

Playground zoning increases physical activity during recess

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Most grade school students are likely to claim recess as their favorite period of the day; however, in many cases recess still can be sedentary with students not engaging in enough physical activity. Now researchers from the University of Missouri have found that zones with specific games can improve physical activity, improving a child's chance of engaging in the recommended 60 minutes of "play per day," an effort endorsed by many health organizations as well as the National Football League.

"Research has proven that active children are healthy children," said Jill Barnas, a doctoral student in the department of nutrition and [exercise physiology](#) at MU. "Moreover, past research has proven that activity helps academic performance. By reworking traditional recess games to be more vigorous, children are able to increase their [physical activity](#) in a really easy way, improving their health and doing better in school."

Zoning a playground involves dividing the existing recess area into separate "zones." Each zone has a specific activity associated with it, and traditional recess games such as basketball and kickball are reworked to maximize physical activity. Kickball, for instance can be reworked to "hustle kickball," where children playing the game kick and run in rapid fire, rather than waiting in line to kick.

Once the playground zones were put in place, researchers tracked the physical activity of participants through the use of accelerometers, similar to a Fitbit. Then they compared the physical activity of

participants using a traditional playground without the zones. Comparing the results, researchers found a significant increase in physical activity among zoned playground participants.

"Playground zoning is one way schools can be proactive in their students' health and wellness," said Stephen Ball, associate professor of nutrition and exercise physiology at MU. "Recess is the best way for young children to be active, and through playground zoning, schools can ensure that [children](#) are achieving maximum benefits during their recess period."

Barnas co-authored the study, "In the Zone: An Investigation into Physical Activity during Recess on Traditional Versus Zoned Playgrounds" with the supervision of Ball. The study recently was accepted for publication in *The Physical Educator*.

Researchers in the study are in the Department of Nutrition and Exercise Physiology which is jointly administered by the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, the College of Human Environmental Sciences and the School of Medicine.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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