

Recess in our Schools Today



An Advocacy Toolbox

How can you as parents, educators, State & Local leaders ensure that play & recess will be around future generations?

Author -Lea May
UCO Graduate Student

Introduction

Why the need for a Recess Advocacy Toolbox?

Parents and educators need a resource to educate themselves as well as local school boards and legislators. This toolbox will give them the resource to gain knowledge about the issues related to the decline of recess in our schools today. In my experience, I have seen that most parents do care about their child's school day. They are truly concerned about their child's learning and providing their children with the best education.

By providing this Recess Advocacy Toolbox, parents will become educated about the need for recess in our schools especially with the increasing pressure of high stakes testing. This toolbox will also help parents learn how to help maintain quality recess programs in their schools. Steps will be provided to assist individuals or groups in their quest for writing policy recommendations, letters to legislators, and *talking points* about the need for recess.

My goal is to get this information out to as many parents, educators and advocates as possible and to assist others in becoming an advocate for Recess.

Lea May

University of Central Oklahoma - Graduate Student
Contact information - lmay0923@sbcglobal.net



Research studies show that *Recess* is diminishing in our schools today.

The decline of recess in schools today is a prevalent issue that has a widespread affect on children. Studies show that the amount of time designated for recess is diminishing in our schools today (Barros, Silver & Stein, 2009) . The main reason for this decline is the fact that schools are being pressured to provide a head start on academic skills for their children, even at the youngest age (Almon, 2003). Forty percent of school districts throughout the United States are reducing or deleting recess as they focus additional time and resources on teaching and learning (Jarrett, Maxwell, Dickerson, Hoge, & Yetley, 1998)

Current studies challenge the idea that limiting recess will benefit children's academic performance, however. Research on the human brain shows that excessive and/or unrelieved periods of instruction can, in fact, impair one's ability to learn and retain material (Healy, 1998; Jensen, 1998).

Guidelines for Recess as stated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children:

1. Play is an active form of learning.
2. Play reduces the tension that often comes with having to achieve or needing to learn.
3. Children express and work out emotional aspects of everyday experiences through unstructured play.
4. Children's free play develops skills such as cooperating, helping, sharing, and solving problems.
5. The development of children's perceptual abilities may suffer.
6. Free play allows children to gain competence in moving through the larger world.

The Question...How do I become an Advocate for play?

The Answer...

- Clarify your own philosophy about how children learn best and most naturally.
- Advocacy begins with your own beliefs, values, and knowledge.
- Spread the word: share evidence about the importance of recess and the rights of children to play.
- Lobby for safe, well-maintained parks & play areas in your community.
- Start an annual local “Play day”

Steps to Take for Legislative Action

1. Get connected to a local organization that supports recess. Join coalitions.
2. Keep informed. Sign up to receive action alerts from local and national organizations. National Association for the Education of Young Children, Oklahoma Family Resource Coalition and Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA).
3. Get information. Learn about your policymakers.
4. Get involved. Use advocacy and action alerts.
5. Personalize your message.
6. Levels of involvement: Public hearing testimony. Lobby visits and Rallies.
7. Remember... policy change is incremental. Short term goals as well as long term goals are important. Celebrate your successes-no matter how small.



Albert Einstein (1879-1945) is credited with saying “Play is the highest form of research.”

Policy Recommendations

Recess and play hold an important part in improving a child's whole experience with school. School should be more fun and playful than it often is today. Not just fun for the sake of fun, but fun in terms of more exploration, building, discovering, and being healthy. Free spontaneous play gives children the opportunities for social-emotional and cognitive development that are rarely available in classroom work or even in structured physical education.

SIGNED LEGISLATION: PHYSICAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENT: Senate Bill 1186 requires public elementary schools (K-5) to provide an additional 60 minutes per week of physical activity, which may include physical education, exercise programs, fitness breaks, recess, classroom activities, and wellness and nutrition education.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION: MANDATORY RECESS LEGISLATION: A mandatory recess legislation for kindergarten through 5th grade. This policy recommendation is in addition to the Senate bill 1186. A policy requiring *recess* periods (unstructured play) in all schools (K-5) should be in addition to physical education class time and not be a substitute for physical education. Research suggests that recess has many benefits for children in the cognitive, social-emotional, and physical domains. Children are less fidgety and more on-task when they have recess and children with ADHD (attention deficit/hyperactivity syndrome) are among those who benefit most (Jarrett and Waite-Stupiansky, 2009).

Physically active children are healthy children, and healthy children make better learners. The education of our children depends up the assurance that they have the opportunities to have daily recess periods. This legislation is a means to ensure that recess will be around for our future generations.



Play needs to be cherished and encouraged, for in their free play children reveal their future minds." —Friedrich Froebel (1887)

Websites for more information:

National Organizations

<http://www.allianceforchildhood.org> <http://www.nifplay.org>
<http://www.stuartbrownmd.com/index.html> <http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/>
<http://www.ipaworld.org/home.html> <http://kaboom.org/>
<http://www.acei.org/playresources.htm> <http://www.csuchico.edu/phed/tasp/>
www.ipausa.org

Local Organizations (Oklahoma)

<http://rainbowfleet.org> <http://www.oica.org>
<http://www.ofrc.org/> <http://www.ok-aimh.org/>
http://www.smartstartok.org/policy/early_childhood_advocacy

Federal & State Legislators

The following link will be helpful in finding your individual representatives:
<http://www.capitolconnect.com/oklahoma/default.aspx>
Contact them through email, phone calls and letters.

Sample Letter to Legislators

October 10, 2009

Marian Cooksey
State Representative
2300 North Lincoln Boulevard, Room 409
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Dear Representative Cooksey:

I am aware that you are an advocate for children and families in our great state of Oklahoma. I have looked at your voting record according to the 2008 Kids Report by the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA). Your voting record is a clear reflection on your concern for children in our state.

I am writing you to urge you to vote in favor of children's issues, especially early childhood issues regarding the need for play (recess) in our schools. The OICA 2009 legislative agenda has recommended a required Health Education curriculum requirement for our children. The topics of instruction include physical activity, nutrition, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, behavioral health, oral health, environmental health, growth and development, injury prevention and wellness. I feel that along with these topics **Recess** should be included.

Research shows that recess is diminishing in our schools today and being replaced by more time for academics. The challenge is to discern the purposes for and the conditions under which play is an optimally useful pedagogical strategy that effects children's development and their school readiness (Play=Learning, 2006).

The future of play depends on what we do for our children today. Therefore, we need you to support this issue. I am looking forward to hearing from you on your views on the issue. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lea May
UCO Graduate Student
6700 NW 220th Street
Edmond, OK 73025
405-831-4677
lmay0923@sbcglobal.net

Talking Points for Recess Advocacy:

- Physical education and health education are critical to educating the whole child in preparation for life.
- Studies show a direct correlation between a child's level of physical fitness and scores on standardized academic tests.
- Many children will be left behind if they do not:
 - *Learn how to achieve and maintain health-related fitness and healthy lifestyles.
 - *Develop character traits to help them make good decisions about behaviors that support their well-being.
- Recess can play an important role in the learning, social development, and health of elementary school children.
- Children have a right to play as stated in Article 31 of the U.N. Convention on the rights of the Child (www.unicef.org/crc). The right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
- Children actually learn valuable lessons during recess:
 - *How to deal with social conflicts
 - *How to handle bullies and learn who the class leaders are.
- Responsibilities - Parents, teachers, administrators and legislators have the responsibility to advocate in the best interest of the child. Children need a voice that will speak up for what is essential to adults as well as children. In a world of conflict, adults need to be reminded of what it was like to play. The creative spirit within us is an essential part of our emotional balance. Take action today to assure that recess will be around for future generations.

Resources:

- American Alliance for Health, P. (2006, May 1). Recess for elementary school students. A position paper from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education. *American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*.
- Brooks, R. (2008, May 15). Remember, Go outside and play? *Los Angeles Times*.
- Barros, R., Silver, E., & Stein, R. (2009). School recess and group classroom behavior. *Pediatrics*, 123, 431-436.
- Fagerstrom, T., & Mahoney, K. (2006). Give me a break! Can strategic recess scheduling increase on-task behaviour for first graders? *Ontario Action Researcher*, 9 (2).
- Frost. (Play and Child Development). Pearson Education.
- Frost, J. (2007). The changing culture of childhood: A perfect storm. *Childhood Education*, 225-230.
- Ginsburg, K. (2007). The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. *Pediatrics*, 119(1):182-191.
- Healey, J. (1987). *Your child's growing mind*. Toronto: Doubleday.
- Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R., Berk, L., Singer, D. (2009). *A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Holmes, R., Pellegrini, A., Schmidt, S. (2006). The effects of different recess timing regimens on preschoolers' classroom attention. *Early Child Development and Care*, 176 (7), 735-743.
- Jarrett, O., Maxwell, D., Dickerson, C., Hoge, P., & Yetley, (1998). Impact of recess on classroom behavior: Group effects and individual differences. *Journal of Educational Research*, 92 (2), 121-126.
- Jarrett O. & Waite-Stupiansky, (2009). Recess-it's indispensable! *Young Children*, 66-69.
- Jensen, E. (1998). Teaching with the brain in mind. *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)*.
- Lamphere, R. (2000, December 14). http://www.michigan.gov/documents/bdpolicy001214_16470_7.pdf. Retrieved April 20, 2009, from IPA/USA.org: www.ipausa.org/recess.html.
- Louv, R. (2008, April 22). Last child in the woods: saving our children from nature deficit disorder. *Algonquin*, Chapel Hill, NC April 22, 2008.
- Marantz Heng, R. (2008, February 17). Taking play seriously. *New York Times Magazine*.
- McLane, J. (2003). *"Does not. "Does too" Thinking about play in the early childhood classroom*. New York: Herr Research Center Erickson Institute.
- Pellegrini, A. D. & Bjorklund, D. F. (1997). The role of recess in children's cognitive performance and school adjustment. *Educational Researcher*, 32, 35-40.
- Spiegel, A.,(2008, February 21). Old-fashioned play builds serious skills. NPR, February 21, 2008.