

Recommendations Pertaining to Access to Recess for Students

Recess is a critical part of a child’s school day. In its *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*¹, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity for school-aged youth. These *Guidelines* identify various health benefits of regular physical activity for children and adolescents, including improved bone health, improved weight status, improved cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, improved cardiometabolic health, improved cognition, and reduced risk of depression. Schools can play an important role in helping students attain the recommended amount of daily physical activity by providing opportunities for physical activity, including recess, during the school day. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and SHAPE America recommend that elementary schools provide 20 minutes or more of daily recess.²

The recognized benefits of recess extend beyond a child’s physical health. In *The Crucial Role of Recess*³, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) summarizes research demonstrating the benefits of recess for the whole child. The literature identified social and emotional developmental benefits of recess in providing opportunities for children to practice and role play social skills with their peers. Through such play-based learning, children hone skills related to communication, negotiation, cooperation, sharing, problem-solving, and perseverance. The literature further identified cognitive and academic benefits associated with recess. Research cited by the AAP found that “optimal cognitive processing in a child necessitates a period of interruption after a period of concentrated instruction.” Studies found that the break provided during recess resulted in greater focus and productivity in the classroom following the break time.

In considering recommendations on recess for students in the Commonwealth, the State Board of Education formed an Ad Hoc Committee on Recess to review evidence-based best practices and to accept public comment on recess. The Ad Hoc Committee received 76 public comments. These comments reflect perspectives shared by parents, teachers, principals, and superintendents from rural, urban, and suburban school districts across the state. In addition, the Ad Hoc Committee received comments from charter and cyber charter school administrators, from a non-public school, and from faculty in educator preparation programs. Commentators largely expressed support for recess being

¹ *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, November 2018. [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition](#)

² *Strategies for Recess in Schools*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and SHAPE America, January 2017. [Strategies for Recess in Schools](#)

³ *The Crucial Role of Recess*, American Academy of Pediatrics, April 2023. [peds20122993 183..188](#)

part of the school day at the elementary level and identified numerous other implementation considerations.

After reviewing research pertaining to the benefits of recess and reviewing public comments, the Ad Hoc Committee transmitted draft recommendations on recess to the State Board of Education for its consideration. The following recommendations were approved by the Board on May 7, 2026.

1. All schools in the Commonwealth should provide 30 minutes of daily recess for students in Kindergarten through Grade 5, including Grade 6 in instances where that grade is included in the same school building configuration. Consideration should be given to the following:
 - a. Flexibility should be provided for the time dedicated to daily recess to be structured in non-consecutive periods.
 - b. Flexibility in the amount of time allocated to recess should be established for half-day kindergarten programs and for days when schools operate on a modified schedule, such as delayed openings or early dismissals.
 - c. A student may be withheld from recess in circumstances where the student's participation poses a threat to themselves or others.
 - d. Educators may utilize discretion for no more than 10 minutes of recess to be used for academic supports or as a disciplinary measure for violations of the code of student conduct.
 - e. If enrichment activities outside the general curriculum are offered during recess, a parent or guardian may voluntarily elect to have their student participate in an alternative activity.
2. Recess for elementary students should be defined to recognize its role as play-based learning, as time for physical activity and for social interaction, to encourage screen-free activities, and to encourage outdoor recreation whenever it is safe to do so.
3. In instances where recess is supervised by certified school employees, school entities should have flexibility to submit a plan to the Pennsylvania Department of Education to have recess counted as instructional time provided that the plan describes how time dedicated to recess meets established requirements for instructional activities.

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4. If a school entity determines that parts of the school day must be shortened in order to accommodate a minimum amount of time for daily recess, all subjects should be equally impacted in making adjustments to the school day schedule.
5. School entities should be afforded one school year to prepare for offering 30 minutes of daily recess to students in Kindergarten through Grades 5/6 if the school entity requires time to address needs related to staffing, supervision, and collective bargaining agreements.
6. The Ad Hoc Committee should continue to explore whether breaks should be provided for students at the secondary level during the school day. To inform the Committee's work, the Department of Education should conduct a survey to determine how many school entities currently provide secondary students with breaks and to understand the practices that are employed to build this time into the school day.
7. The Department of Education should make available a repository of best practices on recess that provides information to school entities on structured and unstructured recess models.