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## **CPS gives recess advocates a victory**

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Chicago elementary schools that do not offer a scheduled recess must vote on whether to provide one by fall 2012 under a victory for recess advocates unveiled Monday.

A new 45-page Chicago Public School recess “toolkit” walks schools through the physical, academic and behavioral advantages of offering recess, and recommends that they return to an “open campus” model once common in the 1970s to accommodate it.

CPS officials are asking schools to start following the Chicago Teachers Union contract, which requires that schools with “closed campuses” — usually featuring 20 minute-student lunches and no recess — form committees charged with voting annually on whether to keep their schools closed or switch to “open campuses” with mid-day recesses.

Only 42 percent of CPS principals said their schools offered recess, according to the toolkit, and 27 percent said it was located in classrooms.

“That’s shameful,” said Patricia O’Keefe of the Raise Your Hand Coalition, a parent group that has been pushing the return of recess.

“We want schools to move to an open schedule because that really allows time for a nice lunch break and recess and socialization time. Kids need time to navigate social situations. That’s one of the biggest things they were deprived of.”

In the 1970s, under a CPS “open campus” model, two 10-minute recesses and a 45-minute student lunch were common, with many kids heading home for lunch. But following concerns about student safety, veterans say, the vast majority of Chicago elementary schools switched to “closed campuses” that moved teachers’ 45-minute lunch to the end of the day, converted the two 10-minute recesses into one 20-minute lunch period for kids, and eliminated recess.

This past February, Raise Your Hands members began highlighting the fact that many schools could bring back a substantial recess if they would form “review committees” as required under the CTU contract and vote on moving teachers 45-minute lunch from the end of the day to the middle of the day to accommodate recess.

CPS officials are asking elementary schools that remain under closed campuses to form review committees next school year so they can vote on whether to switch to an open campus model with recess by the fall 2012, said CPS spokeswoman Becky Carroll.

Review committees should be comprised of the principal, three local school council parents, the school’s

CTU delegate and three teachers.

Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis said she would like to see all teachers in a school also vote independently on the issue “to make sure we have a teacher voice.”

However, Lewis said, “We’re thrilled that CPS wants to provide recess and we want to work with them on making sure it’s done effectively and fairly in every school...”

“I think you’d be surprised how many teachers would like to have a duty-free lunch in the middle of the day,” Lewis said. “It’s a win-win.”

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