

Supporting Scheduled Recess

Position Statement

NASN POSITION

It is the position of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) that regularly scheduled recess during the school day should be regarded as a childhood right that is necessary for the optimal health and educational growth of all students, and that recess should not be withheld for any student. The registered professional school nurse (hereinafter referred to as school nurse) bridges health and education and can apply leadership and collaborative skills to advocate for equitable policies that support scheduled recess and reject withholding recess (NASN, 2016, 2020). Safeguarding scheduled recess is important for promoting the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development of all students.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Scheduled recess provides students with a supervised break from instruction during the school day. Opportunities for unstructured physical activity and peer interaction are essential for healthy physical and emotional growth and development for students at all grade levels (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 2016; Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2022; London, 2019). Breaks from academic work during the school day serve to enhance cognitive processing for both younger children and adolescents (AAP, 2016). Ideally, recess should occur in a safe, well-equipped outdoor area that is intended for recreation (Action for Healthy Kids, 2023a). If weather is inclement or use of outdoor space is not feasible, alternative comparable recess activity time should take place indoors (Action for Healthy Kids, 2023b).

Recess not only contributes to positive physical, social, emotional gains, it also contributes significant academic benefits (London, 2019, Action for healthy kids, 2023a; Hodges et al., 2022; Carriedo & Cecchini, 2022). Given the importance to overall development of the whole child, recess should be regarded as a necessary, inherent right of all school-age youth, and not a conditional privilege or reward (Burson & Castelli, 2022; London, 2019). Therefore, recess should never be shortened or eliminated from the school day for any reason except for student safety.

A growing number of states have enacted legislation requiring daily recess. While specifications for recess frequency and duration vary between states, legislative support promotes greater equity in opportunities for scheduled recess for students in these states (Clevenger, et al., 2022; National Association of State Boards of Education, n.d.). However, in other states, recess time could be replaced with academic work time. Eliminating or minimizing recess could have a negative impact on student achievement (AAP, 2016). Evidence shows that time spent in recess does not detract from academic achievement (Burson & Castelli, 2022). In actuality, recess may have a positive impact on students' attitudes, behaviors, and ability to remain on-task with academic tasks (Burson & Castelli, 2022). "Recess and academic time should not be viewed as competing priorities, but rather complementary to children's overall development" (Thalken et al., 2022, p. 6).

In some school settings, recess could be withheld as a disciplinary consequence, though no published research justifies this practice (London, 2019). Many national organizations strongly advise that recess not be withheld from students as a behavior management strategy. Physical activity as a form of punishment and/or behavior management is ineffective and can create negative associations with physical activity (Advancing IDEAS for Health and RMC Health, n.d.). The Society of Health and Physical Educators has asserted that withholding recess "is inappropriate and constitutes an unsound education practice" (SHAPE America, 2021, p. 2). Further, students should not be excluded from participation in all or part of recess because of negative effects on health (Carriedo & Cecchini, 2022).

Robust policies can have a significant impact on promoting and implementing scheduled recess and preventing actions that revoke recess (Thalken et al., 2022). School nurses are uniquely positioned to apply leadership and

collaboration skills to advocate for equitable school, district, and state-level policies that uphold and safeguard scheduled recess time. These school nursing actions are critical to supporting the right of all school age youth to have regular opportunities for scheduled recess that enhance student health and educational development.

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