Recess Moves:
A Toolkit for Quality Recess

Benefits for brains and bodies

Minnesota Department of Education

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Recess Moves: A Toolkit for Quality Recess

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Minnesota Department of Education

Commissioner's Letter

Every day, students throughout Minnesota and across the nation look forward to a unique time in the school day: recess. This important part of the day serves to give children a chance to move out of the classroom and have time to be active and play. Research indicates regular physical activity and play support student's physical, social and mental health and can improve cognitive function. The evidence is clear - healthier students are better learners!

In 2010, the Minnesota Legislature looked at the benefits of recess, resulting in the "Healthy Kids Bill." The bill contains several measures to improve the health, learning and physical activity levels of students in Minnesota schools. To assist schools meet the intent of this law, the Minnesota Department of Education developed the *Recess Moves* toolkit with input from an advisory group. The toolkit provides examples of quality recess practices and policies to encourage all students to increase their activity levels and build social skills, thereby decreasing behavioral issues and potentially increasing academic performance.

The benefits of recess cannot be overstated. For a child, recess is an integral element of their physical, academic, social and emotional development. As educators, our role is not only to help our students succeed academically, but to help them reach their all-around full potential. Recess offers students regular opportunities to practice and improve essential skills such as decision-making and managing emotions that support learning.

We are excited to provide this toolkit, *Recess Moves*, to help children get the most out of recess time and in so doing maximize their learning the rest of the school day.

Sincerely,

Brenda Cassellius

Dr. Brenda Cassellius

Commissioner

1 Introduction

Influenced by an explosion in research documenting the positive impact of exercise on brain function and learning along with the nation's childhood obesity epidemic, the 2010 Minnesota Legislature passed the Healthy Kids Bill which contained several measures to improve the health, learning and physical activity levels of students in Minnesota schools. The legislation authorized the Minnesota Department of Education to develop recess guidelines "that school districts can adopt that promote quality recess practices and behaviors that engage all students, increase their activity levels, build social skills and decrease behavioral issues."

"...promote quality recess practices and behaviors that engage all students, increase their activity levels, build social skills and decrease behavioral issues."

Minnesota Legislature 2010

While some Minnesota schools are already implementing best practices for quality recess, others under pressure to improve test scores perceive recess in competition with instructional time. The result is schools eliminating or greatly reducing recess time and other opportunities for students to be active during the school day. The evidence suggests such practices are counterproductive for students' academic success and well-being. Child development experts identify the cognitive, social, emotional and physical benefits of recess and state that children need a break period following concentrated instruction to be more attentive and improve focus. A recent report by Mathematica suggests recess "may offer one of the most powerful opportunities to strengthen schools, foster healthy child development and boost learning."

Schools can embrace their role in supporting students' physical, social and emotional development in addition to their cognitive growth via policies and practices that intentionally and systematically support the developmental of the whole child. For the elementary school-aged child, play is an essential component of their development which quality recess fosters. Integrating a comprehensive school health or wellness plan into the schools strategic or school improvement plan can help create school environments for optimal learning. Ideally, the school's curriculum and instruction teaches students how their bodies and brains work together, how learning occurs in the brain and the ways in which physical activity helps the brain grow

and enhance learning. These instructional opportunities can cross many content areas including science, language arts, health education, math and physical education. To teach most effectively educators may also need updated training on the neuroscience of learning such as those identified in the Brain-Body Instruction category of our Resources section. As part of a a comprehensive plan for active schools, keep these recommendations in mind for before and after school programs and other alternate settings.

> *"…recess may offer one of the most powerful opportunities to strengthen schools, foster healthy child development and boost learning."*
>
> **Mathematica**

The guidelines and tools developed for *Recess Moves: A Toolkit for Quality Recess* are recommendations, based on research and best practice. They are not mandated. Please note that playground safety is a core recess issue. This toolkit primarily addresses behavioral management issues for recess safety. For essential information on the safety requirements of play areas and playground equipment, please refer to the Playground Safety Handbook.

2 Overview

Fun, safe and active play doesn't happen automatically. Thus, simply giving children and youth time outside isn't providing a quality recess. A 2010 Gallup poll found a majority of elementary principals believed recess had a positive impact on student focus and academic achievement. However, the amount of time for recess has been declining and in schools that still offer recess, playground staff are often inadequately trained and recess lacks the intentional planning needed to support healthy play. Predictably, this often leads to increased behavior problems on the playground. A growing body of research on recess indicates it is time to re-examine this important part of the school day. An April 2012 report by Mathematica Policy Research for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation identified the following positive impacts when a quality, organized recess was implemented in elementary schools:

- Less bullying
- Better behavior and readiness for class learning
- More time for teaching
- Safer schools
- Satisfied teachers

What makes a "quality recess?" A wide range of education and health research identifies some common best practices for elementary schools to include in implementing a "quality recess." The following components are recommended:

- Daily recess for all students of at least 20 minutes. Outdoors preferred
- Teach positive playground expectations
- Create student choice and universal participation by offering multiple activities at every recess
- Map the playground to designate different areas of play
- Provide game equipment to increase participation and to decrease congestion on play structures
- Provide group games, led and supervised by adults, as one option to actively engage kids and help build social skills
- Provide adequate planning and staff training for recess

How to Use this Toolkit

The information, guidelines and tools were created as a resource for schools to assess and improve their recess practices to gain the benefits of quality recess. The first sections of the toolkit offer details regarding the rationale and benefits of quality recess to build interest and educate stakeholders on the positive learning and health outcomes quality recess can provide. Key Recess Moves, our guidelines, identify the essential components of quality recess drawn from research and best practice. The tools and resources that follow provide the 'how to' steps for school recess teams to move through a recess improvement process with greater knowledge of the opportunities and potential barriers to a safe, fun and active daily recess. We recognize there may be local issues that impact implementation. Therefore, the tools can be adapted

based on local needs and resources to develop a tiered or multi-staged implementation that aligns with other school and community initiatives while moving towards a better quality recess.

Establishing a recess team of key stakeholders is an important step to get started, assess the current recess environment and build engagement to create a recess plan. The recess plan involves several key activities that are detailed in the Recess Planning Checklist. Worksheets for ongoing data collection and checklists for staff roles are among the tools included to assist teams in identifying trends and issues that need adjustment in the recess plan.

Stages to Quality Recess

1. Establish a recess team of key stakeholders
2. Collect and assess recess data
3. Develop a recess plan that addresses key recess moves and guidance
4. Implement the recess plan
5. Collect data, evaluate and adapt plan as needed

3 Rationale/Research

Quality recess impacts student learning in a number of ways. First, by increasing physical activity and enjoying a break from instruction, students have FUN and experience better physical and mental health and improved mental focus, mental flexibility and executive function. This translates into increased academic achievement. Second, play allows children to practice and improve essential social skills such as independence and decision-making, managing emotions, building relationships, and constructively handling challenging situations. Third, when children play outdoors they reap another set of benefits from nature including decreased stress, developing their perceptual abilities and stirring their curiosity.

Benefits of Physical Activity

Emerging research powerfully demonstrates the significant and direct relationship between physical activity and learning, showing that sacrificing recess time for increased classroom instruction does not improve academic performance. A comprehensive research report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance included reviews of studies on recess. All recess studies analyzed found one or more positive associations between recess and indicators of cognitive skills, attitudes and academic behavior; none of the studies found negative associations."

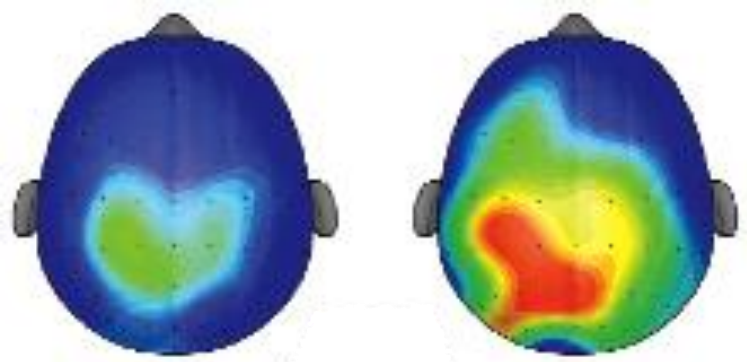
Physical activity increases oxygen supply to the brain and increases new neuron growth, leading to both direct and long-term benefits. "The exercise itself doesn't make you smarter, but it puts the brain of the learners in the optimal position for them to learn" says Dr. John Ratey, at Harvard Medical School and author of *Spark, The Revolutionary New Science of Education and the Brain*. Increased oxygen is accompanied by an immediate uptick in mental sharpness. The additional brain cells that grow over time improve a student's capacity for learning as the same hormones that signal new neuron growth are also associated with improved memory and increased learning rates.

Charles E. Basch, Teachers College Columbia University, in the 2010 report, Healthier Students are Better Learners: A Missing Link in School Reforms to Close the Achievement Gap identified physical activity as one of seven educationally relevant health disparities that impact inequities in student achievement. Dr. John Medina, Director of the Brain Center for Applied Learning Research at Seattle Pacific University and author of *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home and School* identifies exercise as the number one rule to boost brain power. He states "cutting off physical exercise-the very activity most likely to promote cognitive performance—to do better on a test score is like trying to gain weight by starving yourself."

> *"…identified physical activity as one of seven educationally relevant health disparities that impact inequities in student achievement."*
>
> **Charles E. Basch, Teachers College Columbia University**

The 2013 report, [The Wellness Impact: Enhancing Academic Success Through Healthy School Environments](), highlights the research of Dr. Charles Hillman, Department of Kinesiology and Community Health at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Dr. Hillman is using neuroimaging to better understand the relationship between physical activity and processes involved in attention, memory and academic performance in children. His research demonstrates in a very visual way the impact of physical activity on brain function and has important implications for education policy and practice.

Average composite of 20 students' brains taking the same test after sitting quietly or taking a 20-minute walk.



After 20 minutes of **Sitting Quietly**

After 20 minutes of **Walking**

Reprinted with permission of Dr. C. H. Hillman

Thus, when we miss out on moving we miss out on a wide range of benefits, including increased physical and mental health, improved mental focus, flexibility and executive function. Physical activity signals the body to create other hormones and endorphins which help the body fight stress, relieve anxiety, and improve mood. Physical activity can lead to an increased feeling of well-being and optimism. Physical activity is restorative and can recharge students' focus on learning.

Students are better able to focus and better able to stay on task after activity breaks; are able to approach a concept from more than one perspective and find creative solutions; and have increased executive skills such as meta-cognition, reasoning skills and behavioral inhibition. Employees benefit from activity breaks in the same ways and Fortune 500 companies are taking note and introducing physical activity breaks to increase productivity and employee health.

Social-Emotional Benefits of Play

Educators recognize that play is an important way that children learn. Recess offers students opportunities to engage in peer interactions and role play important social skills that support their school success. Play at recess also supports management of stress and allows practice in expressing and coping with feelings.

"My experience is that a well-planned, researched recess program that follows best practices will go a long ways in improving school climate, and supporting student performance in behavior and academics."

Jon Millerhagen, Executive Director
Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association

Child development specialists have researched and examined multiple dimensions of children's play for decades and stress its importance for social and emotional development. Anthony D. Pellegrini, University of Minnesota, has researched and written extensively about the importance of play and recess including *The Benefits of Recess in Primary School* and, *Recess: It's Role in Education and Development* where he identifies the apparent disconnect between education policy and scientific research.

"Recess promotes social and emotional learning and development for children by offering them a time to engage in peer interactions in which they practice and role play essential social skills. This type of activity, under adult supervision, extends teaching in the classroom to augment the school's social climate."

The Crucial Role of Recess in Schools, American Academy of Pediatrics 2013

Quality recess is an opportunity for all students to choose their activities and direct their own play. It is a time of exploration when students learn about their likes and dislikes and have the opportunity to pursue their interests. Students that always participate in organized activities often lack the knowledge and social skills to play independently. At recess students choose which peers to play with and negotiate those relationships. Recess can be a safe and supported opportunity for students to act independently and for them to practice responsible decision-making skills, self-management of emotions, relationship-building and constructive handling of challenging situations.

Benefits of Outdoor Play

Outdoor recess is often a child's favorite part of the school day. It's easy to understand as it provides the opportunity for more and different kinds of play where children can explore their physical abilities, work independently on their social skills, experiment with their environment and make their own choices in a more relaxed environment than the classroom. Research has identified numerous benefits of outdoor play that demonstrate how it can enhance the hard work of instruction going on in the classroom. A 'greening' of the playground to include more natural elements like plants, flowers or a school garden, can further extend student outdoor learning opportunities. The benefits of outdoor play should be of particular interest to education professionals. Time spent in the natural environment provides:

- Improved attention, especially among students with ADD or ADHD
- Reduced stress, anxiety and improved mood
- Improved concentration and focus
- Enhanced curiosity and creative play
- Enhanced problem solving and leadership skills
- Increased physical activity levels
- Opportunities to "Unplug" students from technology
- Development of the next generation of stewards for the earth

Minnesota Children and Nature Connection developed a current research brief, Children and Nature that summarizes the variety of important findings on this topic and can be used to inform staff and families.

Summary

The evidence is clear that recess can offer an enormous number of benefits to students. The key to realizing those benefits lie in a thoughtful planning process similar to other learning opportunities at school. Educators and parents alike know that outdoor recess is good for students and their ability to succeed in school. Working together we can make recess a safe, fun and enjoyable learning experience for all students. This tool kit is your guide to maximize those opportunities so all students can be engaged in safe, active play on the playground and realize all the benefits recess has to offer.

4 Key Recess Moves: Best Practice Guidelines

Schools providing quality recess are intentional about what happens on the playground. They take steps to collect relevant data and create a recess plan that ensures that all kids have the opportunity for fun, safe and active play, every day at recess. Schools that have demonstrated improvements in academic and behavioral outcomes via implementation of quality recess have incorporated several key components into their recess practices. This section includes a brief summary of each quality recess recommendation as well as an overview of the roles and responsibilities required to ensure quality recess implementation is a school-wide effort. Detailed step-by-step guides and implementation checklists for each component are included in Section Six.

Key Recess Moves

1. Daily recess of at least 20 minutes for all students. Outdoors preferred.

Quality recess should be part of a school's larger coordinated school physical activity plan and be only one of many opportunities during the school day for students to be active. Physical Education should be the foundation of a comprehensive school physical activity program, as it is an academic subject that uses state physical education standards. Include a clear recess policy as a component of the school's wellness policies to address physical activity goals, a mandated piece of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. Minimally, the policy should include that recess is at least 20 minutes long and occurs outdoors as often as possible, given the added space and benefits of being outdoors. Many national organizations have endorsed daily recess including the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American School Health Association.

2. Teach positive playground expectations.

Students need to know what is expected of them at recess. Given diverse backgrounds and play experiences, it is important that schools proactively teach students what type of play behaviors are okay at recess. Positive play expectations such as “be respectful,” “be responsible,” and “be safe” allow for a broad variety of play while keeping the nature of the play appropriate for school. It is also important to establish an agreed on and practiced conflict resolution strategy that all students know and is easily used to end disputes on their own such as “rock, paper, and scissors.”

Identifying desired behaviors is the first step in establishing behavior expectations. Identify a handful of core characteristics or qualities the school wants students to exhibit at recess. These expectations should be broad and framed in a positive manner as they will be a foundation for all playground behavior. Teaching positive expectations rather than rules improves the playground climate and encourages good decision-making and thoughtfulness on the playground. While rules often focus attention on what not to do, positive expectations, including concrete behavior examples, focus attention on what is appropriate and encourage children to do what is right. It is important that recess expectations provide a framework to keep interactions respectful.

Teach students these big-picture expectations by providing the rational and using specific examples of the behavior. Incorporating opportunities for students to learn about and practice empathy on the playground can enhance their adoption of positive behaviors. Teach students the expectations at the beginning of the school year and re-teach periodically throughout the year. Considering recess activities change with the seasons, it is useful to teach and re-teach expectations during fall, winter and spring play conditions.

Teaching playground expectations is best done during class time. Teachers should take their class on a “fieldtrip to the playground” to teach the expectations. Teaching with specific examples illustrating the behavior expectations in the context of the playground is important. Students should spend time during their field trip practicing:

- Lining up immediately when the end of recess signal is given.
- Helping with the game equipment and returning it to the designated area when done playing.
- How to use equipment safely and share equipment.
- How to “tag” safely.
- Taking turns.

Additionally, providing a structured way for students to reflect about playground happenings, especially when problem incidents occur, will often stop recess events from distracting from learning when students are back in class.

In combination with the expectations, schools should develop strategies to positively reinforce or reward students who follow expectations and respond to bullying and other harmful behaviors with fair, appropriate consequences. Regular positive recognition increases appropriate behavior. When problem behavior occurs, formative discipline with clear communication about what behavior violates expectations along with consistent

enforcement of the pre-defined consequences is necessary. Consequences should be corrective and support students in learning the desired behavior so students are held accountable but can still reap the benefits of recess. Schools should be proactive in providing additional positive supports for students who struggle. Schools should identify what problem behavior is minor and can be addressed on the playground and what behavior is major and results in immediate office referral.

When a student follows expectations and behaves well, immediate and genuine positive recognition from school staff can increase appropriate behavior levels. Positive recognition can be a high five, thumbs up, or verbal praise such as “nice job jumping rope,” “great work taking turns,” “thank you,” or “I appreciate your respectful behavior/responsible behavior/safe behavior.” Students can also be recognized with leadership opportunities, such as equipment captain, game captain, or line leader.

An Expectation Specifically for the Playground: “Be Active”

While there are many types of playground play, physical activity has a large role in most recess play. Empowering students by teaching the benefits of physical activity is an important part of teaching this expectation. Who wouldn’t want to grow a stronger brain? Activity levels will vary by type of play. While digging in the sand or playing make-believe under a slide may not be as vigorous an activity as a game of soccer, it is developmentally appropriate. Staff should also recognize play when students are actively engaging their imaginations. “No activity” would refer to students who simply sit or stand still during recess, often to socialize. Talkative social students can be encouraged to follow an established walking course and be part of a walking group while they chat.

“A quality recess period each day is integral to the success of students. Research clearly shows that physical activity benefits students physically, socially and emotionally. Schools need to do everything they can to ensure that movement, as part of quality recess, is provided for all students.”

Gary Anger, Principal
Red Pine Elementary School
Eagan, MN

3. Create universal participation by offering multiple activities at every recess.

Students should be able to choose their activity with the expectation that all students actively play the game/activity of their choice. In order to have appealing options for all students, it is important to have a variety of activities of varying levels of intensity, including non-competitive activities. This often means a combination of sport games (soccer, basketball, football), group games (tag, capture the flag, ships across the ocean), equipment games (four square, jump rope, hula hoop), activities (walking club, yoga club, nature discovery club) and active independent play (jungle gym or imaginative play).

Selecting or modifying games/activities to continuously engage all players is another important aspect of universal participation. Many conventional games with lots of downtime have only one or two active positions/roles while everyone else waits their turn, such as kickball. Other games include long periods of waiting or being "out." Also, downtime is an ideal opportunity for students to break behavior expectations. Students won't want to play games where only very few students actually get to do something. Physical Education teachers can help identify effective games and adaptations.

The game adaptations can include having a *heart rate hoop* (a hula hoop laid on the ground) or *heart rate hot spot* (area designated before game begins). Eliminated players must go to the hoop/hot spot and complete a cardio activity in order to return to play. It is best when the activity relates to the game—dance moves, silly cheers or chants, animal or character imitations, etc. Jumping jacks, arm circles, squat jumps all work well. The heart rate hoop is not to punish players with physical activity, but to extend students opportunity to play; it should be viewed as part of the game. Other ideas are to remove elimination, meaning there will never be one final winner. Instead, plan on ending the game differently, for example, by setting a time period.

Encouragement from staff supports universal participation. Students have the choice of what to play. When students aren't playing at all, friendly encouragement from staff can help motivate the start of a game.

Universal participation also means that **all** students receive recess. While it is a common practice, student participation in recess should not be withheld as a punishment or to work on assignments. It is helpful to have a specific policy that prohibits withholding recess. While safety should always be a priority and may be an appropriate reason to withhold recess, playground behaviors which threaten safety are reduced significantly when schools teach playground expectations, provide positive games options and staff effectively supervise. Games and activities may also need modifications to allow engagement for students with disabilities. All students should gain from the benefits of recess and active play with peers, not only the well-behaved, high achieving students.

Alternatives to Withholding Recess

Often the students who would most benefit from physical activity are those who get the least opportunity during the school day. At schools where recess is withheld as a punishment, it is usually a student who has difficulty following directions, staying on task, or interacting appropriately with peers and staff who has recess restricted. These problems behaviors are typically not related to recess, yet recess is withheld.

The practice of withholding recess as punishment can be ineffective for many reasons. Research has shown that punishment is not effective in teaching new skills. To change a problem behavior, a replacement behavior must be taught in its place. Students must be taught what to do differently. If no replacement skills are taught, students will continue their current behavior resulting in the same problems. In addition to teaching student replacement behaviors and the skills to respond differently in the challenging situation, classroom management practices should employ effective consequences. Effective consequences are immediate and relate to the problem behavior. Withholding recess is not an effective consequence. It typically is not immediate and it does not relate to the problem behavior. 60 Alternatives to Withholding Recess provides a variety of strategies to use instead.

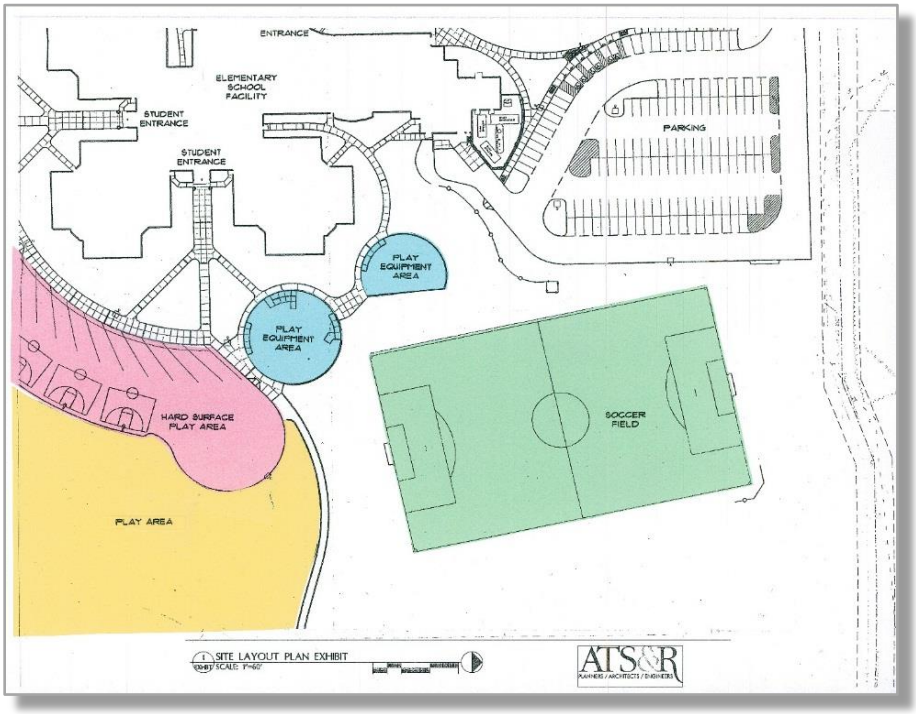
4. Map the playground to designate different areas of play.

Schools vary greatly in the space available for recess. With thoughtful planning, even a school with limited space or facilities can achieve a quality recess. For example, while play structures (jungle gyms) are a favorite, they are often filled to capacity during recess. Often this is because they are the only play option. In contrast, a playground map makes use of all suitable outdoor spaces through a variety of play experiences. Mapping the playground helps ensure that all kids have a safe place to play and that high-energy games don't dominate the playground. This often means identifying different zones for using game

equipment, for group games, and for choice play on the jungle gym area—and the expectations for each. During a quality recess there are a variety of activities happening simultaneously.

Many schools already have some underlying version of playground mapping. It is rarely formally communicated as such, but rather there is an understanding about the way that the playground space is used. Some schools intuitively do a good job of fairly dividing space so that all students have a place to play. However, at other schools, the students decide their use of the space, resulting in playgrounds that are not well-used and may compromise safety. Examples of poorly used recess areas include aggressive games that claim the majority of the space, students who chase equipment into the street, and staff standing far from students.

The goal of a playground map is to provide underlying spatial structure to recess – to fairly create distinct play zones for the different activities so that all students have a place to play, and to ensure each activity is occurring in the safest place. The map provides an underlying foundation so that activities happen in the best available location based on the key considerations of safety, supervision and shared access. The map should be flexible to accommodate changing interests of students and potential changes to the playground environment because of weather conditions. Try to build in a walking route for students who prefer a quieter activity with peers. Keep in mind that this is recess so it is still fine for children to run about between activities.



Site Map Courtesy of ATS&R

The playground map is also helpful to the recess supervisors. Staff can use the map to designate areas for each staff member or trained volunteer to supervise. Ideally, one staff member shouldn't be responsible for more than two adjacent play areas. Playground maps can help reduce the stress of trying to supervise the entire playground, as staff can focus more attention on their designated zones. That said, staff should maintain an awareness of staff in other zones and help when needed to supervise additional areas. When one supervisor's attention is focused on responding to a problem, other supervisors can assist.

5. Provide game equipment to increase participation and to decrease congestion on play structures.

Playground game equipment increases both the variety of playground activities as well as the activity level. Examples of typical game equipment include jump ropes, hula-hoops, bean bags, and playground balls. Students will need initial and ongoing safety instruction on using the game equipment. Using the equipment is a privilege for students that can do so safely and responsibly. Most games using the basic equipment require minimal adult help and thus are games students can play well independently. On the other hand, most equipment games have high equipment to student ratios so it is important to have adequate equipment for students to participate or clear expectations for taking turns.

Basic game equipment should be available every day at the beginning of recess and collected at the end. Students perform better with predictable and consistent structure. Therefore, recess structure is undermined when equipment is only available sporadically. This not only disappoints students, but may leave them without their preferred recess activity, making it more likely they will instead engage in disruptive activities.

Maintaining game equipment takes planning and follow-through on the part of recess staff. Store game equipment in a convenient location (near the playground) to lessen the logistics involved with getting it to and from recess. Using equipment carts or bins are another strategy for quickly and easily transporting the equipment. Engaging a school club or parent group can also be helpful in acquiring and maintaining game equipment.

While staff are responsible for making sure it is available, teaching students to take responsibility for the equipment is the most important step in maintaining it. Without students taking responsibility for the equipment, it is quickly broken, lost, or stolen. Equipment maintenance is an area where student leaders acting as equipment captains can be extremely helpful. They both help with the actual physical collection as well as positively influence their peers in establishing good habits. Incentive systems can also be used to positively recognize students who are responsible with the equipment.

6. Provide group games, led and supervised by adults or older students, to actively engage children and help build social skills.

Group games also increase the variety of options and activity levels of playground activities. Group games need varying amounts of equipment (basic equipment is best) and typically require a minimum of 10 students to play. Recess group games should work outside and require minimal set-up. Where staffing for recess is limited, explore partnership options for expanding playground coverage to lead group games, such as students from higher grade

levels. Older students in school organizations or leadership programs can be trained in playground safety, teamwork, conflict resolution, communication as well as instruction on basic games.

While reviewing rules is necessary before play, group games should be taught to all students before recess so that recess time can be spent actively playing. Adults should help guide the play with more involvement as needed when games are new or for younger students. As games become established, students can lead the play more independently. Strategies for resolving disagreements and returning to play (not being “out” for the remainder of the game) should be included in the game rules.

Examples of popular group games include Ships Across the Ocean, Tag and Freeze Tag games (and tag variations such as Foxes and Hounds), Bears in a Cave (and circle game variations such as Eagles and Sparrows), Spud (and circle ball game variations like Man from Mars), and Soccer (and other sports games such as Touch Football and Ultimate Frisbee). Such games can be used as an adult-led “Game of the Day,” a fun, playground game focused on activity levels, participation, inclusion, and enjoyment rather than competition and winning. A variety of game resources are listed in the Resources section.

Group games are best when their focus is participation, inclusion, and enjoyment rather than competition and winning. While winning can be and is a typical motivation in many games, it shouldn’t be the main goal. Good sportsmanship is critical to successful playground games and should be regularly modeled, recognized and praised by playground staff. While not all teams can win, all students can have a fun experience if good sportsmanship and doing one’s best are the goal.

Group games are also popular because of their social aspect and the structure they can provide. Different games require varying levels of strategy and focus student energy on teamwork, cooperation, and following instructions. Students exercise their bodies and brains with critical thought in shifting perspective, anticipating others’ actions, assessing risk and opportunities, decision-making, and taking appropriate action. Group games are an enjoyable, active, and structured way for students to interact with peers and when successfully employed, can change the entire recess experience for some students.

7. Provide adequate planning and staff training for recess.

A team of key staff fuels a successful recess implementation plan and an active and engaged Principal is essential to oversee the necessary school-wide recess efforts. The recess team includes recess staff as well as representatives from the variety of supporting recess roles highlighted below. Adequate time for planning and data collection improves the recess implementation plan and allows momentum to build. Utilize the recess team's community connections to build partnerships outside the school to support recess needs like equipment, pavement painting or playground volunteer "coaches". Review the major stages of recess planning by using the Recess Planning Checklist in Section 6. Improved training of staff regarding recess is an area of great need.

Just as students need to be taught clear expectations for recess, school staff also needs to know their respective roles. Playground staff need to know the job responsibilities of playground supervision and be trained on effective recess supervision techniques, injury prevention strategies, student engagement and developmentally appropriate play and games. Qualifications for playground staff optimally include some knowledge of child development along with willingness and enthusiasm to engage with students in being active. Principals shouldn't be surprised if there are problems on the playground when the recess staff get little training, support and coaching for this important job. Many Minnesota schools have implemented Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) system. PBIS methods work well in all settings, including on the playground. If your school isn't using PBIS, the positive and proactive approaches of the Active Supervision technique are highly effective on the playground. When implemented well, this supervision technique increases positive interactions between staff and students while decreasing behavior referrals.

The key components of Active Supervision for recess supervisors are:

- Actively move around the playground area.
- Constantly scan the surroundings with eyes and ears.
- Engage positively with students with a goal of having four positive interactions for every corrective action.
- Quickly resolve problems, redirecting students to positive behavior when possible and referring the student to another staff person if the problem cannot be resolved within a few minutes.
- Communicate with other recess staff, classroom teachers, and administration.

These supervision techniques are effective in a variety of non-instructional spaces in addition to the playground, cafeterias, hallways, and on buses (with modifications). Active Supervision not only uses proximity and adult presence to deter problem behavior, it uses this opportunity for staff to connect with students and build positive relationships.

Recess supervisors should focus on students following the game rules, following expectations, managing their emotions, demonstrating caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and constructively handling challenging social situations. Recess supervisors should positively recognize these students—these students are the new winners.

When responding to problem behaviors such as bullying, staff should use formative discipline and redirect the student back to appropriate behavior. Staff should define the problem and give the student the choice between following expectations or a consequence. If the student is cooperative and chooses to follow expectations, they can return to play. If the student is uncooperative, the staff may choose to have the student walk or run for a cool down to allow them time to make a positive choice and then join another activity. If the issue cannot be resolved within a few minutes by either of these options, the student should be referred to another staff person. Referring the student is necessary so that the supervisor can continue to effectively supervise the rest of the students at recess.

Communication is an important part of active supervision that takes place predominantly off the playground. Recess supervisors need to discuss the recess climate, systems, and specific incidents with other supervisors, classroom teachers, behavior specialists, administration, and families if so directed. Recess will improve when the school's staff take time to share, reflect, and assess current recess happenings, then follow through with making plans for addressing the issues and expanding success.

Effective supervision is crucial to recess. Students must be adequately and effectively supervised to ensure safety. All recess supervisors must be consistent in using Active Supervision techniques, supporting recess behavior expectations, stepping in to redirect inappropriate student behavior, and intervening with immediate consequences when behavior cannot be redirected or is of a level that requires immediate intervention. Supervision paired with regular teaching of recess expectations and a variety of fun and appropriate recess games/activities work in combination to support a safe playground.

Recess supervisors also play a key role in assessing changes to recess programming. Collecting data on a regular basis is essential to this process and recess data collection tools are included in Section 6. Beginning a new recess program is an opportunity to come up with benchmarks or rubrics for evaluating recess behaviors/activities. Typically, individuals will have different thoughts on what merits great/acceptable/unacceptable behavior, or what moderate to vigorous physical activity looks like. Generating benchmarks as a team, and then collecting data at least monthly, will help in consistently communicating about and tracking what is happening on the playground, and eventually to look at program effects.

Regular data collection is necessary to identify recess trends. When data isn't regularly gathered, it can't be used in identifying what occurs on days when recess is a success as opposed to what happens that makes recess a challenge. Staff need time to collect and evaluate data. Alternately, consider collecting in-depth data periodically, using outside observers, while having recess supervisors gather basic recess data daily. Additional ideas for gathering data about the recess program would include surveys of students and families, all adults in the school setting and a recess supervisor survey or focus group.

Recess Roles and Responsibilities

Implementing quality recess is a school-wide effort. Every adult in the building, along with outside volunteers, has a role in supporting quality recess. Checklists detailing staff roles and responsibilities are included in Section Six and can serve as self-assessments to guide recess implementation.

Principal/Administration

While a few staff dedicated to recess can make a difference, school administration must lead school-wide planning to implement quality recess. Active engagement of the Principal is essential to support adoption and implementation of school policies for student wellness and quality recess. There are many administrative decisions that are necessary in order for quality recess to flourish and for students to gain recess benefits.

"Research indicates that recess is essential for students to get the movement they need in order to learn. At Park Brook we are intentional with recess but also with before and after school opportunities where students can be physically active. In addition to the academic benefits, students gain physically and socially from recess."

Scott Taylor, Principal
Park Brook Elementary

Recess Supervisors

Recess supervisors are the school's resident recess experts. They know recess or need to be trained as recess experts. It is essential that recess supervisors are onboard and remain open-minded regarding recess changes and follow through on new recess practices as planning for more quality recess progresses. They will need support as their role and job expectations may change with implementation of new recess guidelines.

Physical Education (PE) Teacher

PE teachers are often a school's play experts. A PE teacher's role can expand past the gymnasium to support active play at recess. The PE teacher does not need to be on the playground for recess but their expertise and knowledge will enhance what happens there.

Classroom Teachers

Whether supervising recess or not, classroom teacher engagement is critical to launching and maintaining a successful recess. From teaching the behavior expectations, the activity options and the playground map, getting students to the playground on time and encouraging everyone to be active, the classroom teacher has a direct and important impact on what happens at recess. It is also important to keep in mind the special place classroom teachers hold as important role models for students.

Behavior Support Staff

Behavior support staff often help at recess and respond to problems on the playground. On the playground or not, they can support quality recess. They can be helpful in collecting data on student behavior related to increased physical activity.

While each of the above school staff should assess their roles regarding quality recess via the implementation checklists in the next section, the following groups are allies whose potential contributions should not be overlooked.

School Nurses

The school nurse is important for playground planning and injury prevention through the collection and analysis of injury data. School nurses are also needed for the development of playground first aid protocols.

School Wellness Committee

The school wellness committee members recognize the benefits of being active and are great advocates of healthy play. A helping hand or a round of applause is always appreciated. Wellness team members can:

- Integrate recess into the school's wellness policies.
- Assist with fundraising for recess game equipment.
- Assist volunteers with painting/repainting game markings on the playground.
- Recognize staff who do an exceptional job at recess.
- Write recess updates/success stories for the school newsletter.
- Assist with playground pick-ups—to clean/beautify the school playground.
- Focus a lesson on the benefits of play—could be language arts, visual arts, mathematics, social studies, etc.
- Plan healthy, active events for students, families and community members.

Parents/Families/PTA/PTO

Parents and family members are often recess advocates because they intuitively understand that recess is important to their child's health and wellbeing. Even so, it is important to communicate with them about any recess changes and make them aware of the many benefits kids are receiving from quality recess. They can support recess efforts directly by volunteering at recess and fundraising for recess equipment, and indirectly by teaching and playing recess games at home and supporting playground expectations. In addition, parents and families can:

- Be an advocate for recess on the school wellness committee.
- Volunteer to paint/repaint game markings on the playground.
- Volunteer to pick-up/clean the school playground.
- Practice positive expectations at the playground/park where they play.
- Teach and play the games and activities with their children.
- Support children in practicing the social skills learned in school.

School Engineer

School engineers are often responsible for the physical environment of the playground and maintaining a safe play environment. They can help the recess team by:

- Collaborating with recess supervisors regarding building access scheduling.
- Maintaining a safe playground environment.
- Cleaning and removing litter and graffiti.
- Inspecting playground structures to ensure safety standards are met.
- Collecting and returning recess game equipment found on school grounds.

School Board Members

School board members are important in supporting recess-related policies and resources. They can work to define how recess and physical activity fit within comprehensive school planning. Determine if there is a need to increase awareness and education on the benefits of recess.

Specialists

Support from the entire school makes recess great. Specialists and others at the school can:

- Support or create kick-off week activities.
- Develop lessons focused on the benefits of play—could be language arts, visual arts, social studies, mathematics, science, etc.
- Encourage active play/be a play advocate.

5 Additional Considerations for Quality Recess

Safety of Playgrounds and Playground Equipment

The safety of playgrounds and playground equipment is critical for quality recess and is not specifically addressed in this toolkit as it is covered elsewhere. This important area has specific regulations and requirements that need to be addressed in a school's Health and Safety Management Plan. The recess team should include staff with this specialty knowledge or consult with them in their planning. Funding for certain playground costs can be covered through the Healthy and Safety levy per Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.57 subdivision 6. Specific requirements regarding playground safety are referenced in the Consumer Products Safety Commissioner's current guidelines that can be found in the Resources Section.

Recess Before Lunch

Recess Before Lunch (RBL) is a change from the traditional lunchtime schedule that allows students to be active at recess first, before coming inside to eat a healthy lunch. With a RBL schedule, students go directly outside to recess to be physically active, play games and have fun. At the end of recess, students go to the cafeteria for lunch. Depending on the number of students, students may be dismissed in groups spread a few minutes apart to minimize long waits in line. Students will need to clean their hands before eating. With RBL, teachers pick up their students from the cafeteria rather than the playground. The transition to the classroom from the cafeteria is often easier for students as they return to the classroom ready to learn and teachers don't lose instruction time calming the students down.

Studies have shown that students who have recess first tend to eat more nutrient rich foods, such as milk, fruits and vegetables. With the Recess Before Lunch schedule, it has been found that students eat 24 percent more food by weight, eat 8 percent more calories, consume 13 percent more vitamin A, consume 35 percent more calcium, and waste 30 percent less food by weight (National Food Service Management Institute, 2003).

Students' behavior at lunchtime also improves with RBL. "The health reason is important, but the reason why we have recess before lunch is that it helps with student behavior," states an administrator from Mahalo, Hawaii schools (Healthy Hawaii Initiative, 2009). Schools notice improved student behavior on the playground, in the cafeteria and in the halls. The atmosphere in the cafeteria is greatly improved because students are more settled and calm after they have had the opportunity to be active. Behavior problems in the cafeteria decrease.

Schools in Hawaii have also noticed increased recess participation with RBL. "More students get recess now because they aren't misbehaving in the cafeteria. That used to be a big problem," says a Mahalo, Hawaii school teacher (Healthy Hawaii Initiative, 2009). Because students go directly to recess, less time is lost waiting for students to quiet down and line up in the cafeteria. Most children don't get the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity, so every extra minute gained during recess is valuable.

Tips for Recess Before Lunch

- Allow adequate time for students to eat lunch to improve healthy eating and improve cafeteria atmosphere. Schedule time for hand-washing for health and safety.
- Encourage students to eat their fruits and vegetables. A little encouragement can go a long way in helping students establish healthy eating habits.
- Following mealtime schedules is especially important with RBL. Teachers should be on time when picking students up in the cafeteria. Late pick up no longer means extra recess. Students will be ready to return to the classroom and focus on learning. Consider going to recess early or adding an extra recess to the class schedule to extend recess time.

Active Recess Indoors In the Event of Inclement Weather

Students and staff can go outside across the range of much Minnesota weather with appropriate clothing. Plan ahead and communicate with families to assure students come prepared to be outdoors for recess. Some schools include outdoor wear on the list of school supplies and also collect, clean and reuse lost outdoor clothing at the end of each season. If the temperature or wind chill moves too far in the wrong direction, staff can create an indoor recess to be fun and beneficial too. Establishing a policy on when recess will be held indoors due to inclement weather will make it clear to all what the expectations are. Keep these elements a part of indoor recess plans:

- Whenever possible, indoor recess should happen in a gymnasium or other large area where students can have the space necessary for active play.
- The gym can be mapped in the same way as the playground; with areas for large group, small group and quiet activities. A diagram of the area should be distributed ahead of time to all recess supervisors, so that when there is indoor recess staff and students know what to expect.
- If large areas are unavailable, consider setting up the classrooms in a manner that enables easy movement within the classroom for an indoor activity break. Classroom activity breaks are another great way to get students moving. A simple Internet search for “active classrooms” turns up a variety of opportunities to make movement fun. Some of these are noted in Section Seven on Resources.
- Consider arrangements that facilitate viewing videos that lead students in physical activity routines, such as Instant Recess videos, or kids-focused aerobic routines. The Resources Section of this document provides a sampling of these.
- Ensure students are aware that playground expectations and rules apply to the indoor recess location.

Pavement Painting: An Easy Way to Renew Old Pavement

Playground painting is a fun and easy way to facilitate active play and increase options at recess. Game markings encourage play and make the playground appear more welcoming. Research on using game markings as part of a strategy to increase the variety and number of games has found that activity levels increased with the addition of pavement markings and murals. Be creative by including game lines that are flexible and can accommodate a variety of play are best (for example, four square grid also works for switch, clock face also works for

circle games, US map can host a variety of play.) Using painted murals and mazes where space permits will also increase play opportunities.

Simple preparation is needed to prepare the pavement for painting—sweep or blow the surface clean of any debris, dirt or sand. A sealant coat can be applied before painting to help with paint adhesion, although most often paint is applied directly to clean pavement. Use paint designed for marking exterior pavement. This paint usually comes by the quart or gallon as well as in inverted spray cans specifically designed for lining.

Plan ahead: when planning the number, type and location of game markings, be sure to use the playground map to determine the best location. Once the painting begins it is very difficult to relocate/reorient the marking, so designs should be marked in chalk, masking tape or with stencils before painting. Stencils are a great tool and allow for all sorts of shapes or letters and provide professional looking results. Masking tape and stencils both provide a crisp edge to the painted design and are easily removed once the paint is set. If you can't find the right stencil for your design, consider asking the art teacher for assistance.

Playground painting is a great way to involve the community in improving your school and helps to speed up the process. With enough helping hands the project will be a blast. Playground painting is a great volunteer or service-learning project as it provides a great sense of accomplishment and pride for the volunteers. Other groups that could help with painting include:

- PTA/PTO
- Local businesses-many encourage employees volunteers/service project
- Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts or park board groups
- Religious organizations
- Fraternity/Sororities
- Civic organizations or neighborhood associations
- Service learning classes (older grades)
- Before/after school groups (older grades)

Minimal equipment is needed. Consider asking local businesses to donate the supplies. If using oil based paints, be sure to obtain enough disposable gloves and brushes for all volunteers.

Communication and Marketing

As in any school-wide undertaking, changing long-standing recess practices will require thoughtful and timely communications. Managing communication among staff will be very important during the planning phase. When close to implementation, developing a rollout plan with your recess team can include staging your launch over a period of days. In addition to informing and getting school staff onboard, efforts to inform students and families about recess changes are also essential. Keeping information upbeat and targeted to each stakeholder builds awareness and positive expectation. Whenever possible, include students in identifying key recess messages and promoting the new recess plans and rules. Unleash their creativity by writing stories, making recess posters or videos. Multiple communications with families will also be helpful to build support and make a smoother transition.

When you are ready to launch the new recess it is advisable to plan a fun kick-off event or week with activities building excitement each day. Special recess activities can include fun recess

facts on morning announcements, school assemblies, students doing a fun instant recess dance video together, having a special speaker, or doing something one classroom at a time. School staff can get in the fun and come up with some very creative ideas. Make it fun and a special time for students and staff.

Evaluation

Data collection and evaluation need to be ongoing efforts to implement and maintain a safe and active recess. Regular review of recess data identifies both the areas of strength and challenge on the playground. Modifications of recess rules or practices can then be made in a timely manner. Sharing positive recess trends and successes can further enhance recess efforts.

6 Quality Recess Planning and Implementation Tools

The table below describes which tools correspond to each of the key recess components.

Recess Component	Planning/Implementation Tool
Daily 20-minute recess for all students, outdoors preferred	1 Model Policy Template for Quality Recess
Teach positive playground expectations	2 Step-by-Step Guide to Plan and Teach Positive Expectations
Create universal participation by offering multiple activities at every recess	3 Student Engagement Checklist for Recess
Map the playground to designate different areas of play	4 Step-by-Step Guide to Map the Playground 5 Playground Assessment Worksheet
Provide game equipment to increase participation and to decrease congestion on play structures	6 Game Equipment Checklist
Provide group games, led and supervised by adults, to actively engage kids and help build social skills	7 Step-by-Step Guide to Create a Recess Game Book
Provide adequate planning and staff training for recess	**PLANNING AND DATA COLLECTION** 8 Recess Planning Checklist 9 Recess Observation Tool 10 Monthly Reflection for Recess Supervisor **ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES CHECKLISTS** 11 Principal/Administration 12 Recess Supervisors 13 PE Teachers 14 Classroom Teachers 15 Behavior Support Staff

The following pages include the checklists, worksheets, and step-by-step guides to plan and implement each component of the quality recess guidelines described above.

QUALITY RECESS IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

1 Model Policy Template for Quality Recess

Having a clear recess policy keeps expectations clear and increases accountability. This sample can be used as a template for your school. (Key components to include are bold)

DAILY RECESS. All students will have at least **20 minutes per day** of **supervised** recess **scheduled before lunch**, to be held whenever possible **outdoors**, during which our school will encourage moderate to vigorous physical activity through the **provision of space and equipment, trained staff and widely shared and supported expectations** to be responsible, respectful, safe, and active.

Daily recess is a component of our overall physical activity plan and **does not replace PE**. Our staff and administration will do everything possible to **avoid withholding recess** as a punishment or as a time to complete schoolwork.

This **complements our physical activity plan** which discourages extended periods of inactivity (i.e., periods of two or more hours). When activities, such as mandatory school-wide testing, make it necessary for students to remain indoors for long periods of time, we give students periodic breaks during which they are encouraged to stand and be moderately active.

Related School Wellness Policy Information

Schools that participate in the national school meals program have mandated requirements for school wellness policies stemming from the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 and the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. These requirements include healthy school policies with goals for physical activity and a plan to measure them. Schools that have successfully embraced the impact of physical activity on learning have made these wellness goals a part of their overall school improvement plan as well.

A Recess Position Paper is available from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education. Further information on recess-related policies are in the Resources section.

> *"Recess offers a wonderful opportunity for children, especially elementary school students, to be active and creative and provides a healthy release from some of the stresses they may be facing in class and at home. It gives children a chance to practice important social skills, such as cooperating, taking turns, and getting along with others. Students should be able to play games during recess that require them to run, hop, skip or jump and be physically active."*
>
> School Wellness Policy and Practice: Meeting the Needs of Low-Income Students

2 Step-by-Step Guide to Plan and Teach Positive Expectations

Step 1 Identify the desired recess behaviors.

- Identify three to five broad expectations that embody the desired behaviors, such as “Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Active”
- Consider specific expectations for when students explore plants/insects/wildlife present on the playground

Step 2 Positively frame each expectation.

Step 3 Teach the expectations in the recess environment.

- Provide a rationale for each expectation
- Provide examples of expected behaviors
- Provide examples of non-expected behaviors
- Using the playground map, teach expected types of play in different areas

Step 4 Teach about equipment safety.

- Teach using student participation, such as role-plays

Step 5 Teach and re-teach the expectations throughout the year.

- Post the expectations around the school and near the playground

Step 6 Incorporate “Positive Playground” strategies.

- Follow “Active Supervision” guidelines of four positives for every one corrective interaction
- Positive reinforcement includes:
  - State to students specifically how they are following expectations, taking turns, trying new games, working on motor skills, being friendly
  - High-five/fist bump for students sharing equipment, collecting/helping with equipment, helping other students
  - Awarding student leadership roles such as line leader status, equipment helper, game leader/co-leader, time keeper, help in developing activity ideas
  - Naming “recess all-stars,” providing points/tickets if your school has a token system, awarding lunch with friends/lunch with teachers, awarding extra recess or other privileges for students following expectations

Step 7 Build a positive playground via classroom instruction.

- All adults encourage active play and teach students the expectations and social skills to help make recess better. Ideas include:
  - Having a poster contest, poetry jam, or invent a recess dance or cheer
  - Students can be given class time to make recess game equipment like chalk or bean bags
  - Create lesson on physical activity and its positive impact on the brain
  - Create lesson where students invent or modify a recess game to be more fun/active
  - Create a lesson emphasizing playground expectations and social skills in the context of recess

Step 8 Plan consequences for problem behavior.

- Use corrective consequences for minor problem behavior
- Use referral as a consequence for major problem behavior
- Proactively provide additional positive supports when needed
- Consistently enforce consequences
- Avoid withholding recess as a consequence (unless safety is at risk)

3 Student Engagement Checklist

List of considerations for engaging all children during recess play. (Mark to indicate completion)

Key Practices for Engaging Students

In choosing playground activities:	No	In Progress	Yes
1. We provide several options for students to play and active by offering a variety of activities each day.			
2. We choose games where everyone has an active role.			
3. We strategize about how to deal with elimination, either by adapting a game to have little or no waiting time for returning to play or by having “heart-rate hot spots”.			
4. We choose age-appropriate games that are challenging enough to maintain student interest.			
5. We avoid having too many games with one winner.			
6. We develop variations to keep games interesting, active and challenging. (More “its,” more games with smaller teams.)			
7. We seek student input to ensure we use games students consider to be fun.			
8. The games we choose are easy for children to learn, set-up, and stay positive and active.			

Key Practices to Maintain Positive, Active Student Engagement

Instead of withholding recess:	No	In Progress	Yes
9. We regularly teach and re-teach behavior expectations.			
10. We teach and re-teach specific examples of desired behaviors.			
11. We positively recognize students who follow expectations.			
12. We teach all students specific strategies for self-calming and problem-solving.			
13. When students are having trouble, we analyze what types of situations cause misbehavior and role-play alternatives.			
14. We reward students who adopt positive replacement behaviors.			
15. We use effective consequences and avoid reinforcing problem behavior.			
16. For students not following game rules, we use the “heart-rate hot spot” or other active break area.			
17. We encourage students to change roles, positions or teams if they are having trouble.			
18. We partner students having trouble with a recess leader who is able to follow the game rules.			

Tips

- Map should be simple, yet dimensionally accurate and easy to understand
- Use color to help with understanding
- Use technology if available and take advantage of technologically skilled staff
- Use free graphic software, such as GIMP, or use Word or PowerPoint
- Use multiple layers to be able to move, layer, group or reorder multiple objects

Step 1 Assess the current playground space to identify available space, equipment, and safety concerns.

- Assemble key recess-related staff to provide multiple perspectives
- Complete the Playground Assessment Worksheet

Step 2 Carefully consider what you want to include in the playground map. Possibilities include:

- Play zone for choice/imaginative play on play structures
- Play zone for stationary equipment games
- Convenient equipment borrow/collection point
- Play zone for mobile equipment games
- Play zone for group games which are easily supervised
- Quiet activity zones
- Heart rate hot spot(s): area(s) near the group game area for cardio activities where students complete an activity in order to return to play/group game
- Zones for other activities your student body enjoys

Step 3 Create a basic map that represents the playground geography including all permanent fixtures.

- Start with a site plan map from the school's architect or an aerial map found online (e.g., via Google Earth)
- Working with the map, mark the different areas of the playground
  - Mark grassy/field, paved, garden, wooded and sand/wood chip areas, sidewalks/pathways, and the school building each in an appropriate color
  - Result should be a spatially accurate and understandable overhead view
- Add the permanent playground fixtures
  - Painted game markings and basketball hoops
  - Physical boundaries like fences
  - Shrubs or trees, especially if they impact sight lines for supervising students
- Mark the perimeter/outermost boundary of the playground area
  - Include as out-of-bounds any areas that are always difficult to supervise, such as behind a dumpster or outbuilding
  - Make use of natural landmarks when possible
  - Use spray chalk, paint or cones to illustrate boundaries when landmarks aren't available
  - Mark smaller areas for younger children who need closer supervision

  - Consider creating a roughly 10-foot out-of-bounds area between the school buildings and playground to stop students from playing next to windows
- Complete the map by including a scale marker, compass and legend
- Save a version to share as a jpg or PDF, as this basic map is unlikely to change

Step 4 Create an activity-mapped version by identifying the different activity zones and boundaries. Schools may have multiple activity-mapped versions depending on student age, interest in different games and areas available by season.

- Start with the basic playground map
- Plan the best way for playground space to be used
- Map the various activity areas
  - Game equipment area**,** including a distribution and collection point
    - This area will be a hub of activity. Place it in an area convenient for bringing equipment in and out but not interfering with the school doors
    - Ensure students are not allowed to bring game equipment into the play structure area
    - Mark a larger and different area for playground ball games, ideally far enough away from the building to avoid balls ending up on the roof or breaking windows
    - Include four-square area as a transition area as it is localized to the game grid
    - Mark smaller area for stationary games such as jump ropes or hula hoops
  - Group games area
    - Attempt to have this area be a grassy field. If this area is a paved surface, adapt playground expectations appropriately to ensure safety
    - Cones can supplement/establish group game boundaries that vary by game
    - If space is limited, the group game and ball equipment play areas may be the same but scheduled on alternating days
  - Other areas
    - Mark quiet activity zones, possibly including a yoga or stretching zone
    - Mark walking circuits or ‘walk and talk’ paths, often around the perimeter
    - Mark a science/nature discovery zone

Step 5 Print large posters of the activity-mapped versions to be posted near the playground.

- If posters are laminated, play areas or changes can be marked directly on the map
- Create electronic PDF or .jpg versions that can be projected for the class when teaching expectations

5 Playground Assessment Worksheet

Looking objectively at the playground environment helps schools to identify strengths and plan for addressing areas of need. *(Mark to indicate needs.)*

Equipment and Safety Assessment

Playground Equipment	Great Condition	Acceptable Condition	Needs Attention or Repair
1. Swings			
2. Monkey bars			
3. Slides			
4. Other			

Describe problems:

Describe plan to address problems:

Markings on Playground	Great Condition	Acceptable Condition	Needs Attention or Repair
5. Basketball court			
6. Four-square			
7. Hopscotch			
8. Other			

Describe problems:

Describe plan to address problems:

Overall Safety	Great Condition	Acceptable Condition	Needs Attention or Repair
9. Playground areas are visible and easily supervised			
10. Equipment is free of vandalism and graffiti			
11. Trash receptacles are easy to access			
12. Windows are at a safe distance			

Describe problems:

Describe plan to address problems:

6 Game Equipment Checklist

List of considerations to optimize the use of game equipment. *(Mark to indicate completion)*

Key Game Equipment Practices

Game equipment policies and planning:	No	In Progress	Yes
1. We have labeled all equipment with permanent marker.			
2. We teach game equipment expectations before giving it out and re-teach expectations for new equipment.			
3. We offer different equipment based on age as appropriate.			
4. We allow students to challenge themselves with equipment, while keeping playground safety the priority.			
5. We provide enough equipment for all interested students.			
6. We teach expectations about sharing and trading equipment when there is not enough for everyone.			
7. Game equipment is available at the start of every recess.			
8. We have a quick and easy system of equipment check-in and out.			
9. We have a clear signal for game equipment collection time.			
10. We collect and store game equipment after every recess.			
11. We give positive reinforcement to students who promptly stop play and return equipment.			
12. We use student helpers to increase efficiency and scan the playground to ensure no equipment is forgotten on return.			

Key Game Equipment Practices

Game equipment maintenance:	No	In Progress	Yes
13. We have assessed the costs/benefits of grade/recess level versus school level equipment sharing.			
14. We have a convenient storage location which makes daily retrieval of equipment easy—large bins, wheeled carts, etc. ,			
15. Our game equipment is stored in a secure storage area, which limits its unauthorized use and reduces distraction.			
16. All staff who need to access securely stored equipment have the combination or key.			
17. Student helpers are used to help transport equipment only in ways that are safe and within their abilities.			
18. Student helper roles are perceived positively and can be used as an incentive and leadership opportunity.			
19. We successfully establish expectations that everyone is invested in maintaining equipment for longer use.			

7 Step-by-Step Guide to Create a Recess Game Book

An invaluable tool for recess supervisors is an extensive game book -- a book listing recess games approved and selected by the school. There are dozens of instances where one game goes by many different names uses different equipment, has different versions, or may even be a game by the same name with completely different rules. A book of the specific games (and rules) that you plan to play at your school gets everyone on the same page. In addition to the games and activities, include your school's expectations and the playground map.

The recess game book is a resource to expand the play at your school. It should contain both games that students are already familiar with as well as games that the school would like to introduce. When selecting games to include, consider if the game is a good fit for recess – is the equipment available? Is the set-up simple? Can it be played or adapted to play within the recess time frame? And does it or can it be adapted to have continuous play to actively engage students?

Game book entries can be recorded using the following template. A detailed game should need no more than one-half page of space as more would indicate that the game is too complicated to fit recess needs. It's OK to start small, with a half dozen age-appropriate games per grade. Add a few more each quarter/semester to build the play options. Don't overlook including recess activities such as a walk and talk path, yoga/stretch zone, jump rope, and hula-hoops.

Game category:	
Name:	
Age/grades:	Equipment:
# Players:	Setup:
Rules:	
Return to play:	

Steps To Organize Your Game Book

Once you have ample entries ready, use the following for easy set up.

Step 1 Decide the order to list the games.

- Grouping similar games together by category (for example, list circle, tag, sports and equipment activities together).
- Within groups, consider grouping by grade or equipment needs rather than by name, depending on what will best suit your needs and how well recess staff know the names of the game.

Step 2 Grow in increments.

- Make plans for your recess book to grow. Decide a method for new submissions, possibly an online form like a Google docs form, with established timeframes for when new game and activity submissions will be evaluated, planning for at least

two times per year. Accumulate new games and activities to increase the play options and increase participation.

- Consider involving the student council in the process.
- Communicate when new games are added and update all electronic and hard copies.

Step 3 Include the PE teacher when choosing games.

- Starting with games from PE class means students already know the games.
- Ask PE teachers for other good game ideas.
- Ask PE teachers to help with game updates or modifications to create “recess versions” of games, especially to increase physical activity levels.

Step 4 Take advantage of other resources.

- Ask before and after school programs if they have games to contribute. Complete the loop by sharing the completed recess book with the afterschool staff. Ask that they also use the same positive expectations and rules as during recess.
- Use a pre-existing game book as a launching point. Game books are available online, as are commercial game books focused on cooperative play.
- Consider tools or approaches that will support collaboratively working on the game book. Store it in a shared location so that all team members can access it, or use Google docs to make it available online to a team for editing.
- Consider asking a school volunteer for help with the data entry.

Step 5 The game book—both physical and electronic.

- Maintain a master electronic version of the game book.
- Enables teachers to project the game rules using an interactive whiteboard, or to print off additional paper copies when needed.
- Post the electronic version of the game book for families to view on your school’s website.
- Update your online recess information with games that are the focus for that month/quarter.
- A hard copy may be the most practical for recess supervisors, although it could also be accessed via smartphone or iPad.
- A three ring binder can easily accommodate more games over time.
- Keep a few copies in the media center for students to access.

Step 6 Use the book! A planning tool.

- Recess supervisors and teachers use game book to plan recess games and activities. Planning for recess includes identifying group games and also equipment activities (hula-hoop, jump rope, etc.).
- Scheduling ahead is necessary so that new games can be taught to students.
- Coordinate with classroom and PE teachers so all students know how to play and thus have the choice to participate in the highlighted recess group game or equipment activity.
- Equipment activities are those that students can play independently with little adult assistance and don’t need to change (i.e. jump rope can always be a play option).
- Group games will typically need more adult help for the game to be successful.

- Rotate group games based on how long it takes for students to play successfully (and relatively independently) as well as how long a game holds student interest.

Step 7 Use replacement games for popular but inappropriate recess games.

- Only include games that are approved for recess.
- If deciding to prohibit a popular game, be sure to clearly communicate this restriction to everyone, students and staff alike.
- Use replacement games that are a recess version of the original game where the rules have been modified to make it recess appropriate.
- Example 1: Replace dodge ball, which eliminates players, may cause injuries and equipment is easily lost, with a recess version where players form a circle and roll balls at the feet of the players in the middle. Middle players run the perimeter of the circle when hit to return to play and the game positions are rotated using a timer. Adding more balls increases the challenge and fun for everyone.
- Example 2: Replace touch football with the game "5 catches." In "5 catches," one team must successfully pass the ball to all 5 (or more) players on a team without being intercepted. When intercepted, the possession changes and play continues by the other team. The focus is on communication, teamwork, and participation – everyone gets to be the quarterback.

Step 8 Include a Chapter on Game Adaptations/Modifications for Children with Disabilities *(Adapted from Play to Learn: Active Play through Systematic Supervision)*

Make adaptations to games that allow all children to play with their peers, including children with disabilities. Students with a disability can set personal goals that focus on their ability, not their disability. In planning program modifications, consider equipment, skill complexity, the rules of the game and the space in which the activity takes place.

Consult with your building or district Developmental Adaptive Physical Education teacher, Special Education teacher or whoever is the most appropriate resource at your school about possible game adaptations. Often they can share adaptations that are effective with specific students that allow them to better integrate into recess play. When adapting the activities, modify the games so that the inclusive version is the children's first experience with the activity. Adapted activities will increase student success and provide greater opportunity for independence.

Possible adaptations to games or game equipment

- Use lighter, softer, larger balls to slow the game and allow more time to prepare for executing a skill.
- Choose shorter, lighter bats and racquets which give greater control for those with less arm length.
- Choose larger or lower goals or target areas to reduce the number of misses and make it easier for everyone to succeed.
- Substitute bean bags for balls to make catching and throwing easier for participants with limited use of their hands.

- Partially deflate balls for dribbling and kicking activities to slow the movement and allow players more time to prepare.
- Using a smaller play area makes it easier for players of all skill levels to participate and be in on the action.
- Consider having a different starting or finishing point for the player with a disability to make the competition more equal.
- Choose a function on the team that requires less or more mobility such as a pitcher, a goalie or a designated foul shooter.
- Reduce the number of players on each team to increase the participation of each player.

Possible adaptations for skills

- Wheeling for running.
- Rolling a ball off a lap for kicking.
- Striking a soccer ball with a floor hockey stick instead of a foot.
- Have players drop the ball and catch it rather than asking that they bounce it consecutively.
- Use props to enhance the player's skills, for example, using a towel can extend a player's reach in a game of tag.
- When playing hopscotch, someone in a wheelchair can toss the marker while a friend hops.
- A visually impaired student can be guided verbally through the markings. Others can direct games.

8 Recess Planning Checklist

The school recess team can use this checklist to identify and track key stages of the recess implementation plan.

Quality Recess Planning Activities	Date When Complete
Quality recess policies and procedures developed and adopted by administration	
Playground maps developed and ready to share	
Playground expectations for staff and students developed and ready to share for:	
■ Play structures/jungle gym	
■ Equipment area	
■ Group game area	
■ Other (out of bounds, walk and talk, yoga, etc.)	
■ Recognizing/rewarding positive behavior	
■ When and what types of consequences to use	
Recess schedules are ready:	
■ Ready for next month, plan in place for when future schedules will be shared	
■ Schedules include rotating group games	
■ Schedules include everyday games, including equipment games	
Plan for maintaining recess game equipment developed and ready	
Plan for including student leadership opportunities developed and ready:	
■ Regularly rotates student leadership privileges	
■ Awards/privileges for exhibiting desired/improved recess behavior	
■ Intentionally includes strategies for giving leadership roles to students who might not otherwise have those opportunities	
Plan for ongoing data collection and tools are developed and ready	
Kick-off week activities are planned and ready:	
■ Daily group games are planned for recess	
■ New game equipment available daily at recess	

Quality Recess Planning Activities	Date When Complete
■ Tickets, recognition and student leaders will be prominent	
■ Additional staff and volunteers available at recess to introduce new games, participate	
■ Administrator will be on the playground at recess	
■ Classroom lessons will introduce the new recess program, including expectations, map, rules for this week's group game and equipment games	
■ Daily announcements will emphasize recess kick-off	
■ PE classes will provide support with game instruction	
■ Classroom lessons will incorporate information about physical activity and brain-body connections that support learning	
■ Classroom lessons will include social skill building around conflict resolution or problem-solving incorporating recess-relevant scenarios	
■ Information about the new recess program is shared with parents and other community stakeholders	

9 Recess Observation Worksheet

Name of Observer: Date:

Location and Weather Conditions:

Recess Period: Time Recess Starts: Time Recess Ends:

Number of Supervisors: Number of Supervisors Arriving on Time:

Number of Students/Classes: Number of Students/Classes Arriving on Time:

Number of Inactive Students: Number of adults facilitating:

Description of Inactive Students (Grade, Gender, Reason for Inactivity)

Daily Game Equipment Data	Time available/ Time started?	# available/ # able to play	# of students playing
1. Type 1 (e.g., hula hoops)			
2. Type 2			
3. Type 3			

List Planned Games

Group Games	Time available/ Time started?	# available/ # able to play	# of students playing
4. Game 1			
5. Game 2			
6. Game of the day (name:_____)			

Equipment used:

Active Supervision Data	Yes	No	N/A
7. Visible positive interactions with students			
8. Observable ratio of four positive for every one corrective interaction			
9. Students successfully redirected to appropriate behavior			
10. Supervisors actively observing all areas			

Injury & Behavioral Incident Data

Name of Student:

Describe Injury or Behavior:

Activity Preceding Incident:

Result (circle one):

Health Office Referral Redirected behavior Active time-out Office referral

Other notes:

10 Monthly Reflection Worksheet for Recess Supervisor

During the past month:

1. **The activity level on the playground has been** (circle one):

   High Moderate Low

2. **The most popular activities have been:**

3. **The most popular game equipment has been:**

4. **The climate on the playground has been mostly** (circle the word from each line that best applies):

Cooperative	Competitive	Tense	Friendly
Inclusive	Exclusive	Fun	Boring

5. **Students have shown respect toward others** (circle one):

   Usually Sometimes Rarely

6. **Games or activities that went well include:**

7. **Games or activities that caused problems include:**

8. **Playground areas that have been problematic are:**

11 Principal/Administration: *Recess Roles & Responsibilities Checklist*

Key Recess Practices *(Mark to indicate completion)*

Decisions about recess schedule:	No	In Progress	Yes
1. We have daily, 20-minute, outdoor recess.			
2. There is adequate time for student and staff transition to recess.			
3. Recess is scheduled before lunch.			
4. We have trained recess supervisors.			
5. We have an adequate plan for absences/back-ups for our recess staff, including well-trained back-up staff.			
6. Near grades/ages are scheduled together for recess.			

Key Recess Practices

Decisions about recess expectations:	No	In Progress	Yes
7. I participated in creating recess expectations/rules.			
8. I support the system of positive recognition/rewards for students who follow expectations.			
9. I support the system of responses/consequences for students who do not follow expectations.			
10. I have implemented a school policy of not withholding recess, other than when safety is a concern.			

Key Recess Practices

Decisions about recess activities:	No	In Progress	Yes
11. I support acquiring/maintaining game and playground equipment.			
12. I participate in creating and approving recess maps.			
13. I participate in creating and approving recess games/activity options.			
14. I utilize the expertise of PE staff in identifying the best games/activities for recess.			
15. As part of larger school emergency response and student safety plans, we have two-way communication between recess supervisors and the school office and an emergency response plan for playground incidents.			

Key Recess Practices

Decisions about recess supervisors:	No	In Progress	Yes
16. I ensure adequate time for recess supervisor training.			
17. I ensure time and resources are dedicated to recess data collection and analysis.			
18. I ensure time and resources are dedicated to plan for recess activities.			
19. Recess supervisors are expected to engage in “Active Supervision” to ensure student safety.			

12 Recess Supervisors: *Recess Roles & Responsibilities Checklist*

Key Recess Practices *(Mark to indicate completion)*

I have received the following recess trainings:	No	In Progress	Yes
1. Active Supervision			
2. Positive Recess Expectations			
3. Recess Activities - playground map, school game book			
4. Positive interactions with students			
5. Playground safety and emergency preparedness			

Key Recess Practices

I regularly implement the following key Active Supervision practices:	No	In Progress	Yes
6. I move about the playground area scanning with eyes and ears to stay aware of recess happenings and ensure student safety			
7. I positively engage with students			
8. I quickly and respectfully redirect/resolve problems			
9. I communicate with other supervisors, teachers, administration and families			

Key Recess Practices

I regularly implement the following key Recess Expectations practices:	No	In Progress	Yes
10. I plan positive recognition for students following expectations			
11. I plan consequences for students not following expectations			
12. I aim to redirect students to appropriate behavior			
13. I avoid using time-outs and inactivity as consequences			

Key Recess Practices

I regularly implement the following key Recess Activities practices:	No	In Progress	Yes
14. I collaborate with classroom & PE teachers on activities schedule			
15. I use strategies to actively engage all students			
16. I use a playground map to guide location of student activities			
17. I facilitate group games			
18. I maintain game equipment			
19. I use student helpers to assist with game equipment			
20. I make game equipment available daily at the start of recess			
21. I collect game equipment daily at the end of recess			
22. I communicate clear expectations about the safe and responsible use of game equipment			

Key Recess Practices

I regularly implement the following key Data Collection practices:	No	In Progress	Yes
23. I objectively assess what is successful and what needs addressing			
24. I regularly assess recess behavior trends			
25. I regularly assess recess injury trends			
26. In collaboration with others, I identify strengths and make plans to address areas needing improvement			

Key Recess Practices

I regularly implement the following key practices to ensure student safety:	No	In Progress	Yes
27. I know the school's emergency response plan			
28. I use 2-way communication with the school			
29. I observe the environment for potential hazards and respond promptly if found			
30. Students know to alert me of items discovered on playground			
31. I ensure students are dressed for the weather and stay hydrated			

13 PE Teachers: *Recess Roles & Responsibilities Checklist*

Key Recess Practices *(Mark to indicate completion)*

I have:	No	In Progress	Yes
1. Shared information on games students learn in PE class (name of game, rules & grades who have learned them.)			
2. Advised on games that would be good additions to the school's recess game book.			
3. Suggested recess modifications for games as necessary such as: ■ Ensuring continuous/no elimination play where players are not eliminated but instead have ways to quickly to reenter the game. (out = inactivity) ■ Increasing physical activity levels to actively include all players by having fewer players per team, more teams, more "its," more equipment, less waiting.			
4. Shared strategies with recess supervisors and classroom teachers on effective game instruction.			
5. Learned and used social skills vocabulary consistent with what classroom teachers and recess supervisors use.			

Key Recess Practices

I have taught the following concepts in PE class and shared the information with recess supervisors and classroom teachers:	No	In Progress	Yes
6. Sportsmanship concepts (supports social skills development)			
7. Common game practices and vocabulary (start signal, stop signal, roles/positions, tagging, pursuing, evading, boundaries, goals, points)			
8. Game names and rules			
9. How to self-organize and regulate play			
10. Leadership skills via the use of student helpers/leaders			

14 Classroom Teachers: *Recess Roles & Responsibilities Checklist*

Key Recess Practices *(Mark to indicate completion)*

As behavioral support staff:	No	In Progress	Yes
1. I teach students recess expectations.			
2. I re-teach recess expectations on a regular basis.			
3. I check with recess staff for specific examples or expectations to emphasize.			
4. I teach students social skills, regularly and proactively, using the playground as the context when appropriate.			
5. I incorporate examples of specific recess incidents, as needed, to build on social skills teaching.			
6. I share the social skills vocabulary with recess supervisors, specialists and others so all adults in the building use consistent language.			
7. I teach students recess games and activities, in collaboration with recess staff based on the recess activity schedule.			
8. I teach the playground map so students know where different activities and games are permitted.			
9. I ensure students arrive to recess on time.			
10. I avoid withholding recess as a behavior management tool.			
11. I encourage all children to play actively.			
12. I help maintain game equipment.			

Key Recess Practices

As someone who understands how play/activity can enhance learning:	No	In Progress	Yes
13. I consider ways to add games and activities to my instruction.			
14. I know the more opportunity students have to play together, the better they become at these skills.			
15. I expand my knowledge of “energizer” activities that create an active learning environment.			
16. I know about and use the Responsive Classroom games focusing on cooperative play.			
17. I believe that games and activities motivate and engage students, and build a safe and welcoming classroom community.			

15 Behavior Support Staff: *Roles & Responsibilities Checklist*

Key Recess Practices *(Mark to indicate completion)*

As behavioral support staff:	No	In Progress	Yes
1. I proactively teach positive playground expectations.			
2. I positively engage with students regarding recess.			
3. I encourage participation in games and activities.			
4. I acknowledge or recognize when expectations are followed.			
5. I teach specific examples of appropriate behavior.			
6. I don't assume students willingly or purposefully break behavior expectations. Instead, I teach and re-teach specific examples of how to follow recess expectations in the future.			
7. I only withhold recess when playground safety is a concern.			
8. I find active ways to enforce consequences, such as having a student walk with the recess supervisor for a portion of recess.			
9. I work with recess supervisors to limit access and privileges in ways they are able to implement.			

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RESOURCES

Academic Success and Student Health

The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance

Healthier Students are Better Learners: A Missing Link in School Reforms to Close the Achievement Gap

Student Health and Academic Achievement

The Wellness Impact: Enhancing Academic Success Through Healthy School Environments

What School Administrators Can Do to Enhance Student Learning by Supporting a Coordinated Approach to Health

What School Boards Can Do to Enhance Student Learning by Supporting a Coordinated Approach to Health

Adaptive Games/Practices

Adapted Games and Activities: From Tag to Team Building by Pattie Rouse

Creative Play Activities for Children with Disabilities by Lisa Rappaport-Morris and Linda Schulz

Games for People with Sensory Impairments by Lauren J. Lieberman and Jim F. Cowart

Brain-Body Instruction

Neuroscience For Kids

Six Tips for Brain-Based Learning. Edutopia

The Essential Neuroscience of Learning: What Every Educator Needs to Know and Teach Students. An ASCD webinar by Judy Willis

Behavior/Systematic Supervision

PBIS Information for parents

PBIS Information on Recess click on link, then enter “recess” in search field

Play to Learn: Active Recess Through Systemic Supervision

Games

Recess Games Resources

Play to Learn: Active Recess Through Systemic Supervision

Playworks Game Book

Ultimate Playground and Recess Game Book

General

Action for Healthy Kids

Active & Healthy Schools Program

Alliance for Healthier Generation

Fuel Up To Play 60

Let's Move! Active Schools

Peaceful Playgrounds

Indoor Recess/Active Classrooms

Brain Breaks

Energizers

Instant Recess

Just-A-Minute (JAM) School Program

TAKE 10! ®

Outdoor Play

Children and Nature

Outdoor Play

Policy

Action for Healthy Kids School Wellness Policy Tool

Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn. Part D. National Association of State Boards of Education

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Promoting Health in Minnesota Schools: "No Punishment or Reward" Policies. Public Health Law Center

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School Wellness Policy and Practice: Meeting the Needs of Low-Income Students

Safety of Playgrounds

Public Safety Playground Handbook

Staff Training

Active Supervision for Recess

Ready for Recess: Changing Policy and Practice to Support Students' Physical Activity Webinar

Get Your School Ready for Recess! Webinar