



# RECESS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Council on Physical Education for Children

A Position Paper from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education

## Recess, An Essential Component

Recess, while separate and distinct from physical education, is an essential component of the total educational experience for elementary aged children. Recess provides children with discretionary time and opportunities to engage in physical activity that helps to develop healthy bodies and enjoyment of movement. It also allows elementary children to practice life skills such as conflict resolution, cooperation, respect for rules, taking turns, sharing, using language to communicate, and problem solving in real situations that are real. Furthermore, it may facilitate improved attention and focus on learning in the academic program.

Various organizations including the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the American Association for the Child's Right to Play support recess as an important component of a child's physical and social development. Children need a variety of movement experiences to develop a healthy mind and body that is capable of learning. Inactivity is considered a major risk factor for heart disease and patterns of inactivity may begin at early ages. As a result of parents working outside the home, neighborhood safety issues, and a lack of community support, a growing number of children have limited time to participate in unstructured play in their neighborhoods. They spend more time watching TV, playing computer games or other sedentary activities. The result of this inactivity, coupled with poor nutritional habits, is more children are overweight and obese, showing early signs of heart disease, diabetes and other serious health problems. The involvement of young children in daily physical activity during school hours therefore is critical for their current and future health.

Recess may also provide the opportunity for students to develop and improve social skills. During recess periods, students learn to resolve conflicts, solve problems, negotiate, and work with others without adult intervention. Cognitive abilities may also be enhanced by recess. Studies have found that students who do not participate in recess may have difficulty concentrating on specific tasks in the classroom, are restless and may be easily distracted. In addition, recess serves as a developmentally appropriate strategy for reducing stress. Contemporary society introduces significant pressure and stress for many students because of academic demands, family issues and peer pressures.

Based on this information, COPEC recommends the following:

- ♦ Recess should not replace physical education. Recess is unstructured playtime where children have choices; develop rules for play and release energy and stress. It is an opportunity for children to practice or use skills developed in physical



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education.

- ◆ Physical education provides a sequential instructional program with opportunities for children to learn about and participate in regular physical activity, develop motor skills, use skills and knowledge to improve performance.
- ◆ Schools should develop schedules that provide for supervised, daily recess in grades pre-kindergarten through grades five or six. The use of facilities for recess activities should not interfere with instructional classes (separate locations for each activity). If possible recess should not be schedules back to back with physical education classes.
- ◆ Recess should not be viewed as a reward but a necessary educational support component for all children. Students should not be denied recess as a means of punishment, or to make up work.
- ◆ Periods of moderate physical activity should be encouraged and facilitated while recognizing that recess should provide opportunities for children to make choices. NASPE recommends that children ages 6-11 participate in at least one hour and up to several hours of physical activity each day. This activity may occur in periods of moderate to vigorous activity lasting 10-15 minutes or more. Recess may provide some of this activity time.
- ◆ Schools should provide the facilities, equipment and supervision necessary to ensure the recess experience is productive, safe and enjoyable. Developmentally appropriate equipment, as outlined in the NASPE Guidelines for Facilities, Equipment and Instructional Materials, should be made available. Adults should regularly check equipment and facilities for safety.
- ◆ Physical education teachers and classroom teachers should teach children positive skills for self-responsibility during recess.
- ◆ Adults should direct or intervene when a child's physical or emotional safety is an issue. Bullying or aggressive behavior must not be allowed and all safety rules should be enforced.

Quality physical education along with daily recess are necessary components of the school curriculum that enable students to develop physical competence, health-related fitness, self responsibility, and enjoyment of physical activity so that they can be physically active for a lifetime.



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\*Additional information on recess may be found at the International Play Association