Advocate for More Recess
If your school does not offer recess, does not meet the recommended 20 minutes a day or allows recess to be withheld as a form of discipline, start a campaign to bring it back. Check out Playworks and Peaceful Playgrounds for campaign resources.

Advocate for Better Recess
An effective recess program should include:
• Enough trained adults to enforce safety rules and prevent aggressive, bullying behavior
• Enough space, facilities and equipment
• A physically safe environment

Advocate for Active Recess
Sometimes called “structured recess,” this is a planned and actively supervised recess period where:
• Students engage in organized “play” or games that emphasize turn-taking, helpfulness, rule following and emotional control
• Each game or activity has pre-set rules that the entire school population follows
• Older students may be trained to help lead activities for younger students

The benefits of active recess include reduced bullying, better behavior and easier transitions from recess to learning. The goal is to get all students moving and engaged. Staffing can be one of the biggest barriers to implementing an active recess program. Parents can volunteer to lead activities and supervise at recess. Schools can always use help in this area. Make sure parent volunteers receive training — either from school staff or other experts. Playworks offers trainings and a free, online “playbook” with hundreds of games and activities.

Principals agree...
• Four out of five principals report that recess has a positive impact on academic achievement.
• Two-thirds or principals report that students listen better after recess and are more focused in class.
• Virtually all believe that recess has a positive impact on children’s social development (96%) and general well-being (97%) 1.

Playground Design
Playground enhancements can help decrease safety concerns and promote increased activity. When you’re ready to revamp your playground, check out KaBOOM! and Peaceful Playgrounds for playground improvement guides, planners, blueprints, stencil sets and fundraising support.
Recess for Better Health

Advocate for Recess Before Lunch

Just as it sounds, this is the practice of switching school schedules so that students play at recess first, then eat lunch. Kids tend to eat a better lunch if they’ve already had their time on the playground, leading to less waste, better behavior and better performance in the classroom. Although major schedule changes can be challenging, many schools are doing it successfully and reaping many benefits. Visit the HealthierUS School Challenge, Peaceful Playgrounds and Game On for resources.

Make Your Recess Inclusive

When planning your recess program, give special consideration to children with particular physical activity needs and those who are at risk for a less active lifestyle, including children with chronic illnesses, physical and other disabilities, as well as those who are overweight. Most activities can be modified to ensure that all students can enjoy the benefits. Check out SPARK PE for inclusive recess strategies.

Recess for Secondary Students

According to some teenagers, recess is for younger kids! So Apex Middle School students in North Carolina don’t have recess, instead they have 12 minutes after lunch called “Blacktop Time.” The PTA painted the blacktop to mark out various activities to inspire more movement, and adults are around to encourage participation. Panther Creek High School in North Carolina offers SMART Lunch, an extended, single lunch period for all students. Students spend half their time eating lunch and half their time participating in a variety of activities, including rotating sports activities that are set up in the gym. Your school could also include active video games, yoga or exercise videos.

Resources

Fuel Up to Play 60: fueluptoplay60.com
GameOn: ActionforHealthyKids.org/GameOn
KaBOOM: kaboom.org
Playworks: playworks.org
Peaceful Playgrounds: peacefulplaygrounds.com

Action for Healthy Kids® is a nationwide grassroots network mobilizing school professionals, families and communities to take actions that improve school foods, nutrition education, physical activity and physical education for all students. Through funding opportunities, expert technical assistance, and our flagship program, Game On, Action for Healthy Kids supports schools in becoming healthier places where children thrive.

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