



Promoting Health in Minnesota Schools:

RECESS

As society becomes more aware of and concerned with children's health issues, communities are turning to schools to provide a school environment that promotes both healthy eating and physical activity.¹ School policies supporting healthy eating and physical activity are an important component of school efforts to promote the health and well-being of school children. Good nutrition and physical activity "contribute to improved academic performance, attendance rates, behavior, and lifelong health and well-being."² Recess policies can encourage children to be more active by supporting physical activity during the school day.

What is recess?

Recess is typically a break period of 20 minutes or longer when children can engage in unstructured free play.³ Recess provides a break from classroom activities during the school day, allowing children to have more autonomy to engage in the activities they choose.⁴ Recess is generally included as part of the school day for elementary school children, whereas junior high/middle schools and high schools tend to use organized sports and physical education to achieve physical activity goals instead of recess.⁵ However, some middle schools and high schools also provide unstructured free periods for students several times per week.⁶ Some schools also provide structured supervision during recess to increase physical activity levels by teaching children new games and encouraging every child to participate.⁷

Why is recess important?

The American Academy of Pediatrics identifies three overarching benefits to a recess break during school.

1. *Cognitive and academic:* Children who participate in either indoor or outdoor recess are more productive and attentive in class and behave better in the classroom.⁸
2. *Social and emotional:* Children who are allowed to play and interact during recess develop important communication and coping skills such as cooperation, problem solving, and self-control.⁹ Recess can also serve to foster relationships among students, create youth involvement opportunities, and teach conflict resolution.¹⁰
3. *Physical:* The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that children and adolescents get 60 minutes of moderate- or vigorous-intensity physical activity throughout the day.¹¹ This activity should include muscle strengthening, bone strengthening, and aerobic activity and can be pursued at school,

home, or both.¹² Schools can take advantage of recess as an opportunity to help children reach the recommended 60 minutes of daily activity.¹³

Many children are not given sufficient opportunities to be physically active during the school day, making it more difficult for them to achieve the recommended amount of daily physical activity.¹⁴ Nationwide, less than one-third of all children ages 6 to 17 engage in daily “vigorous activity” – physical activity that lasts at least 20 minutes and makes the child sweat and breathe hard.¹⁵ Recess periods are seen as one way to help reverse this trend.¹⁶

How long should recess be?

The country’s largest physical and health education professional organization, the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (AAHPERD), recommends that children in elementary school have a daily recess at least 20 minutes long in addition to 150 minutes per week of physical education.¹⁷ The corresponding recommendation for children in middle and high school, which does not include a recess component, is 225 minutes of physical education per week.¹⁸ AAHPERD also recommends outdoor recess when possible; research shows that children who participate in outdoor play have more active imaginations and creative play, lower stress levels, and are in better physical shape.¹⁹

Is the time of day when recess is scheduled important?

The time of day recess is scheduled can make a difference. Research has shown that scheduling “Recess Before Lunch” (RBL) can be particularly beneficial.²⁰ When recess is scheduled after meals, students may not finish the meal served because their attention is on getting outside, resulting in wasted food and hungry children. Pre-lunch recess can also stimulate children’s appetites, helping them eat a full, balanced meal in the cafeteria.²¹ In addition to improved nutrition, children who have RBL behave better in the cafeteria, classroom, and on the playground, and gain the benefit of increased time for socializing over a slower-paced and more relaxed lunch.²²

Do any federal or Minnesota laws requiring recess or RBL exist?

No. However, the 2010 Minnesota Healthy Kids Bill encourages the Minnesota Department of Education to develop recess guidelines to promote quality recess.²³ The Recess Guidelines will be released in the fall of 2013. In addition, the Minnesota Department of Education is developing a Healthy Schools Awards Program that will recognize K-12 schools for implementing policies and practices that give students opportunities to be physically active throughout the day (and support healthy food and beverage choices).²⁴

Does the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA)²⁵ Model Wellness Policy²⁶ address recess or RBL?

No, not directly.

Do any other MSBA policies impact recess programs?

Yes. The MSBA has several model policies that are relevant to recess, including:

- 510 (School Activities)
- 514 (Bullying Prohibition)
- 525 (Violence Prevention)
- 807 (Health and Safety)

How can Minnesota schools incorporate recess into a school wellness policy?

The following language can be incorporated into a school board policy that follows the MSBA’s model. This language can also be individually tailored to fit into a school board policy that does not follow the MSBA’s model policy.

Addition to the MSBA School Wellness Policy

III. GUIDELINES

A. Foods and Beverages

1. Scheduling: Schools will schedule recess or physical education before lunch in order to increase food consumed, decrease plate waste, and improve cafeteria behavior.

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D. Physical Activity

4. Physical Activity Generally:
 - a. Physical activity will be integrated into the main school day.²⁷
5. Recess:
 - a. All students will have at least 20 minutes per day of supervised recess, preferably outdoors, during which moderate to vigorous physical activity is encouraged from pre-kindergarten through grade five or six.²⁸
 - b. Schools will provide staff to lead and supervise recess.²⁹
 - c. Teachers will teach students active games for recess time.³⁰ Schools will offer a variety of games, including non-competitive activities, during each recess period to ensure that universal participation is achieved.³¹
 - d. Schools will proactively teach and encourage positive recess behavior throughout the school year.³²
 - e. The use of facilities for recess activities will not interfere with instructional classes; separate locations will be used for each activity.³³
 - f. Schools will avoid scheduling recess back to back with physical education classes whenever possible.³⁴
 - g. Recess will not generally be used for instructional makeup time.³⁵

What other ways can Minnesota schools support recess and RBL?

In Minnesota, the superintendent is responsible for implementing and enforcing school board policy. Superintendents issue protocols, procedures, and guidelines to help implement the school board's policies. The following language can be incorporated into existing guidelines. However, as school boards and superintendents may adopt more specific or general guidelines based on their needs and goals, policy language can be interchangeable with the guidelines listed below.

Recess Guidelines

- Students will be provided with daily opportunities to be physically active during a recess period.³⁶
- Recess will be offered outdoors, weather permitting. If outdoor recess is not advised due to weather, air quality, or other considerations, recess will be provided indoors. Children should be permitted to play outdoors provided that the wind chill or temperature is above ___°F and the heat index or temperature is below ___°F. Children should be dressed appropriately for weather conditions. Air quality risk should be determined by the local authorities or smog alerts.
- Recess and unstructured time will complement, not substitute, physical education classes.³⁷
- Teachers will lead structured group games to actively engage all children and help build social skills.³⁸
- Teachers are encouraged to schedule additional recess periods or other activities suggested by students as alternatives to celebrations involving food.³⁹
- Preschool, kindergarten, elementary, and middle schools will have safe playgrounds, recreational facilities, and other equipment available for free play.
- Lunch-time recess will be scheduled before the meal.
- A student's participation in recess or other unstructured time will not be denied as a form of discipline or punishment, or used for instructional makeup time."⁴⁰
- Recess will be supervised by adults to enforce safety rules and prevent injuries. At least one adult trained in first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and infection control will always be available when students are present on school grounds to respond to injuries and medical emergencies. Supervising adults will be informed of any medical limits impacting the participation of individual students in physical activity. Such information will be treated with strict confidentiality.⁴¹

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Endnotes

- ¹ See, e.g., *Local Wellness Policy: A Guide for Development*, MINN. DEP'T OF EDUC. 5 (2005), available at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/cdrr/nutrition/docsandpdf/localwellnesspolicy.pdf>.
- ² *School Wellness Policies*, IDAHO DEP'T OF EDUC., <http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/cnp/wellness/> (last visited Apr. 29, 2013).
- ³ *Quality Recess Guidelines*, MINN. DEP'T OF EDUC. 3 (2013).
- ⁴ Olga S. Jarrett, *Recess in Elementary School: What Does the Research Say?*, ERIC CLEARING HOUSE ON ELEM. AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUC., CHILDREN'S RESEARCH CENTER, UNIV. OF ILLINOIS, ED466331 3 (July 2002), available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/ERIC-ED466331/pdf/ERIC-ED466331.pdf>.
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- ⁶ See, e.g., *Developing a Recess Plan*, CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS 3 (May 2011), available at http://www.cps.edu/News/Press_releases/Documents/DevelopingSchoolRecessPlan.pdf; Martha Irvine, From Pets to "Recess": High School Stress Relief, Minn. Public Radio (Feb. 3, 2013), <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2013/02/03/education/high-school-stress-relief>; *Photos: High Schools Attempt to Address Student Stress*, PIONEER PRESS (Jan. 31, 2013), <http://photos.twincities.com/2013/01/31/photos-high-schools-attempt-to-address-student-stress/?repeat=w3tc> (scroll through photos for description of recess at Chanhassen High School).
- ⁷ *Recess Rules*, ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUND. 3 (Sept. 2007), available at <http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/web-assets/2007/09/recess-rules> [hereinafter *Recess Rules*].
- ⁸ Robert Murray et al., *The Crucial Role of Recess in School*, 13 PEDIATRICS 183, 184 (2013); *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: Chapter D: Policies to Promote Physical Activity and Physical Education*, NAT'L ASS'N FOR SPORT AND PHYSICAL EDUC. 39 (last updated 2012), http://www.nasbe.org/wp-content/uploads/FHRTL-D_Physical-Activity-NASBE-November-2012.pdf [hereinafter *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn*].
- ⁹ See *Understanding the Difference*, *supra* note 18.
- ¹⁰ *Recess Rules*, *supra* note 7, at 10.
- ¹¹ *Children's Physical Activity Drops from Age 9 to 15, NIH Study Indicates*, NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (July 15, 2008, 4:00 PM), <http://www.nih.gov/news/health/jul2008/nichd-15.htm>.
- ¹² *How Much Physical Activity Do Children Need?*, CENT. FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREV. (last updated Nov. 9, 2011), <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/children.html>.
- ¹³ See *id.* See also David Bassett et al., *Estimated Energy Expenditures for School-Based Policies and Active Living*, 44 Am. J. Prev. Med. 108, 111 (2013); *Recess Rules*, *supra* note 7, at 6.
- ¹⁴ See *Physical Activity Facts*, CENT. FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREV. (last updated Feb. 19, 2013), <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/physicalactivity/facts.htm>; *Increasing Physical Activity through Recess*, ACTIVE LIVING RESEARCH 1 (Jan. 2012), available at http://www.activelivingresearch.org/files/ALR_Brief_Recess.pdf.
- ¹⁵ *Let's Move in School: Get the Facts*, AMER. ALLIANCE FOR HEALTH, PHYS. EDUC., REC. AND DANCE, <http://www.aahperd.org/letsmoveinschool/facts.cfm> (last visited Apr. 29, 2013).
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- ²⁰ See *NFSMI Best Practice Checklist: for School Nutrition Professionals Implementing or Assessing Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools*, NAT'L FOOD SERV. MGMT. INST., UNIV. OF MISSISSIPPI 1 (Nov. 2008), <http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20090508013951.pdf>.
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²³ *Active Recess*, MINN. DEP'T OF HEALTH (Mar. 14, 2012), available at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/healthreform/ship/techassistance/activerecess031412.pdf>.

²⁴ MINN. STAT. § 124D.955 (2013); this initiative had not yet been operationalized at the time this resource was released.

²⁵ LEAGUE OF MINNESOTA CITIES, HANDBOOK FOR MINNESOTA CITIES 17:14 (2012), available at <http://www.lmc.org/media/document/1/chapter17.pdf> (“The Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) supports, promotes and enhances the work of public school boards. MSBA is a private nonprofit organization that provides technical assistance; cost-saving programs; and advocacy, training, research, and referral services for all of Minnesota’s public [school members]. Membership in MSBA is voluntary.”).

²⁶ *MSBA/MASA Model Policy 533: Wellness*, MINN. SCHOOL BOARD ASS'N & MINN. ASS'N OF SCHOOL ADMIN. (2010).

²⁷ *Integrating Physical Activity into the Complete School Day*, NAT'L ASS'N FOR SPORT AND PHYS. EDUC., available at <http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/publications/teachingtools/upload/pa-during-school-day.pdf> (last visited May 22, 2013).

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³⁰ *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn*, *supra* note 8, at 34.

³¹ *Quality Recess Guidelines*, MINN. DEP'T OF EDUC. 7-8 (2013).

³² *Id.* at 6-7.

³³ *Recess in Elementary Schools*, NAT'L ASS'N FOR SPORT AND PHYS. EDUC. 2 (July 2001), available at <http://www.nh.gov/gcpah/documents/recessinelemschool.pdf>.

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³⁵ *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn*, *supra* note 8, at 35.

³⁶ *Id.* at 39.

³⁷ *Id.* at 35.

³⁸ *Quality Recess Guidelines*, MINN. DEP'T OF EDUC. 10-11 (2013).

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⁴⁰ *Id.* at 35.

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