

WSPTA recognizes the benefits of unstructured play for children and the positive impacts on learning. Recess provides a mental break, and has a positive effect on attention, concentration, and classroom behaviors.¹ Unstructured play is also critical to development of imagination, creativity, conflict resolution and improves the social and emotional learning of all students.^{2,3}

Background

- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends 60 minutes of physical activity daily to improve strength and endurance; help build healthy bones and muscles; help control weight; reduce anxiety, stress, and depression; improve academic achievement; and increase self-esteem for children and adolescents. Recess can help students increase their daily physical activity and contribute to getting the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity each day.²
- In Washington state, there is no clearly defined minimum standard of adequate school recess, but the 2016 Health and Physical Education K-12 Learning Standards confirm that recess cannot be used to meet the requirement of an average of 100 minutes per week of instruction in physical education; that recess should not be viewed as a reward but as a necessary educational support component for all children; and that students should not be denied recess so they can complete class work or as a means of punishment.⁴
- Recent surveys and studies have indicated a trend toward reducing recess to accommodate additional time for academic subjects in addition to its withdrawal for punitive or behavioral reasons.³
- The period allotted to recess decreases as the child ages and is less abundant among children of lower socioeconomic status and in the urban setting.³
- The American Academy of Pediatrics and CDC state that recess is a crucial and necessary component of a child's development and that recess should not be withheld for punitive or academic reasons.^{2,3}

Proposed Solutions

The Washington State PTA shall support legislation or policies that:

- Define a *minimum* of 30 minutes of daily recess time for elementary school students;
- Prohibit recess from being withheld due to academic or punitive reasons;
- Promote schools as an effective and necessary partner in guiding children to meet the CDC recommendation of 60 minutes of daily moderate to vigorous physical activity;
- Specify that recess should be outdoors and primarily unstructured, with contingency plans for inclement weather or other safety concerns.

For More Information

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For more information on the WSPTA advocacy program, please visit our website (www.wastatepta.org)

Citations

1. Centers for Disease Control National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (2014). Health and Academic Achievement
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf
2. Centers for Disease Control and Society of Health and Physical Educators (2017) Strategies for Recess in Schools
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/pdf/2016_12_16_schoolrecessstrategies_508.pdf
3. American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement: *The Crucial Role of Recess in Schools*. *Pediatrics* 2013;131:183–188
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/131/1/183.full.pdf>
4. Washington State 2016 Health and Physical Education K-12 Learning Standards, Appendix B
<http://k12.wa.us/HealthFitness/Standards/AppendixB.pdf>