

Back to School -- Recess and P.E. Critical to Success

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Not only adults but also children need physical activity in order to stay happy, healthy, and focused. If you have children of your own, this won't come as a surprise. However, one out of every four school-age children are being severely limited in the amount of physical activity allowed during the school day.

Many elementary schools have completely pulled their physical education programs either due to no funding, lack of administrative interest, or funds needing to be directed toward keeping up with standardized testing requirements. For some schools, P.E. has got the wrong idea, such as one school in Northwest Florida where the children play video games for P.E.

Recess is another cutback. Schools are rigorously restricting or completely eliminating recess altogether. In one Arizona elementary school, children are constrained from running on concrete playgrounds due to fears of falls and resulting lawsuits.

Says Dr. Melinda Bossenmeyer of California State University San Marcos, "Every decade or so educators stumble upon a really bad idea. The elimination of recess is one such current example. After hearing about coach potatoes, sedentary kids, youth obesity, video game- playing zombies for the last ten years -- take away recess? It simply doesn't make any sense."



If your school is showing any of these trends, take note -- children need to jump, play, laugh, throw balls, and enjoy themselves outdoors. And if your child is showing low grades and signs of restlessness, new studies show daily fitness equals better report cards and more-focused children.

The National Association for the Education on Young Children identified several benefits of recess and active play for children:

Improved Learning -- children learn better when using the mind and the body.

More Relaxation -- play reduces tension.

Healthier Emotions -- children work out emotional aspects of their lives easier through unstructured play.

Increased Perceptual and Problem Solving Abilities -- experiencing the whole world around them versus a microcosm of computers and books is a powerful mode of learning.

Dr. Nadine Gelberg, a sports technology expert, says, "Physical activity is really a part of critical thought, including (the process of) intellectually understanding the physical activities," noting that critical thought is engaged when you move your body, play a game together, bounce a ball a certain way, or test your physical endurance.

A group called SPARK (Sports, Play, and Active Recreation for Kids) along with the support of Nike has developed a new physical education program for kids called PE2GO in which children don't stand on the sidelines waiting to play but all enjoy physical activity together. With a long-term goal to get P.E. back into every school in the nation, Gary DeStefano, president of Nike USA Operations, would like to see "companies, organizations, and the government work together to bring P.E. classes taught by P.E. specialists back to schools."

Talk to your school, district, or state education office to get P.E. and recess back into your school. Here are some resources to get you going:

Get Charged -- www.getcharged.com

Peaceful Playgrounds -- www.peacefulplaygrounds.com

PE2GO -- www.sparkpe.org or www.nikego.com

PE4Life -- www.pe4life.com

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