

# SCHOOL RECESS

*Why some love and others hate  
this American tradition*

A young girl in a blue and floral dress is in the foreground, holding a basketball with both hands. She is on a colorful playground court with blue and green sections. In the background, other children and adults are engaged in various activities on the court. A school building is visible in the distance under a clear blue sky.

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## School Recess: Why some love and others hate this American tradition.

**By Melinda  
Bossenmeyer, Ed.D.**

The school recess movement in Orange County, Florida is growing and even received national attention yesterday when The Today Show put out an elementary recess survey.

The national survey shows that 99% of adults participating in the survey favor elementary school recess. End of subject? Not quite. Parents in nearby Lake County have taken to the streets to join in the protest over the lack of recess at their schools.

The benefits of recess are well researched and documented. Professional education organizations like the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, the National PTA, as well as the American Association of Pediatrics have position statements supporting recess and praising its value. So why are some administrators “pretending not to know what we know”?

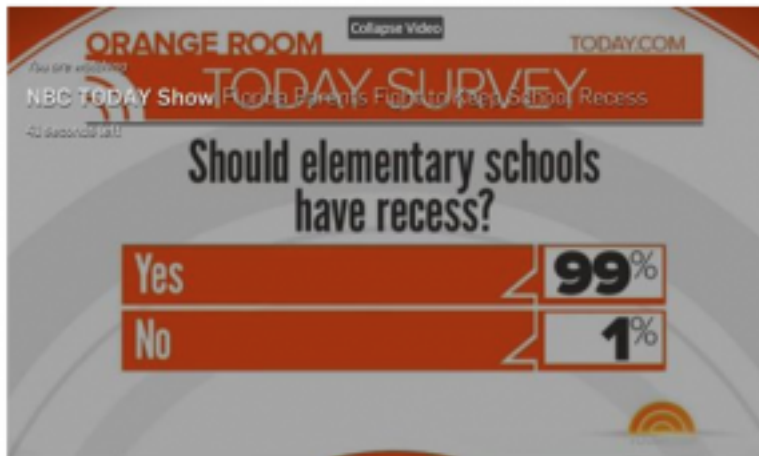
It could be because districts leave the decision up to principals, principals leave the decision up to teachers and some teachers decide its too hot, too cold, too inconvenient or too much effort to take students to recess. Sure there are other reasons for a teacher’s decision to eliminate recess like “the kids need more time to focus on academics”, but note that I said some teachers.

### **An Administrator’s Perspective**

As an elementary school principal, I’m thankful to say morning and noon recess were mandated in my school district. All of my K-5 students received a 15 minute morning recess and 20 minutes of playtime at lunch in addition to 20 minutes devoted to eating lunch. Our afternoon recess was optional and highly encouraged for K-2 classes. Reflecting back, I remember that when I left the decision to the classroom teacher less than 1/2 took children outside for the afternoon recess. The optional recess was an example of an oft used saying in schools, “what gets tested gets done,” with the case of recess being “what gets mandated gets implemented”.







The Today Show Poll- 99% of respondents support elementary school recess.

There is another reason why schools hesitate to have kids out for recess. I'm guilty of it myself – discipline issues. Some schools also have an additional before school morning recess. My schools had it. In 60 minutes of morning play with limited supervision, play time was a recipe for a line of discipline cases outside the administrators door (mine) before the school day even started. Whew.

### **Not a One-Size-Fits-All Solution**

Like most problems there are many solutions. Education gets in “trouble” when we delegate a “one-size-fits-all” fix. But we worked it out so that the kids had the benefit of the exercise. We limited the time students could arrive early to school to 30 minutes. Those arriving earlier sat at the lunch tables up until that time.

We also added additional playground supervisors to the morning duty slot. We staggered start times by 20 minutes so that younger children started earlier than the other ones to limit the amount of time older and younger kids were on the playground at one time. In short, we instituted multiple strategies which allowed for a smoother start to the morning for all involved.

I have find that when we educators are locked in a one-size-fits-all mentality, we then fail to meet the needs of students or staff. If we keep an open mind for new solutions, there are ways to give our children the free time and space they need.

### **Value of Recess Well Documented**

With the abundance of research and support for recess, it's inevitable that soon recess will be mandated across the nation. Parents will not stand for it otherwise. If we focus on solutions rather than focusing on the problem, the solutions will reveal themselves.

### **Recess Support Documents**

If you still need to be convinced that recess is essential for healthy, vibrant children, here are some documents that may help to convince you.

1. One of the best documents on the topic of the value of recess was put out by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) called, [The association between school based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance.](#)
2. The American Academy of Pediatrics recess policy statement, [The Crucial Role of Recess in Schools.](#)
3. Peaceful Playgrounds has advocacy materials, research, talking points, powerpoint presentation, sample meeting agenda's etc for anyone advocating for recess called, [Right to Recess Campaign.](#)