

Recess: An essential part of the school day

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Study shows supervised play boosts teamwork, friendships and positive attitudes.

(HealthDay)—Recess is an essential part of children's school days that can help set students up for success once they head back to the classroom, a new study suggests.

Yet, many schools are cutting back on recess or not offering quality recess time. This may have unintended negative consequences, the Stanford University researchers cautioned.

"Recess isn't normally considered part of [school](#) climate, and often is shortchanged in tight fiscal times, but our research shows that [recess] can be a critical contributor to positive school climate in low-income [elementary schools](#)," study co-author Milbrey McLaughlin, the founding director of Stanford's John W. Gardner Center, said in a university news release.

When planned well, recess can boost attendance as well as academic

performance, the research showed. It can also help kids make friends, learn how to resolve conflicts and gain a more positive outlook about learning, particularly for those in low-income schools, the study's authors noted. High-quality recess can also curb bullying among [students](#), according to the researchers.

"We saw how a positive recess experience can benefit classroom climate in low-income elementary schools through students' improved conflict-resolution skills and sense of teamwork," McLaughlin said.

In examining the effects that recess has on students, the researchers analyzed information on six low-income elementary schools that had implemented a non-profit organization's recess-based program designed to encourage a safe, healthy and inclusive environment.

Trained, full-time coaches were sent to these schools to improve their recess programs, establishing organized games with rules, offering conflict-resolution tools, encouraging positive language and making sure no students were left out. All of the schools had two recess periods daily.

The coaches, teachers and principal from each school were interviewed. The researchers also conducted student focus groups and observed recess periods. They compared their findings to other schools with a variety of recess programs ranging from poor to very good.

The study revealed that good recess programs rely on adult supervision and guidance. Conflicts can arise when children do not agree on games and rules. The study showed that 89 percent of the teachers surveyed saw an improvement in recess organization once the coaches were sent in to offer support.

"It's more of a structured, fun environment. You can see that they're playing soccer, whereas, before, you weren't sure what they were

playing," one teacher commented in the study.

The recess improvements also appeared to lead to a more positive environment. Nearly half of the teachers polled said the students became more encouraging of each other and used better language.

"There's a lot more collegiality between the kids," another teacher responded in the survey. "They're using, 'Hey, good job, nice try,' instead of 'Ha ha, you're out.'"

High-quality recess programs also foster an environment that helps prevent conflicts and bullying, the study showed. The recess improvements had a number of positive effects on the students, such as:

- The children initiated games more often
- The students felt better and safer overall
- Girls, in particular, became much more engaged

"This analysis points to a new framing for how a high-quality recess can positively contribute to a school's climate," the study authors wrote.

The importance of play or recess time for children is already recognized by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which views this time in the school day as essential for kids' well-being.

A set of guidelines has also been established by the American Academy of Pediatrics to help schools develop positive recess programs. The Stanford researchers cautioned many schools are currently not meeting these standards and have cut back or eliminated recess programs entirely. And, without proper supervision, McLaughlin said that recess can end up being a time when kids feel unsafe—both physically and emotionally.

More information: Education Week has more about [supervised recess](#)

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