games like tag, catch, kickball, or four square - and even allow children to make up their own games.

Benefit:

Children learn the importance of social rules, expectations, and conflict resolution while engaging in social play.

Communication Play

Children use words, phrases, and gestures to play and interact with each other.

Examples:

Outdoor: Take a nature hike and share about what you see.

Home: Create storylines and act out skits.

School: Foster time for peer-to-peer communication, both for social and academic purposes.

Benefit:

While engaging in communication play, children learn the important skills of picking up on body language, decision making, and the flow of conversations with others.

Object Play

Children use physical objects to explore their use and purpose.

Examples:

Outdoor: Find items in nature and figure out additional ways they could be used.

Home: Build with blocks.

School: Bounce, throw, or catch a ball

Benefit:

Object play is essential to the development of both gross and fine motor skills for children.

“ Personally, I have witnessed over the years, those students having quality play/recess experiences generally exhibit better self esteems. Also, students who play together learn to negotiate and communicate with one another more reasonably.”

– Kevin McCarty

Early Childhood Coordinator at Jefferson-Morgan Elementary School

Imaginative Play

Children role play and act out experiences by experimenting with different scenarios.

Examples:

Outdoor: Pretend to be a wildlife expert and talk about the animals and nature around you.

Home: Pretend to go shopping in a closet.

School: Pretend to be an animal or drive in an imaginary car.

Benefit:

Imaginative play allows children a safe space to explore their curiosity with scenarios they do not experience every day or have never been able to experience.

Rough and Tumble Play

Vigorous behaviors that are associated with positive feelings and physical activity between individuals.

Examples:

Outdoor: Race or chase with other children.

Home: Wrestle with parent supervision.

School: Spin and jump.

Benefit:

Rough and tumble play allows children to learn how to set boundaries with others, and how to assess risk.

Considerations to Support Play

There is no “right” way to play. Experiencing play should be a joyful opportunity that considers children’s cultures, languages, and abilities, and enables them to express their unique identities.

- Play is the primary way children express and use language.
- Consider how cross-cultural play can bridge language and social norms.
- Consider modifications for environment, routines, and materials to meet children of differing abilities.

Play does not have to involve expensive equipment, materials, or lots of space.

- From NYT Parenting—a mother explains how her child explores and plays in their small apartment: [My 4-Year-Old Is a Destroyer¹](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/03/parenting/4-year-old-destroy-play.html)
- From Remake Learning—tips for incorporating mindfulness in the school day: Case study: [How IU1’s campus schools kept mental health support in place during pandemic learning²](https://remakelearning.org/blog/2021/03/05/case-study-mental-health/).



Play aligns with literacy and language development.

- Think about how you can encourage children to act out a story you just read, or maybe encourage them to create an alternate ending.
- [Learning at Home: Early Literacy Activities³](https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/learning-at-home-9-early-literacy-activities) —PBS Kids

Math concepts such as counting, addition and subtraction, patterns and shapes can be incorporated into play.

- Anita Mullen, a pre-k teacher at Jefferson-Morgan Elementary School, suggests incorporating simple learning activities such as counting how many times you go down the slide during recess.
- Think about what household activities and chores can be made playful such as sorting laundry and measuring for recipes.

¹ www.nytimes.com/2021/03/03/parenting/4-year-old-destroy-play.html

² remakelearning.org/blog/2021/03/05/case-study-mental-health/

³ www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/learning-at-home-9-early-literacy-activities

The Approaches to Learning Through Play are foundational to building academic competencies and social and emotional skills.

- The Pennsylvania Early Learning Standard for Early Childhood provides a continuum of [early learning standards](http://www.pakeys.org/pa-early-learning-initiatives/early-learning-standards/)¹ from infant to second grade.

Standard 1: Constructing and Gathering Knowledge

- Skills such as: curiosity and initiative

Standard 2: Organizing and Understanding Information

- Skills such as: task analysis and memory

Standard 3: Applying Knowledge

- Skills such as: creativity and invention

Standard 4: Learning through Experience

- Skills such as: making connections and problem solving

Remember adults need play and physical movement for their own health and physical wellness.

- Ask yourself: How am I modeling play for the children in my care?
- Consider ways to nurture your physical, emotional, and social wellbeing so you can serve as an example for your children and/or students.

¹ www.pakeys.org/pa-early-learning-initiatives/early-learning-standards/



ADVICE FROM PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Every physical education class is different. While each school building offers varying availability of space and equipment, physical education teachers recognize the importance of play and physical movement for Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Below, nationally recognized teachers share their insight into some ways they connect with their students during online physical education classes.



National Physical Education Teachers

Allison Relyea¹ writes about what she did well, things that needed improvement, and what she would do differently in response to the pandemic and the transition to distance learning.

TIPS

- Conduct social and emotional check-ins with students during the week in addition to meeting virtually with students for physical education (PE) class.
- Get to know the students before a change happens—create a needs assessment survey for students to answer about what their home life is like and what kind of activities they like to do in their free time.
- Engage students of all abilities in virtual games - give students a list of games (such as Jeopardy, Name That Tune, or Charades) and provide information a few days before the scheduled class.
- Ask students to choose the PE activities they want to explore—allow them to research new activities and be creative as to how they want to move.

1 bit.ly/recess-allisonrelyea

Diane McRandal² is a teacher for Edmentum's EdOptions online learning academy for K-12 Pennsylvania students. She has 25 years of experience teaching PE in classroom and virtual settings. Diane reports that students improve their physical and mental health in her online PE class. They become healthier individuals and have an increased sense of confidence. She shares her virtual PE teaching best practices and successes for other PE instructors. Her students have shared that they have less anxiety and embarrassment when participating in online PE as opposed to regular gym classes.

TIPS

- Let students choose how their PE journey will unfold. They can choose between paths such as biomechanics, diet and exercise, fitness, running and walking, strength based, stress management, etc.
- Give students information on how to become experts in each course.
- Encourage students to track their chosen coursework in an activity log accessible by parents and/or teachers.
- Include in the coursework why the movement is important and the science behind moving their bodies.

2 bit.ly/recess-dianemcrandal



“Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, cognitive skills, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development.”

– **Michelle Sparro**

STEAM Educator at Amos K. Hutchinson Elementary School

Local Physical Education Teachers

Through connections from the Recess Advocacy Team (made up of individuals with experience in a school setting as well as parents themselves), the following recommendations come from PE teachers in the Western Pennsylvania region about how they are connecting with families and students during online remote learning.

Paul Casey Health and PE Greenfield K-8

“The online PE class has been quite an experience for all of us. It has given me the opportunity to learn more about individual students’ interests, which is great because I’m new to the school, and don’t know a lot about the students.”

TIPS

- Pose a question of the day to support students talking and socializing in an online environment.
- Be prepared with an asynchronous assignment in the event that technical difficulties interrupt class time.
- Focus on health topics that reiterate how diseases may be prevented by exercise, eating healthy, and getting ample sleep.
- Make PE fun for the students and let them take a break from their screens by getting out of their seats.

Cindy Haigh Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12, Physical Education and Health Teacher, National Board-Certified Teacher, PA Teacher of the Year Finalist—Class of 2006

“The remote learning experience is less about reaching content area goals (middle school physical education and health), and more about focusing on being physically active and finding laughter in that physical activity.”

TIPS

- Be willing to try new things outside of your comfort zone.
- Embracing laughter helps us and the children we teach to improve our moods.

Lisa Roberts

Elementary Health and PE Teacher
McKean Elementary School

Recently featured in
[Staying Active While Virtual Learning](#)¹

TIPS

- Bring awareness to activities and opportunities for movement for students and families. Give ideas for adding movement into the day and share their ideas.
- Create virtual activities that include families. When possible, provide incentives for participation.
- Embrace the opportunity to engage in meaningful interactions with students and families through these activities. During a normal school year, there is very little family communication with special subject areas.

¹ bit.ly/recess-staying-active

PLAY AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RESOURCE GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS & FAMILIES

COVID-19 has upended life. As a very different school year begins, the Recess Advocacy Team continues to elevate play and provide support to educators and families. While there are many stresses and challenges that both educators and parents are facing in navigating the new way of schooling and learning (and staying safe), the role of play should not be lost sight of in the healthy development and learning of children. This Atlantic article titled [How the Coronavirus is Influencing Children's Play](https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2020/04/coronavirus-childrens-play/603007/)¹ reveals how children are using play to make sense of the current situation.

Below is a list of resources, activities, and considerations for ensuring play shows up daily in the lives of children, and ways that educators and families can incorporate play and physical activity into children's learning.

1 [bit.ly/recess-coronavirus](https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2020/04/coronavirus-childrens-play/603007/)



Resources for Play & Physical Activity

15-Day Family Fitness Challenge: [Let's Move at Phipps](#)¹ provides activities that encourage families to move, get creative, spend time together, and just take a moment. This resource offers a variety of playful activities.

Moving More at Home: Free tools, resources, and games from [Alliance for a Healthier Generation and Kohl's](#)².

Wide Open School Get Moving: Powered by Common Sense Media, this page [compiled online videos](#)³ that will guide viewers through physical activities.

Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy Parks on the Go: [Digital guides](#)⁴ for exploring the outdoors from anywhere.

Nature-themed Yoga Series: Four weeks of nature-themed [yoga activities](#)⁵ from the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy & Venture Outdoors.

Creative Connections: [Short videos](#)⁶ created by Pittsburgh Cultural Trust teaching artists that cover multiple art forms.

Creative Curriculums: These PA Standards aligned arts-integrated [extensions to classroom curriculums](#)⁷ can be used to lead a group of students or for families to engage in at home.

ATL Parent Like A Boss, Inc.: Their mission is to enhance generational literacies through play in underserved African American communities.

[Follow their Facebook page for activity ideas](#)⁸.

Keeping Children Active During the Coronavirus Pandemic: Physical activity guidelines for children ages three to 12 with options for [indoor and outdoor activities](#)⁹. [Spanish version available](#)¹⁰.

Learn More

In July 2020 The New York Times published a series of articles on how play shapes the way children see the world. [The State of Play](#)¹¹ and the following stories remind readers that play is the work of childhood.

The Magic of Black Girls Play: Article discussing how [game-songs](#)¹² created and passed down by Black girls are full of sophistication, power, and cultural meaning.

When Playtime and the Coronavirus Collide: Article presenting the importance of children [incorporating COVID into play](#)¹³ as a sign that a child is working through the intensity of living through something difficult, like a global pandemic.

Play Can Help Kids Speak the Unspeakable: Article outlining the [benefits of play therapy](#)¹⁴ to help children express their thoughts and feelings through playing rather than by talking about what's happening in their lives.

1 bit.ly/recess-hipps

2 bit.ly/recess-kohls

3 bit.ly/recess-fitness

4 bit.ly/recess-parks

5 bit.ly/recess-yoga

6 bit.ly/recess-creative

7 bit.ly/recess-curriculum

8 facebook.com/ATLParentLAB/

9 bit.ly/recess-active

10 bit.ly/recess-active-spanish

11 bit.ly/recess-nyt

12 bit.ly/recess-magic

13 bit.ly/recess-playtime

14 bit.ly/recess-therapy

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a powerful tool for advocacy, even if you do not consider yourself to be an ‘expert.’ If you spend time on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or LinkedIn, you can use those platforms to advocate for issues that are important to you.



Social Media Tips

Remember that the best content to share is your own personal stories and experiences.

Use Google to search for your local school district, elected officials, and other decision makers to find their social media accounts. Sometimes social media will be listed at the bottom of a website, or it will appear in the search results. Certain school districts also have social media for their parent-teacher organizations. Be sure to tag these accounts when making posts related to recess advocacy.

Ask your friends and family to help share your posts with their networks. The more people that share, the wider the reach. This helps everyone to be informed about recess advocacy.

Make sure you are following Trying Together and the Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative on social media, sharing their posts, and tagging these accounts when possible.

A hashtag is a metatag prefaced by the pound sign, such as #ThrowbackThursday. Hashtags aggregate all social media content for a specific topic, making it easier to join in a conversation or find related posts. If you include “#PlayMatters” in your post, your post may be seen by others who are interested in that same topic, or your friends and family may click on the hashtag to see other people’s posts that have also used “#PlayMatters.”

Trying Together Accounts and Handles

Facebook @TryingTogether

Twitter @Trying_Together

LinkedIn linkedin.com/company/trying-together/

Instagram @Trying_Together

Pinterest @tryingtogether

Vimeo vimeo.com/tryingtogether

Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative Accounts and Handles

Facebook @playfulpittsburgh

Twitter @playfulpgh

Instagram @playfulpittsburgh

Hashtags

#playfulpgh

#ThePowerofPlay

#PlayMatters

#BringBackPlay

#RecessMatters

#PlayToLearn

#SummerOfPlay

Sample Social Media Posts

“ Play is often talked about as a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood”

- Fred Rogers

Play affects the frontal lobe of the brain, which is responsible for executive functions and controls behavioral inhibition.

“ Play is the highest form of research.”

- Albert Einstein

“ As astronauts and space travelers children puzzle over the future; as dinosaurs and princesses they unearth the past. As weather reporters and restaurant workers they make sense of reality; as monsters and gremlins they make sense of the unreal.”

- Gretchen Owocki

Play has many cognitive benefits and is highly connected with multiple intelligences. Play can be seen through linguistic, interpersonal, logical-mathematical, visual/spatial, and musical intelligence.

Play is a gateway into the future. Exploring play is about understanding that innovation can happen when we are driven by enjoyment.

Children authentically learn through play.

During play, children build background knowledge and imagination that enables academic skill development.

“ Play comes natural to a child and may look different for each child. Play is the building block of a solid education. Play allows students to relax and learn at their own pace. Sometimes the best moments are “taught” during recess. Teachable moments are the moments that a child will remember for a long time.”

– Sara Podvasnik, Pre-k Teacher, Duquesne City School District

Physical movement including the freedom to play helps improve behavior and attention.

Children who engage in socio-dramatic play develop greater language and social skills.

“ Developmentally, children are meant to play. When you don’t allow young children to “get their play on” then behavior problems and ways to act out will occur. A child’s natural behavior is to play and learn. They are curious and this makes play essential to their mental health and wellbeing.”

– Kayla Pollacci, Pre-k Teacher, Duquesne City School District

Children are most comfortable when they can use their senses to play, experiment, and learn.

Play provides opportunities for children to reduce stress, explore feelings, and form relationships with peers.

ADVOCACY EMAIL AND STUDENT LETTER TEMPLATES

We need your voice to elevate the importance of play. Effectively sharing the research and communicating why play matters to you and your children is a simple way to advocate to your local school leaders.

In order to support play advocacy, below is sample email language that can be sent to principals, school board members or leaders, and district leadership. Consider modifying the introduction and story depending on whether or not the leader/decision-maker is a close contact; for example, sending to your child's principal versus school board members. The Recess Advocacy Team recommends sending a version to both, and mobilizing others in your community to send them as well.



Subject:

Feedback for school reopening plan

Body of email:

Dear <Name of School Board Member or District Leader>,

<Begin by introducing yourself, including your name, child(ren)'s names, and the school(s) they attend.>

I know many things about school are changing and you are managing how to open (or planning to reopen) school buildings. I am writing to urge you to consider prioritizing play and physical activity as a component of keeping children healthy as they return to school. As schools open (or plan to reopen), recess should be considered as a critical component of the school day.

Research demonstrates the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical benefits from play and physical activity:

- Cognitive/Academic Benefits: Several studies show that recess increases children's attention spans and productivity in the classroom. Physically active students tend to have better attendance, classroom behaviors, cognitive performance, and grades.
- Social and Emotional Benefits: Recess promotes social and emotional skills that become fundamental lifelong tools and serves as a developmentally appropriate way to reduce stress. Through recess children learn to develop self-discipline, plan strategies, respect rules, and solve problems.
- Physical Benefits: Dedicated time for recess during the school day helps children achieve some of the recommended sixty minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per day.

<Optional: insert brief personal story about your child(ren) and the positive impact of play.>

I want to share an article titled *[Recess Should NOT Be Cut: Considerations for COVID-19 School Reopening Plans](https://journals.lww.com/acsm-tj/fulltext/2020/07150/recess_should_not_be_cut_considerations_for.10.aspx)*¹ which provides strategies for balancing health protocols to reduce transmission while sharing the benefits of physical activity and recess. I ask that these strategies be considered to ensure that there are opportunities for physical movement and play. You can also review these resources from the Recess Advocacy Team: *<https://tryingtogether.org/community-resources/recess-advocacy-toolkit/>*.

It is important that all children have equitable opportunities to move, play, and thrive. Let's work together to enhance academic success by promoting physical activity and play for our students.

Sincerely,

<Your Name/ Signature>

¹ https://journals.lww.com/acsm-tj/fulltext/2020/07150/recess_should_not_be_cut_considerations_for.10.aspx



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412.421.3889
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Dear, _____
(Homeroom teacher, principal, etc.)

Recess and physical movement are an important part of my day. With much of my learning happening online and in front of a screen, the need to move is even greater. I need time on my own. I need time to move and play. Whether it's inside or outside, providing time and encouraging me to play will help us all be successful. Don't worry, even when I'm playing, I'm learning! Play helps me make sense of what is happening in the world around me.

I know many things about school are changing and you have a lot to teach me but physical activity and play will help. When my friends and I return to school, please do not take away any of my recess time for things such as not completing class work, making up a quiz or test, or as punishment for my behavior during the day. If my actions are causing any problems, please communicate with me and my parents/guardians. It is important that all children have equitable opportunities to play, move, and thrive. We can all work together to find solutions so that I can be successful at school.

Thank you.

Playfully yours,

(Student Signature and Date)

(Parent/Guardian Signature and Date)





RECESS

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

The Recess Advocacy Team is a group of organizations dedicated to health, wellness, education, and play with a focus on recess practices and policies in pre-k through sixth grade.

Learn more on the Recess Advocacy Team website at www.playfulpittsburghcollaborative.org/recess-advocacy-team/ or by contacting recess@tryingtogether.org.



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