

## **Recess and Physical Activity: Impact on Student Health, Academic Performance, Social and Emotional Development**

January 2020

### **Background**

“Recess is critical, say experts in childhood development. Recess is a period of the school day set aside for the physical, social, and cognitive pursuits that can’t otherwise be achieved in the sit-down-and-shut-up environment that is an elementary school classroom. But this respite from organized learning is not only available for what the students are doing on the playground. It is equally as vital for what they are not doing, namely math, reading, or science.”

Excerpt from [The Best Schools](#).

Best Schools. “The Death of Recess in America. ”TheBestSchools.org, 15 Jan. 2019, [thebestschools.org/magazine/death-of-recess/](http://thebestschools.org/magazine/death-of-recess/)

### **Texas Education Policies Related to Physical Activity**

[Texas Education Code 28.002\(1\)](#) Physical Education: A school district shall require a student enrolled in full-day prekindergarten, in kindergarten, or in a grade level below grade six to participate in moderate or vigorous daily physical activity for at least 30 minutes throughout the school year as part of the district’s physical education curriculum or through structured activity during a school campus’s daily recess. To the extent practicable, a school district shall require a student enrolled in prekindergarten on less than a full-day basis to participate in the same type and amount of physical activity as a student enrolled in full-day prekindergarten.

A school district shall require students enrolled in grade level six, seven, and eight to participate in moderate or vigorous daily physical activity for at least 30 minutes for at least four semesters during those grade levels as part of the district’s physical education curriculum. If a school district determines, for any particular grade level below grade six, that requiring moderate or vigorous daily physical activity for at least 135 minutes during each school week. Additionally, a school district may as an alternative, require a student enrolled in a grade level for which the district uses block scheduling to

participate in moderate or vigorous physical activity for at least 225 minutes during each period of two school weeks.

[Texas Education Code 28.004\(1\)](#) School Health Advisory Council –  
“The local school health advisory council shall consider and make policy recommendations to the district concerning the importance of daily recess for elementary school students. The council must consider research regarding unstructured and undirected play, academic and social development, and the health benefits of daily recess in making the recommendations. The council shall ensure that local community values are reflected in any policy recommendation made to the district under this subsection.”

## **Research on Recess and Physical Activity**

### **1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

#### **Recommendations: 2019**

“Recess is a regularly scheduled period in the school day for physical activity and play that is monitored by trained staff or volunteers. During recess, students are encouraged to be physically active and engaged with their peers in activities of their choice, at all grade levels, kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Recess benefits students by:

- Increasing their level of physical activity.
- Improving their memory, attention, and concentration.
- Helping them stay on-task in the classroom.
- Reducing disruptive behavior in the classroom.
- Improving their social and emotional development (e.g., learning how to share and negotiate).”

Excerpt from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

“Recess.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 29 May 2019,  
[www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/recess.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/recess.htm)

### **2. Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE)**

#### **2017 Recommendations: Strategies for Success**

“This document, Strategies for Recess in Schools, describes strategies for planning and providing recess in schools to help increase

participation in physical activity and improve academic achievement (e.g., performance, behavior, attention). The audiences for this document include state and school district leaders that provide technical assistance and professional development on recess, physical education teachers, classroom teachers, recess and playground supervisors, support staff, school administrators, parent-teacher organizations, school health coordinators, school health advisory councils, parents, and anyone interested in supporting recess in schools. While each of these representative groups may have different roles and responsibilities in garnering support for and implementing these strategies, involvement of all groups is important.”

Excerpt from [SHAPE America](#).

Strategies for Recess in Schools, Center for Disease Control, 2017, [www.shapeamerica.org/uploads/pdfs/recess/SchoolRecessStrategies.pdf](http://www.shapeamerica.org/uploads/pdfs/recess/SchoolRecessStrategies.pdf)

### **3. Education Week 2018: 7 Things to Know about School Recess**

“Recent U.S. education reform has focused on defining and raising the subject-matter standards students are expected to meet. In order to get their students up to snuff, schools are extending the school day and putting more and more emphasis on academic learning, which can squeeze out a beloved part of the traditional school day—recess.

#### **What Time Is Recess?**

In most schools, recess is the only time in the school day reserved for outdoor and mostly unstructured play. It typically occurs once or twice in the day, often just before or after lunch. The length of recess is rarely mandated at the state level. In some schools, it’s as short as 15 minutes, in other it lasts up to 45 minutes. Some schools have eliminated it altogether.

#### **Is Recess Important?**

For many, recess conjures memories of hopscotch or monkey bars. But whether or not recess plays a critical role in the mental, physical, emotional, and academic development of children has been a topic of much research and debate.”

Excerpt from [Education Week](#).

Riser-Kositsky, Maya. "7 Things to Know About School Recess." Education Week, 14 May 2019, [www.edweek.org/ew/issues/school-recess/index.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/school-recess/index.html)

#### **4. Brookings Institute 2017: A New Way to Measure the Benefits of School Recess**

"The full spectrum of play, from make believe to soccer, can contribute to healthy child development. Play helps students develop socially, emotionally, physically, and academically. During play, students learn and practice important skills, such as cooperation, conflict resolution, respect for others, and self-regulation. Some adult support is needed to facilitate safe and healthy opportunities for all kids to play, and then the adults can step back and allow the play to unfold."

Excerpt from [Brookings](#).

Cushing, Elizabeth "A New Way to Measure the Benefits of School Recess." Brookings, Brookings, 10 Feb. 2017, [www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/02/13/a-new-way-to-measure-the-benefits-of-school-recess/](http://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/02/13/a-new-way-to-measure-the-benefits-of-school-recess/)

#### **5. American Academy of Pediatrics 2013: The Crucial Role of Recess in School**

"Just as physical education and physical fitness have well-recognized benefits for personal and academic performance, recess offers its own unique benefits. Recess represents an essential, planned respite from rigorous cognitive tasks. It affords a time to rest, play, imagine, think, move, and socialize. After recess, for children or after a corresponding break time for adolescents, students are more attentive and better able to perform cognitively. In addition, recess helps young children to develop skills that are otherwise not acquired in the more structured classroom environment."

Excerpt from [Pediatrics](#).

Health, Council on School. "The Crucial Role of Recess in School." American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Pediatrics, 1 Jan. 2013, [pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/131/1/183](http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/131/1/183)

## 6. Pathways to Family Wellness 2010: Why Kids Need Recess

“More and more, parents are protesting school policies that allow teachers and administrators to withhold recess to punish student misbehavior. Common infractions include tardiness, acting out in class and failure to complete homework—everyday childhood behaviors that result in numerous children having to go without recess on any given day.

The research is clear. Children need recess. Recess benefits every aspect of childhood development—physical development, of course, but also social, emotional and intellectual development as well.”

Excerpt from [Pathways to Family Wellness](#).

“Why Kids Need Recess.” Why Kids Need Recess/ Children’s Health & Wellness, [pathwaystofamilywellness.org/Children-s-Health-Wellness/why-kids-need-recess.html](http://pathwaystofamilywellness.org/Children-s-Health-Wellness/why-kids-need-recess.html)

### Considerations

Given the increasing incidence of obesity, diabetes, and other health concerns including social emotional issues among children and youth, and considering a review of existing research concerning the benefits of physical activity for all domains of child development, the Texas School Health Advisory Committee (TSHAC) acknowledges the need to inform communities, parents, educators and young people about the benefits of engaging in regular physical activity and the dangers of not doing so.

Research supporting the positive benefits of physical activity and play on the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional health and development of children and youth has led to the following considerations of the TSHAC:

- **Parents** have a significant role to play in striking balances for their children between structured activities and free play, between passive and active entertainment, and between physical and sedentary activities;
- **Schools** have a significant role to play in providing opportunities for students to engage in structured (physical education class) and unstructured physical activity (recess) on a daily basis. Providing structured and unstructured physical activities throughout the school day has a positive impact on students’ academic performance by

reducing disruptive behaviors in the classroom, and enhancing social and emotional development;

- **Communities** have a significant role to play in providing the infrastructure of playgrounds, parks and athletic facilities; security measures and supervision; and financial support to allow all citizens to develop physically healthy habits.

---

This document was developed by the TSHAC. For additional information about the committee, go to the [TSHAC Home Page](#). External links to other sites appearing here are intended to be informational and do not represent an endorsement by DSHS. These sites may not be accessible to people with disabilities. For information about any of the resources listed, contact the sponsoring organization directly. For comments or questions about this publication, contact the School Health Program at (512) 776-7279 or by email at [SchoolHealth@dshs.texas.gov](mailto:SchoolHealth@dshs.texas.gov). Copyright free. Permission granted to forward or make copies in its entirety as needed.