

RECESS

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

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 Education¹

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.

¹ bit.ly/recess-roadmap