National Wildlife Federation®

Ranger Rick®

RESTORE RECESS CAMPAIGN

Today approximately 30 percent of elementary students do not have daily recess, a critical part of each child's school day [1]. Recess is an integral component of a child's physical, social and academic development, and can be a gateway experience to nature. [2]

The National Wildlife Federation along with the American Academy of Pediatrics [3] recommend a return of regular recess to our nation's elementary schools.

What is a good recess policy?

NWF believes a good recess policy should include:

- At least 20 minutes per day of supervised recess for elementary children.
- Recess scheduled in addition to designated physical education and lunch periods, not as a replacement for it, or during the same time period.
- Recess outdoors, except for in extreme weather conditions.
- A safe outdoor play area with play equipment and a natural setting designated for recess.
- Participation in recess is not withheld from students as punishment or cancelled to make up for missed instructional time.

How can I make sure that my school has a good recess policy?

Public school policy (including the daily school calendar in which recess would be incorporated) tends to be set at the state or school district level.

To implement a good recess policy in your District or State:

- **Work with your state legislature or state board of education to pass policy requiring local school districts to schedule recess.**

  Only a few states (Connecticut, Hawaii, and Missouri) have adopted a statewide recess requirement. In some states, a statewide requirement is not a policy option because authority over the daily school calendar is reserved for the local school district.

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[1] *"The Impact of State Laws and District Policies on Physical Education and Recess Practices in a Nationally Representative Sample of US Public Elementary Schools,"* Slater S.J., Nicholson L., Chriqui J., Turner L. and Chaloupka F., Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine. 2012 Apr;166(4):311-6. doi: 10.1001/archpediatrics.2011.1133. Epub 2011 Dec 5.

[2] National Association for Sport and Physical Education, position paper at http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/standards/upload/Recess-for-Elementary-School-Students-2006.pdf, last accessed on May 8, 2012.

[3] American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement - ***The Crucial Role of Recess in School*** - http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/131/1/183.full.html

How can I make sure that my school has a good recess policy? (continued)

• If your state constitution will permit such a requirement, consider working to pass a statewide recess requirement like the following one:

Model Recess Requirement

A bill to be entitled: [BILL NAME]
relating to recess requirements for public elementary school students.
Be it enacted by the legislature of [STATE]:

Section 1. Section [X], Education Code, is amended by adding Subsection [Y) to read as follows: [Y] In addition to the daily physical activity requirement prescribed by Subsection [Z], a school district shall require a student enrolled in elementary school to participate in supervised recess consisting of play and physical activity for at least 20 minutes each school day throughout the school year. The period for play required by this subsection may not be used to grant a reward or impose a punishment. The recess period shall be scheduled out of doors except for in the case of extreme weather conditions, in a safe outdoor natural area with play equipment designated for the purpose.

• Encourage your state board or state department of education to adopt an existing recommended recess policy.

Even if your state constitution does not permit a statewide requirement, it is still possible for your state board of education to adopt a policy that recommends a recess policy to local school districts. A number of states have adopted recommended policies in this manner, including Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, New Mexico, and Vermont. For example, in 2005 the Michigan State Board of Education adopted a recommended district school wellness policy.

The following is model language based on that policy that could be used in your state or district:

The District should offer daily opportunities for unstructured physical activity, commonly referred to as recess, for all students Pre-K through grade six. Recess should be in addition to physical education class time and not be a substitute for physical education. Each school shall provide proper equipment and a safe area designated for supervised recess in the elementary setting. School staff should not withhold participation in recess from students or cancel recess to make up for missed instructional time. Schools should provide opportunities for some type of physical activity for students in grades seven through twelve apart from physical education class and organized sports. Physical activity opportunities might include: before- and after-school extracurricular physical activity programs, Safe Routes to School Programs,14 and use of school facilities outside of school hours.

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How can I make sure that my school has a good recess policy? (continued)

- Ensure your local school district adopts a strong recess policy.

  All school districts have authority to adopt a recess policy, so the easiest place to work on recess policy is your local school district. A recess policy can be adopted by a local school board as stand-alone policy, or as part of the district's School Wellness Policy. Since 2004, all local school districts participating in the federal free and reduced lunch program are required to adopt a School Wellness Policy, and while there is no requirement that the policy address recess, a number of school districts have chosen to do so.

  The following is a model district recess policy:

  Daily Recess - In addition to physical education classroom time, DOE requires principals to provide elementary school students with at least 20 minutes a day of supervised recess, preferably outdoors, during which time staff encourage moderate to vigorous physical activity and provide appropriate space and equipment.Outdoor play is permitted regardless of temperature so long as weather conditions are appropriate. School staff shall not withhold participation in recess from students or cancel recess to make up for missed instructional time.

Where can I find tools to improve the quality of recess at my school?

You can find helpful recess-related tools and other resources on the National Wildlife Federation's Eco-Schools USA website (www.eco-schoolsusa.org) and our Ranger Rick Restore Recess website (www.nwf.org/recess).

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