



# PLAY WELL

# RECESS

**Providing opportunities for recess during the day increases the likelihood that children will be successful in school and fosters the physical and social development of children. Recess should be a valued and seamless part of the school day that engages all students and requires commitment from all staff.**



## CPS Policy Requirements for Recess

The *Local School Wellness Policy* requires minimum of 20 minutes of daily recess for all CPS elementary schools, middle schools and elementary grades of K-12 schools. It is recommended that recess is offered before lunch.

## What is high quality recess?

Recess is a non-instructional activity during the school day that provides students the opportunity to engage in physical activity as well as activities that promote social development. Recess may include structured activities, organized games, fitness activities and/or free play but may not be instructional in nature.

## Strategies for implementing high-quality recess

- Offer recess for a minimum of 20 minutes daily before lunch.
- Recess supervisors should be trained and engaged. Ensure that your recess supervisors attend trainings provided by the Office of Student Health and Wellness (OSHW).
- Establish and maintain daily recess procedures. Similar to the classroom, students should learn procedures for recess. Recess is a collective responsibility and all school staff can help support recess by continuing to use themes for conflict resolution on the playground throughout the school day.
- Students will thrive in a organized recess environment, especially when there is some amount of choice built in. Organize recess so that students have defined and specific choices in games.
- Establish school-wide positive behavior expectations for recess and beyond. Check out the [CPS Positive Behavior Support](#) website for more strategies.

### **Recess should not be withheld as punishment**

Recess is viewed as a necessary and foundational component for all children—students should not be denied recess because of behavior in class or so they can complete class work as punishment. Alternatives for withholding recess as punishment include:

- Focus on positive rewards rather than punishment, such as offering extra recess for good behavior
- Have students do service learning rather than participate in recess
- Limit students' game or activity choices during recess
- Complement physical activity and instruction children receive in PE with recess. The primary goal of PE is to help students acquire the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to engage in physical activity throughout their lifetime. Recess is an ideal setting for students to practice and reinforce skills and concepts taught during PE classes whenever possible.

### **Aim to schedule recess before lunch**

Recess should be scheduled before lunch. Studies and pilot programs, such as the Montana Office of Public Instruction School Nutrition Programs pilot program, indicate that recess before lunch can result in the following benefits:

- Less food wasted by students
- Increased nutrient intake (increased consumption of milk and food)
- Students are less inclined to rush to finish their lunch
- Improved student behavior on the playground, in the cafeteria and in the classroom
- Students are calmer and more focused upon returning to the classroom

### **Creating an Organized Recess Plan**

Elementary schools should develop a recess plan that outlines all logistics and procedures of their recess program. The plan should include the following:

- Supervision schedules
- Supervisor roles and responsibilities clearly defined
- Transition protocols
- Clear procedures for minor injuries or bathroom/water breaks
- Indoor recess plan

In addition, schools should also create a Recess Command Center, which can be a centrally located bulletin board that outlines recess expectations and procedures for all students, staff, and parents. The Recess Command Center should include:

- Recess schedule
- Location of recess (whether indoor or outdoor)
- Goals of recess
- Activity zones and options for games to play during recess



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### Supervision

Peterson Elementary — a CPS school — works with Playworks, a non-profit organization, to provide a trained recess coordinator. Education support staff (ESPs), caregiver volunteers and ancillary teachers also serve as recess supervisors. There is one lead at every recess; the lead has a walkie talkie that allows him/her to communicate with the principal, AP, clerk and security as well as a clipboard with misconduct and injury reports.

### Expectations/Setting the Tone

Universal expectations for classroom time, recess and lunch are taught during the first two weeks at Peterson. During the first two weeks, the principal and the assistant principal are at recess everyday reinforcing expectations for students and modeling behavior for supervisors. During advisory, teachers cover problem solving with students and frequently discuss recess during that time.

### Training

The school's recess coordinator provides students, supervisors and teachers with training on new activities throughout the year. They also provide training to student junior coaches, who also help facilitate recess activities. The principal and assistant principal monitor recess throughout the school year and supervisors are provided with additional training on an as-needed basis.

### Resources

The PE teacher helps coordinate recess resources. Crates with equipment (balls, jump ropes, cones, etc.) are available during recess and supervisors set up and host stations.

### Challenges

While students go outside for recess nearly every day, indoor recess with about 200 students at one time is a challenge. Initially, there was a spike in incidents on indoor recess days. However, the school worked with their coordinator and supervisors to reduce the number of incidents through various strategies, including introducing students to new indoor activities every two weeks.

### Benefits

With recess, students are more focused in the afternoon and they learn to play and problem solve with their peers. Student leaders are also developed through recess implementation. Students, teachers and caregivers rave about recess at Peterson.

# CPS RECESS WEATHER GUIDELINES

Outdoor recess allows children to get fresh air, provides an opportunity for children to engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity and gives students more activity options than most indoor spaces. Recess Weather Guidelines are as follows:

## Cold Weather Guidelines

Weather	Recess Held:
Above 32°F with or without wind chill	Outdoors
15°F to 32°F with or without windchill	<p>Principal Discretion based on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Precipitation: Snowy and icy conditions should be evaluated for student safety and attire.</li> <li>· Student preparedness: Students should have appropriate outdoor attire to stay warm and dry during recess.</li> <li>· Playground safety: The playground equipment and surface (i.e., icy conditions) should be evaluated to determine whether students can safely play outdoors.</li> </ul>
Below 15°F with or without windchill	Indoors

## Warm Weather Guidelines

Weather	Recess Held:
Heat index of 90°F or below	Outdoors
Heat index between 91°F and 94°F	<p>Principal discretion. However, schools should exercise the following precautionary measures if holding recess outdoors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Activity level: Students should participate in only light to moderate physical activity.</li> <li>· Student preparedness: Students should wear appropriate attire during warm weather. It is recommended that students wear sunscreen when outdoors.</li> <li>· Playground equipment: The playground equipment and surfaces should be checked prior to recess. Supervisors should ensure that students do not play on equipment that is extremely hot to the touch.</li> <li>· Water access: Students should have access to water before and/or after recess. Additionally, students who show any signs of heat exhaustion or a heat-related illness (i.e., heavy sweating, weakness, muscle cramps, nausea, weak pulse, clammy skin, etc.) should be provided with immediate access to water.</li> </ul>
Heat index above 95°F	Indoors in a cool location

## Space and Equipment

Ideally, recess should take place outdoors on school grounds as [weather](#), space and [safety](#) permit. In all cases, the school administration must consider the safety of children during recess. Schools can utilize playgrounds as well as pavement and grass spaces on school grounds.