

# KEEP RECESS IN SCHOOLS



## What is recess?

Recess is a relatively easy and low cost way to help students be physically active. Recess also provides social, emotional, and academic achievement benefits.

## What's happening currently?

**More than 90%** of elementary schools had students in each of grades K-5 participate in regularly scheduled recess during the school day.\*<sup>1</sup>

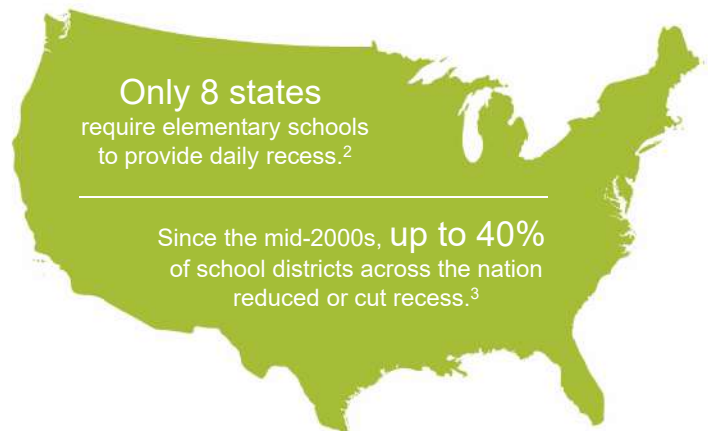


**But only 35%** of elementary schools had 6th-grade students participate in regularly scheduled recess.\*<sup>1</sup>

*\*Among elementary schools with students in that grade.*

## Recess defined:

- A regularly scheduled period within the school day for physical activity and play that is monitored by trained staff or volunteers.
- Encourages students to engage in activities of their choice.
- Is offered at all grade levels, kindergarten through 12th grade.



## Active students are better learners

Recess increases students' physical activity and improves educational outcomes.<sup>4</sup>



### Social & emotional outcomes:

- Improved ability to share and negotiate
- Better social interactions
- Increased school connectedness
- Improved school climate

### Academic achievement outcomes:

- Better grades and test scores
- Better classroom behavior
- Better school attendance
- Improved memory, attention, and concentration



On average, elementary schools schedule students to have  
**27 MINUTES** of recess each day.\*\*<sup>1</sup>

*\*\*Among elementary schools in which students participate in regularly scheduled recess.*

While elementary schools are meeting the national guidance to provide at least 20 minutes of daily recess, there are still many that do not offer recess. Even for those that do, school recess practices can be stronger and more comprehensive.



**54%** of elementary schools prohibit or actively discourage staff from excluding students from all or part of recess as punishment for bad behavior or failure to complete class work.<sup>1</sup>



**30%** of elementary schools have students participate in physical activity in the gym, multi-purpose room, or cafeteria when the weather does not permit outdoor recess.<sup>1</sup>



**11%** of elementary schools have all their classes schedule recess immediately before lunch.<sup>1</sup>



**49%** of elementary schools use the safety checklist and equipment guidelines published in the Handbook for Public Playground Safety.<sup>1</sup>

## What are ways to improve recess?

### National guidance for recess in schools

The following can guide policies for recess:

- Provide all students K-12 with at least 20 minutes of recess daily (or similar daily period of physical activity).
- Prohibit replacement of physical education with recess or using recess to meet time requirements for physical education policies.
- Provide schools and students with adequate spaces, facilities, equipment, and supplies for recess.
- Ensure that spaces and facilities for recess meet or exceed recommended safety standards.
- Prohibit exclusion of students from recess for disciplinary reasons or academic performance in the classroom.
- Prohibit use of physical activity during recess as punishment.
- Provide recess before lunch.
- Provide staff members who lead or supervise recess with ongoing professional development.

### Practical strategies and resources

An important way to improve recess is by having recess policies at the state, district, and school level that aligns with the national guidance for recess.



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and SHAPE America developed **Strategies for Recess in Schools** to provide schools with concrete evidence-based strategies to implement and practice effective recess.



They also developed **Recess Planning in Schools: A Guide to Putting Strategies for Recess in Practice** to help schools develop a written recess plan to increase students' physical activity and improve their academic achievement.

#### SOURCES:

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *School Health Policies and Practices Study 2014*.

<sup>2</sup> SHAPE America — Society of Healthy and Physical Educators. *Shape of the Nation Report 2016*.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. *The State of Play — Gallup Survey of Principals on School Recess*.

<sup>4</sup> Michael SL, Merlo C, Basch C, et al. *Critical connections: health and academics*. *Journal of School Health*. 2015;85(11):740–58.

