

3-Active Recess / Open Gym

OVERVIEW

The goal is to have all students engaged in physical activity during the majority of recess time or free periods through age appropriate games and other organized activities.

Resources Needed:

- Funding varies according to current supplies and playground.
- Staff time varies depending on how recess has been managed in the past.
- Staff training for playground aides and teachers for playground games/ activities/rules.

Facilities and Equipment Needed:

- Summer break is the best time to prepare the playground.
- Community and staff working together can help with preparation time.
- Access to school recreation facilities.
- Safe locked storage of all recess equipment.
- Equipment examples: Playground balls, Basketballs, Jump ropes, Soccer balls, Hopscotch, Striking equipment, Tetherballs
- Initial preparation of the playground is needed.
- Maintenance - Blacktop and grassy play area must be kept clean of debris; large playground equipment must be checked for safety seasonally. Any fencing must be routinely checked for safety.

Evaluation:

- Observation and children being more active during recess or participation during open gym.

Active Recess involves purposefully designing the playground and recess activities to encourage physical activity for all students. It also involves including a minimum of 20 minutes of recess each day for students in elementary and middle school. Active recess incorporates activities on the grassy areas or fields, blacktop surfaces, and playground equipment. Active recess provides children with a guarantee of non-structured play each day, with equipment and supplies needed to be physically active on the playground. It provides some structure to recess and may include several activity stations scattered around the playground and green spaces.

For maximum impact, use active recess as a school-wide practice for all students. For greatest success, all school personnel must take an interest in the play and activity of children. The classroom teacher can help teach new rules of activities, while the physical education teacher can help teach new activities. The art teacher may help develop new rules posters. The school counselor and school nurse can help integrate safety and social rules.

Many playgrounds include three play areas: blacktop, grassy areas, and playground equipment. Following are ideas to increase activity in two of the three areas:

- **Blacktop:** Games and activities safe for the blacktop are generally bouncing and jumping games. Examples include: Four and Two Square, jump rope activities, hopscotch, basketball, net games, and all activities where markings have been painted on the blacktop. For safety reasons, most educators avoid kicking games or striking games on the blacktop.

- Grassy areas: Grassy areas are safe for kicking, running, striking, and fast-paced activities including, but not limited to: soccer activities, striking games or field games, tag games, and running-type challenges. Areas for kicking games must be separated from playground equipment.

In the high school setting, where designated recess takes the form of long lunch periods with open or closed campus rules, it is important to offer drop-in open gym at a regular time daily. Open gym creates a positive environment in which to play ball sports and release energy, when supervised by a staff member. The goal of open gym is to have the gym and perhaps other physical activity facilities available to students, staff, and family members to be physically active before and after school and during the lunch hour. The facilities must be conducive to physical activity, which would include adequate space, time, equipment, and appropriate supervision being available



ACTION STEPS

ACTIVE RECESS

- Commit to active recess or open gym periods as a school-wide practice.
- Review and improve, if needed, recess areas. If possible, establish safe grassy, blacktop, and playground equipment areas. Paint colorful markings on blacktop.
- Develop an active recess handbook for the school and orient all playground supervisors.
- Allow all children to participate in recess activities. Avoid withholding recess from students who misbehave in other academic classes. Recess should never be denied, withheld as punishment or as a time to make up incomplete academic work.
- Allow different developmental levels private use of large equipment area (swings, climbing, equipment, and slides). Avoid allowing fifth grade to play on the large apparatus at the same time as the first grade.
- Post a consistent set of rules for each area of the playground where all can see them.
- Select appropriate activities and obtain needed supplies and equipment.
- Teach children appropriate use of each area of the playground.
- Increase the use of games and equipment during recess. Provide equipment choices for each area of the playground.
- Teach appropriate children's games at each grade level. Both physical education and classroom teachers can integrate games into units. Examples of some popular games include: Four Square, Longball, Basketball, Around the World, Tetherball, Multi-Use Circle, Wallball, Alphabet Track, Running Track-Painted Line, Tricycle Track, Volleyball, Prisoner Court, Skipping Track, US Map, and Hopscotch.
- Consider pedometer play at recess.
- Integrate math and physical activity while challenging the children to be more active.
- Consider recess before lunch (students play and then eat).

ACTION STEPS

OPEN GYM

- ✓ Conduct a needs assessment to determine available time, available facilities in school, interest by students and families, school and community commitment support, including staffing, for open gym and other facilities.
- Determine which groups will be allowed to use the facilities. In addition to students, this may include staff and/or family members.
- Develop a schedule that includes the following: available facilities such as a field house, gym space, pool, or weight room, available time (both in school and out of school), and activities that could be completed during this period.
- Develop and obtain approval for a budget that includes the cost of supervision and equipment.
- Assign or hire and orient gym supervisors.
- Develop promotional pieces to make the community aware of open gym availability. Consider having the students develop promotional posters. Promote the availability and publish the schedule.
- Monitor open gym to help prevent and solve any problems.
- Count attendance for each open gym period to help promote continuation of this strategy.

CDC Recommendation: Schools should incorporate at least 20 minutes of recess per day in addition to physical education classes. Active recess and open gym relate to Wisconsin State Physical Education Standard 3: Participates regularly in physical activity; Standard 4: Achieves and maintains a health enhancing level of physical fitness; and Standard 5: Exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings.

EXAMPLES

Portland, Oregon area schools integrated recess as a school project to make recess safe and give students ownership of their recess, while all school personnel helped in the transition from a chaotic recess to time well spent.

http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2009/04/portland_schools_make_recess_f.html

Other strategies and considerations for Indoor Recess:

- Lack of space/ Noise can be issues
- Schedule to ensure gym is free during recess or use hallways, band/ choir rooms, theatres
- Set up zones in gym
- Relay races, Wii, DDR, Fitness circuits,
- Fitness games

See more examples in Appendix 3B

RESOURCES

Recess Rules: Why the Undervalued Playtime may be America's Best Investment for Healthy Kids and Healthy Schools. <http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/web-assets/2007/09/recess-rules>

Ready for Recess: Provides tools for how to implement more active recess including brief instructional videos. <http://livewellomaha.org/ReadyforRecess/>

School playground design: Information on the planning and design of playgrounds for varying age levels, including resources on safety, accessibility, equipment, surfaces, and maintenance. <http://www.ptotoday.com/playgrounds>

Log It Home: A pedometer recording program for 3rd grade and up. <http://www.peclogit.org/logithikepreview.html> and <http://www.peclogit.org/logit.asp>

Peaceful Playgrounds <http://www.peacefulplaygrounds.com>

Games Ultimate Playground and Resource Game Book offers a variety of activities for an active recess. <http://www.gameskidsplay.net/>

SPARK After School resources including games, activity cards with an initial cost. Check to see if your school district has it. <http://www.sparkpe.org/after-school/>

Outdoor Games and Activities: A State of Play offers a list of games and how to play them. <http://www.aaastateofplay.com/how-to-playground-games/>



POLICY SAMPLES

General Policy

All elementary school students will have at least 20 minutes a day of supervised recess, preferably outdoors, during which schools should encourage moderate to vigorous physical activity verbally and through the provision of space and equipment.

Schools should discourage extended periods (i.e., periods of two or more hours) of inactivity. When activities, such as mandatory school-wide testing, make it necessary for students to remain indoors for long periods of time, schools should give students periodic breaks during which they are encouraged to stand and be moderately active.

Recess before lunch

Research from the Montana Nutrition Team found fewer discipline problems in the lunch room, classroom and playground when students had recess before lunch. In addition there was less food thrown away and teachers reported improved focus in the classroom.

http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin389.shtml

Strategy 3 - Appendix A

Additional Rationale for Active Recess

Active recess provides standards-based and progressive instruction of movement skills. Recess provides children with much needed unstructured activity time. Recess is not a replacement for physical education. It should be considered an important activity supplement, and another opportunity for children to accumulate 60 minutes of physical activity a day. Recess also allows children to release energy and reduce stress, both of which help improve attention in the classroom and decrease disruptive behavior.

An active recess will include children participating in developmentally appropriate play where they may explore, stimulate their imagination, and develop critical thinking skills as they take a break from a structured classroom.

The benefits of active recess include the following:

- Unstructured play helps children manage stress and reduce anxiety.
- Recess creates a setting in which children learn and practice social skills and must be creative with how they choose to spend their free time.
- Children who take breaks between performing school tasks are more attentive and alert afterward.
- Recess allows children to explore, which stimulates their imaginations and fosters critical thinking skills.
- Breaks between rigorous studying or working improve brain function and memory.
- Children who receive more recess behave better and are likely to learn more.¹

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES

Scavenger Hunt 1

Your Mission: To complete the challenges listed during 1 recess period

1. Go down the slide 4 times
2. Skip around the playground area once
3. Cross the monkey bars
4. Pass and catch with a friend 20 times
5. Hop 20x on each foot
6. 10 jumping jacks
7. Run around the track once
8. Jump on all the States beginning with the letter M
9. Move from one end of the playground to the other only touching the ground 10 times
10. Swing until you have completed 20 swings (count each time you go forward as one)

Mission Accomplished? - Tell your teacher you have completed Scavenger Hunt level 1

Scavenger Hunt 2 (Winter version)

Your Mission: To complete the challenges listed during 1 recess period

1. Create 10 snow angels
2. Make 10 snowballs
3. Jump on snowballs to break them
4. Build a snowman
5. Blaze a trail
6. Make a maze
7. Drag a friend on a sled
8. Build 20 snow blocks
9. Build the tallest tower of snow you can
10. Knock down the tower

Mission Accomplished? - Tell your teacher you have completed Scavenger Hunt level 2

¹ *Huntington Learning Center Glendale Feb. 1, 2010—Global Press Release Distribution*
citing a 2009 study at Yeshiva University's Albert Einstein College of Medicine