

2006

The advantages and disadvantages of recess

Nicole Sullivan
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©2006 Nicole Sullivan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Health and Physical Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sullivan, Nicole, "The advantages and disadvantages of recess" (2006). *Graduate Research Papers*. 1597.
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/1597>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

The advantages and disadvantages of recess

Abstract

This study examined the topic of recess in our schools. Recess is an important part of the early childhood curriculum for all children. It should be given some ' thoughtful attention that other aspects of the curriculum receive. This literature study focused on the benefits, and the problems, associated with recess. Guidelines were presented for developing an effective recess program. Also, conclusions were drawn from the literature and recommendations were made for the implementation of recess in our schools.

**THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES
OF RECESS**

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

with a Major in Early Childhood Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By

Nicole Sullivan

July 3, 2006

This research paper by: Nicole Sullivan

Titled: The Advantages and Disadvantages of Recess

Has been approved in meeting the research requirements for the
Degree of Mater of Arts in Education.

July 7, 2006
Date Approved

Charles R. May
Director of Research Paper

July 12, 2006
Date Approved

Rebecca Edmiaston
Graduate Faculty Reader

July 15, 2006
Date Approved

Greg P. Stefanich
Head, Department of curriculum and Instruction

Abstract

This study examined the topic of recess in our schools. Recess is an important part of the early childhood curriculum for all children. It should be given some thoughtful attention that other aspects of the curriculum receive. This literature study focused on the benefits, and the problems, associated with recess. Guidelines were presented for developing an effective recess program. Also, conclusions were drawn from the literature and recommendations were made for the implementation of recess in our schools.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family – my husband, Tom, my Mom and Dad, and my sister, Stacey, – without their continuous support and guidance I would never have been able to complete my master's degree and final project. It was their never-ending encouragement and love that made it possible for me to complete this endeavor.

I would also like to thank the Dubuque Cohort for their support – Lynn Glaser, Amy Herber, Michelle Leicht, Michelle Meier, Angela Riesberg, Leigh Siegert, Kara Trentz and Aulanda Zenner-Stecklein for their support throughout the program. Their humor and encouragement made the journey much easier.

Lastly, I would like to thank my professor and advisor Dr. Charles May, who made me realize that anything is possible. His positive words always motivated me to my best. Dr. May taught me that everything is attainable if you have the tenacity to do it. Thank you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background of the study	1
History of Recess.....	1
Purpose of the study.....	3
Need for the Study.....	3
Limitations.....	4
Definitions.....	5

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Benefits of Recess.....	7
-----------------------------	---

CHAPTER 3 THE PROBLEMS OF RECESS.....11

CHAPTER 4 GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING RECESS EFFECTIVELY.....16

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS.....20

Summary.....	20
Conclusions.....	23
Recommendations.....	24

REFERENCES.....26

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

When children are asked about their favorite school subject, the answer is often *Recess*. For many children it is their only opportunity to play outside with their peers. Although recess has been a part of the school day for decades, a complete history of elementary school recess has yet to be written. There have been few references recorded about recess until the latter part of the 19th century. Early lithographs and old prints of children playing outside indicate that recess was a part of the curriculum in earlier centuries. However, even then recess was a controversial topic (Clements & Jarrett, 2000).

In 1885, David Howell, the Superintendent of Schools in Lansing, Michigan, published a report that gave eight reasons, which were concerns during that period, why there should not be recess. His reasons were listed under the following rubrics: health, safety, bullying, moral contamination, convenience, concentration, light, and time efficacy. His concerns with health were that children rushed out of the school inadequately dressed for recess, which increased their chances of getting diphtheria, pneumonia, and catarrh. In addition, he was concerned about the safety of younger children because of the rambunctious play of older children. Bullying, which involved stronger children tyrannizing younger and weaker children was also a concern of Howell's. Furthermore, Howell stated that "Improprieties of conduct involving vulgar and obscene language could be reduced without recess" (Clements & Jarrett, 2000, p. 1). Convenience was also an issue for Howell. He felt that without recess children would be

able to leave school earlier and help the family at home. Furthermore, Howell believed that students had a more difficult time focusing and forming good study habits when they returned from recess. In addition, Howell thought, "...without a recess break, children would be able to study in the morning, when natural light from the windows could prevent eye injury and myopia" (Clements & Jarrett, 2000, p.1). Lastly, Howell hypothesized that time in the classroom was wasted because of children's breathless condition when recess ended and tired students were back in the classroom but not ready to learn.

From 1885 to the present there has been additional controversy about the issue of recess in our schools. In a survey conducted in 1989, (as cited in Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005) ninety percent of school districts in the U.S. had some type of recess in their curriculum. At this time recess ranged from approximately 15 to 20 minutes, once or even twice a day. Another survey conducted approximately ten years later, found that 70% of kindergarten classrooms in schools in the U.S. had a recess period (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). In recent years there have been many school districts that have opted to have a no-recess policy, choosing to devote more time to academics that impact student achievement (Clements & Jarrett, 2000). The no-recess policy in our schools has stemmed from the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* act, signed into law in 2002. This law has expanded the role of the federal government in education and has set requirements that affect every public school in the United States. *No Child Left Behind* is designed to close achievement gaps between different groups of students. In addition, NCLB "... is meant to improve student achievement by holding schools accountable for test results in reading and math through high school, and ensuring that they provide parents with more

information about their child's progress" (Doheny, 2005, p.1). In a position statement by the South Carolina Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity, they observed that nearly 40% of the 16,000 school districts in the U.S. have either abolished or altered recess in their schools since 2002 (*National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, NAECS/SDE, 2003*).

Throughout the past one hundred years, people in the U.S. have debated the issue of whether there should or should not be recess in our schools. In recent years the debate whether recess should be eliminated to increase academic time has been at the forefront in education. This concern leads to a very important question: Should recess be eliminated in order to increase the time spent on academics?

Purpose of the Study

One of the two purposes of this study is to examine the literature concerning the effects of recess and whether recess should be eliminated or incorporated into the school day. The second purpose is to examine what is included in an effective recess program. In order to accomplish these purposes, this paper will address the following questions:

1. What has the attitude been concerning recess in the past?
2. What are the benefits of recess?
3. What are the problems of having recess?
4. What are the guidelines for implementing recess effectively?

Need for the Study

Since the NCLB Act of 2001, schools have been struggling to measure up to the law's mandates in reading and math. Implications of this new law to school districts is that they are now pressured to devote more time to academics. Since recess has had

limited educational objectives, there are people who believe it should be eliminated in order to address more time to academics (Clements & Jarrett, 2000).

... Many educational experts say that the key to success in school and life, is academic learning. Shaving a few minutes from recess, or even eliminating it altogether, they argue, won't hurt children. Play has educational value, they admit, but play can occur outside of the school; school should be devoted to academics. (Cromwell, 2005, p.1)

These beliefs are leaving playgrounds quiet with no children running, playing, laughing, or talking. There are even some states that are building new elementary schools without playgrounds (Svensen, 2005).

The pressures that children in schools are facing today have increased by eliminating opportunities for socialization and exercise that recess has provided. Therefore, educators need to examine the benefits and problems associated with recess. All aspects concerning recess must be examined before making the final decision to abolish it altogether.

Limitations

One limitation to this study was that a complete history of recess has not been written as of today. The only evidence found wasn't until the latter part of the 19th century. Therefore, a close examination on the history of recess before the 19th century was not available. Furthermore, literature on the history of recess was difficult to find. An additional limitation concerning this study was that some of the literature found on the effects of recess were not available through the University of Northern Iowa library.

Definitions

An examination of the literature for this study revealed that various terms were used interchangeably; consequently, in order to enhance clarity and understanding, the following terms are defined for this literature review.

Breaktime: Is a word for recess time in the secondary level including children ages 11 to 16 years if age (Blatchford, 1996).

Curriculum: “A way of helping teachers think about children and organize children’s experiences in the program setting” (Decker & Decker, 2001, p.240).

Free Choice: “Children are not presented with a task or set of standards to follow. This means that the use of materials, the environment, the rules of the game, and the roles of the participants all flow from the children’s imaginations and sense of reality” (Flaxman, 2000, p.39).

Recess: “A break (either indoors or outdoors) from academic work, where children are free to chose and engage in an activity on their own terms” (Pellegrini & Bjorklund, 1996, p.7).

Physical Education: “A sequential instructional program related to physical activity and performance” (Jarrett, 2003, p.2).

Play: “The natural medium through which youngsters explore their environment, solve problems, and develop motor skills and cognitive abilities” (Geiger, 1996, p. 2).

Playtime: A reference for primary level children, ages 4 to 11 years old (Blatchford, 1996).

Primary: Primary consists of children between 4 to 11 years old (Blatchford, 1996).

Secondary: Secondary refers to children ages 11 to 16 years old (Blatchford, 1996).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Benefits of Recess

The literature reviewed in this study examined the influence that recess has on children's behavior post-recess, such as fidgeting, inattentiveness, and listlessness. Many of the studies compared children who had recess to children who did not have recess throughout the school day. It is essential to understand that physical education was not a substitute for recess in these studies. In the research reviewed for this literature review children had physical education incorporated into the school day in addition to recess.

Studies have shown that students without recess were less on task and more fidgety when compared to those students with recess. These findings were significant ($p < .001$) (Jarrett, Maxwell, Dickerson, Hoge, Davies, & Yetley, 1998). "The finding that children are less attentive when they have not had recess implies that adding more instructional time without giving breaks may be counterproductive" (Jarrett et al., 1998, p.1).

For some children, the effects of recess were more prominent, for recess can have beneficial effects for different individuals. For example, children who live in transient housing may have moved many times, leaving their life slightly chaotic. For these children transitions to the playground and back to the classroom may be especially difficult. In contrast, children with *Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)* benefited the most on days when they had recess (Jarrett, 2003). In an earlier article by Jarrett (1998) she observed that individual students who need more structure and consistency may require

more help settling down after recess; however, other children may experience more positive effects from recess.

Furthermore, Jarrett, (as cited in Svensen, 2005) observed similar results of less fidgety behavior in the classroom after recess. In her study she “found that in schools without recess, the amount of instructional time lost to fidgeting adds up to the amount of time it takes to have recess in the first place” (Svensen, 2005, p.1). Svensen went on to quote Jarrett again with the following statement: “Human beings have to take breaks. It is one of our basic needs. If we told union workers that they had to go from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. without a break, they’d go on strike” (Jarrett as found in Svensen, 2005, p. 1). One child from a school in Massachusetts said, “Recess gives me a chance to run around and play tag. I’m in the classroom with one teacher all day long. I need a mental break” (Svensen, p.1). Furthermore, it was found that elementary school children became more inattentive when recess was delayed, which resulted in more active play when they went to recess.

It has also been found that recess allows children the opportunity to reduce stress. (*National Association for Sport and Physical Education, NASPE, 2001*). In addition, “Contemporary society introduces significant pressure and stress for many students because of academic demands, family issues, and peer pressure”(National Association for Sport and Physical Education, NASPE, 2001, p.1). Thus, children who have stress in their lives are less distracted and are able to concentrate more when given the opportunity to have recess.

Including recess in the school day can also have positive effects on peer interactions. Pellegrini & Bohn (2005) observed that when children are given free choice

in an unstructured environment, they interact with their peers by using more sophisticated cognitive behaviors than students who interacted more with adults. In addition, Pellegrini & Bohn found that children who interacted with peers were less antisocial, more popular, better at perspective taking, and had higher academic achievement. Recess can encourage open discussion, for children are more likely to disagree with one another at recess than in the classroom. During recess, children learn to solve problems, resolve conflicts, and negotiate without adults intervening. It is essential that children be provided with opportunities of being confronted with views other than their own. The playground is one place where this social interaction can take place. Unstructured play and interactions with peers provide experiences for children to learn and develop new cognitive and social skills (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). In addition, the importance of peer interaction also relates to children's adjustment to school.

Important longitudinal studies have recorded the significance of peer relations in a child's adjustment to elementary school. For example, in the article *The Role of Recess in Children's Cognitive Performance and School Adjustment*, studies by Ladd and colleagues (as cited in Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005) have shown that a successful transition to school can be made when the transition is made with a friend. Friends provide social-emotional support for each other in new environments (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). Relationships often develop in the context of games such as soccer, tag, and jumprope with peers. Recess can provide children with opportunities to make friends and establish relationships, even in the primary grades. Not only is establishing relationships important to a child's development, but physical activity is as well.

Various organizations, including the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, support recess as an integral part of a child's development. Children need to have movement experiences to promote healthy minds and bodies that are essential for learning. Because parents work outside the home, children today spend more of their time watching television or playing computer games. They often do not participate in unstructured play in their neighborhoods. As a result, children are becoming more inactive, and this can lead to obesity, which can contribute to early signs of heart disease, diabetes, and other health problems. For these reasons, promoting daily activity during the school day is critical to a child's health (NASPE, 2001).

CHAPTER 3

THE PROBLEMS OF HAVING RECESS

In recent years, there have been increased pressures to promote an academic agenda in the elementary schools in the United States. This decision has resulted in a trend toward a no-recess policy in many schools. In fact, some professional educators believe that recess is a waste of time, especially when including the minutes lost in transitioning to and from the playground. In this regard a Superintendent of Schools of the Las Vegas, (Nevada) Community School System stated the following:

If you have a 15-minute recess scheduled you spend five minutes getting students to the playground, another five getting back and then five more minutes getting them calmed down and ready to learn back in the classroom. You end up blowing 30 minutes of potential instructional time to gain the limited benefits of having recess. It's become a luxury we can't afford. (Richmond, 2004, p.1)

Other administrators have observed that this topic becomes a question of what is a higher priority: recess or academics?

With the numerous standards that teachers are required to teach their students, the school day is not long enough to fulfill these requirements. When a school district is required to have a minimum of three hours and ten minutes of instruction in a subject area something has got to give, often it is recess (Richmond, 2004). Therefore, if recess were eliminated teachers could spend more time teaching academics, which could raise test scores. Likewise, some educators hold the belief that schools cannot improve academic performance by having kids hanging on monkey bars (No-Recess Policies Being Implemented in U.S. School Districts, 2005).

Also, schools in the U.S. have to cram more into the school day such as bike safety and character education. Again, it is recess that is cut to allow these extra

programs in schools. Svenson (2005) quoted Darwin Johnson, the superintendent in Evanston, Illinois, who observed that "When I ask parents what should be cut, [out of the school day] they think I'm being a smart aleck... but something has to go and recess is an easy target" (Svenson, 2005, p.1).

In addition, some school districts are finding it very difficult to schedule instruction and meet time allocations required by government. Today, teachers are pressured to improve test scores, to increase yearly progress, and to stay off the NCLB watch list. Superintendent Tom Horne stated: "Schools get no credit for how much time their kids spend on the playground (Bland, 2005).

In order to find out how local principals felt about time allotments, and especially recess, all twelve Elementary School Principals of the Dubuque (Iowa) Community School District were asked to participate in a time allotment study. Of the 12 principals who were asked to participate, five agreed to be interviewed concerning the best use of time in the schools, and especially to share their views about recess.

The responses to each question of the interview are indicated below. Because of confidentiality issues, names of schools or principals are not included in this paper.

1. Does your school have recess? If yes, how many recess breaks does your school have daily?

Three of the principals stated that they scheduled recess one time a day. Two of these principals shared that their recess ranged from 15-20 minutes, either before or after lunch, depending on the scheduling of academic courses. A third principal in this group said that the one recess that he scheduled was for 25 minutes each day, and a second recess could be scheduled for individual teachers if he was told it was needed. The remaining two of the five principals said that they scheduled two recesses a day.

These recesses were scheduled for mornings and afternoons, and they lasted 15-20 minutes.

2. How much time do you believe is appropriate for recess?

Four of the respondents reported that 15-30 minutes is an appropriate length for recess; whereas only one principal mentioned 15 minutes two times a day as a reasonable amount of time.

3. What do you see as problems with having recess?

All of the principals stated that transition time and loss of instructional time were problems with having recess. One principal stressed that a 15-minute recess turns into a 35-minute loss of instructional time when transitions are included. Late starting schools, which begin the school day at 9:00 to 9:30 AM, impact recess time. For example, late starting schools have a short morning, which is a prime time for young children to learn. Morning recesses take out a significant portion of instructional time, especially when transitions are added to the time for recess.

In addition, NCLB has put more pressure on schools to monitor their time more closely. An example of this pressure is how income differentials between college graduates and high school graduates create a responsibility on schools to make sure students experience quality learning environments, and time to learn skills necessary for future earning success. Recess cuts into instructional time.

Furthermore, supervision and health issues such as, children not dressed appropriately are a problem at two of the schools. These schools do not have enough people to supervise the large number of children who are at recess. More accidents and

bullying can occur without adult supervision. Secondly, children come to school in the winter without the proper attire.

4. What skills can children learn during recess?

All of the principals interviewed stated that children learn social skills during recess time. Examples of social skills included the following: cooperation, sharing, communication, problem solving, negotiating, interpersonal skills, problem solving, and decision making. In addition, two principals mentioned fine and gross motor skills can be enhanced through recess.

5. If your school had a cut back on recess, what were the reasons for that decision?

Two of the schools responded that balancing instructional time with recreational time as a reason for cutting back on recess. As stated above, with the increasing curricular demands, the transitional time lost from recess creates a major problem. Lastly, a late starting school day does not leave enough time for recess.

6. If your school does not have recess, how much time would your school devote to it if your school could have recess?

All of the principals represented in this interview have at least one recess each day. One principal responded that once instructional needs have been allocated and met that the time remaining could be devoted to more recreational time.

7. How has your school tried to give children movement activities during the day if your school has cut back on recess?

Three of the principals chose not to answer this question. One of the principals admitted that there has not been a school-wide effort to do so, but it would be worth pursuing as a school. This principal also mentioned that students get some PE and music

during the week, which includes movement. In addition, this principal also suggested that promoting stretching exercises would be a good idea for mid-morning breaks.

Another principal specified that he has encouraged teachers to have center activities that allow students movement in the morning and afternoon. This principal also referred to specialists such as art, music, and physical education, who provide children with movement activities during the school day.

CHAPTER FOUR

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING RECESS EFFECTIVELY

In order to implement recess effectively into the school day there are several guidelines that must be taken into consideration. Organizations such as NASPE and the Council on Physical Education for Children (COPEC) recommend educators, policy makers, and parents consider the following guidelines to ensure an effective recess program.

1. Recess should not be a substitute for physical education (Recess in Elementary Schools, 2001).

Recess should be an unstructured time where children are allowed to have choices. They should be able to interact with children, play on equipment, and run about the playground without having strict directions from adults. Recess should be a time where children can release energy and stress. In addition, recess provides children with opportunities to develop rules for play that can be used in physical education and in the classroom. Children develop social skills, problem-solving strategies, and conflict resolution during recess. Physical education is a program by itself. It provides a "...sequential program with opportunities for children to learn about and participate in regular physical activity, develop motor skills, use skills and knowledge to improve performance" (NASPE, 2001, p.2).

2. Schools should develop routines that allow for daily recess in pre-kindergarten through the sixth grade (Recess in Elementary Schools, 2001).

Even with time allocations brought on by NCLB, schools should schedule at least one recess daily. In addition, separate locations should be established so it does not

interfere with instructional classes. For recess to be effective it should not be scheduled before or after physical education.

3. Recess should not be viewed as a reward for children but as an essential component to a balanced curriculum (Recess in Elementary Schools, 2001).

Schools should view recess as part of their curriculum where socialization skills are being built rather than a hindrance to academic learning. When children are at recess, they learn to solve problems, resolve conflicts, and negotiate without adults intervening.

In addition, children need a time during the day to release energy so they can focus on curriculum in the classroom. For some children recess is the only time in which they can be supervised outdoors because of home factors such as parents working.

4. A recommendation that was not found in the literature, but is of importance is the following: when loss of recess needs to be used as a logical consequence, children should only lose a few minutes rather than the whole recess.

Students should not miss their entire recess to make up work or for punishment. Some schools only have one recess and students should be allowed that privilege. When loss of recess needs to be used as a logical consequence, children should only lose a few minutes rather than the whole recess. It is more effective to have children see what they missed than spend the entire recess in the classroom. For example, a negative consequence to missing a few minutes of recess might be that the child would not get first pick of equipment. Just as math is considered a part of the curriculum, so should recess. Teachers would never take away math as a punishment because it is a part of the curriculum. Recess should be viewed in the same way.

5. NASPE recommends that children ages 6-11 have from one hour to several hours of physical activity daily (Recess in Elementary Schools, 2001).

This activity can occur for 10-15 minutes with the activity level ranging from moderate to vigorous. Recess may provide some of this time. It is important to understand that recess should provide children with opportunities to make choices. In addition, other times in schools can be used for activity in physical education and movement activities in the classroom.

6. Schools need to provide children with equipment and supervision to guarantee recess is a safe, enjoyable and productive time (Recess in Elementary Schools, 2001).

Developmentally appropriate equipment should be available for children.

Equipment with slides, monkey bars, and swings can help children develop strength. Some children with autism or other sensory deficiencies may benefit from the movement of a swing. Children enjoy equipment that offers a variety of activities and are often seen laughing or smiling in their play. A space to run where children can play soccer or baseball is also recommended. Children should also have opportunities to play with different size balls or jump ropes to strengthen gross motor skills. Furthermore, the equipment and facilities should be checked and maintained regularly to ensure safety.

7. All teachers are responsible for teaching children positive skills for self-responsibility during recess (Recess in Elementary Schools, 2001).

Adults need to intervene when a child's emotional or physical safety is being threatened. Aggressive behavior and bullying should not be tolerated. Furthermore, all safety rules should be enforced during recess. In addition, enough adult supervision should be available to ensure that children are safe. In most cases, 2-3 adults are not enough to watch a large number of children.

8. Teachers, administrators, and parents should support policies that require recess time to be a vital part of the school day. (Recess and the Importance of Play, 2001)

These individuals should know and support what research reveals about the influences recess has on a child's social, emotional, physical, cognitive development, and academic achievement. In addition, they should support research findings regarding the positive effects recess has on children with attention problems. This is especially important with the pressures that schools are facing today. Recess should not be eliminated in order to fit in more academic time. It is essential for parents, educators, and community members to support recess and be educated on the importance of including it in the school day. Lastly, individuals should understand the negative effects that eliminating recess could have on children.

9. Schools should develop policies to raise an awareness of the importance of recess in a child's development (Recess and the Importance of Play, 2001).

Educators could help raise awareness by educating the community about the skills that children learn during recess. For recess to be effective and maintained in our schools it is essential for individuals to support the implementation of recess. Practices that are best for children and developmentally appropriate should be at the forefront in education, even if this means eliminating 15-20 minutes of academic time.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The two purposes of this literature study were to examine the literature concerning the effects of recess and whether recess should be eliminated or incorporated into the school day and to examine what is included in an effective recess program. This paper addressed the following four questions to accomplish these purposes:

1. What has the attitude been concerning recess in the past?

Since the 19th century lithographs have been found of children playing outside during the school day. However, even in this time period recess was an issue of debate. For example, David Howell (1885), the superintendent of schools in Lansing, Michigan published a report citing the following reasons why there should not be recess: health, safety, bullying, moral contamination, convenience, light, and time efficacy. From 1885 to the present, additional controversy has surfaced regarding recess in our schools. In 1989, ninety percent of school districts had recess in their curriculum. Ten years later, findings from a research study (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005) indicated that 70% of kindergarten classrooms in the U.S. had recess. In recent years, there have been school districts that have opted for a no-recess policy in their schools. This change initiated by the NCLB act, which has pressured schools to increase academic time.

2. What are the benefits of recess?

Studies have shown that children were less on task and more fidgety if they did not have recess when compared to children who did have recess (Jarrett, Maxwell, Dickerson, Hoge, Davies, Yetley, 1998). Furthermore, children with ADD benefited the most on days when they were allowed to have recess. In addition, studies (Jarrett, 2003)

have shown that children release stress during recess time. This is especially important today with the increase of stress in children's lives. Many of the pressures that children face are academic demands, peer pressure, and family issues. The *National Association for Sport and Physical Education* (2001) reported that children who have stress are able to concentrate more in school when given the opportunity to have recess. An additional benefit of recess is the positive effects it has on peer interactions. Recess encourages open discussion in an unstructured environment, which allows children to solve problems and resolve conflicts without adult interference. Establishing relationships is also a benefit to including recess in the school day. Recess is a time when children can make friends and enhance existing relationships. Not only are relationships essential to a child's development so is physical activity. Promoting daily activity in the school day is important for children, especially since childhood obesity is rapidly increasing. Children today spend much of their time watching television or playing computer games, which can lead to health problems such as, heart disease, diabetes and other problems.

3. What are the problems with having recess?

Since the implementation of the NCLB act, school personnel have felt increasing pressure to spend more time on academics. If recess were eliminated, teachers could spend more time on academics, which could potentially raise standardized test scores. Many administrators see recess as a waste of time, especially when transition time to and from recess is considered. In addition, administrators in the Dubuque Community School District also found transition time to be a problem with recess. One principal felt that a 15-minute recess turns into a 35-minute loss of instructional time when transitions are included. This time loss impacts time spent on academics. Furthermore, late starting

schools also have issues with recess. If a school starts their day late, the morning is already cut short, which leaves no time for recess. Mornings are especially important for young children since they are more attentive and fresh when the day starts. Supervision issues are also a problem with recess. Often times, there are not enough adults to supervise the large number of children on the playground. When there are not enough adults, children can have more accidents and bullying is more likely to occur. Lastly, health reasons, such as children not dressed appropriately, is a problem. This is especially a health hazard in the winter when children come to school without the proper attire. They often go outside in the cold temperatures without mittens, hats, boots, or other proper clothing.

4. What are the guidelines for implementing recess effectively?

The following guidelines were revealed in the literature and from my own observations:

1. Recess should not be a substitute for physical education.
2. Schools should develop routines that allow for daily recess in pre-kindergarten through the sixth grade.
3. Recess should not be viewed as a reward for children but as an essential component to a balanced curriculum.
4. When loss of recess needs to be used as a logical consequence, children should only lose a few minutes rather than the whole recess.
5. NASPE recommends that children ages 6-11 have from one hour to several hours of physical activity daily.
6. Schools need to provide children with equipment and supervision to guarantee recess is a safe, enjoyable and productive time.
7. All teachers are responsible for teaching children positive skills for self-responsibility during recess.

8. Teachers, administrators, and parents should support policies that require recess time to be implemented into the school day.
9. Schools should develop policies to raise an awareness of the importance of recess in a child's development. (Recess and the Importance of Play, 2001).

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from this review of the literature:

1. There are numerous benefits from the inclusion of recess in the school day.

Children are more attentive and less fidgety when given the opportunity to have recess. During recess, children can enhance relationships, social skills, gross motor skills, and learn conflict resolution. Furthermore, providing recess can lower stress in children's lives and promote physical well being.

2. Recess should be included in the school day even though academic time may be lost through transitions.

Allowing children to have recess during the school day is beneficial.

Even though academic time may be lost when recess occurs, children are more on task and ready to work when they return. This would replace the time spent correcting children and prompting them to pay attention during the school day when they are not allowed to have recess. Consequently, teachers could get more out of their students if they were allowed time in which they could release energy. In addition, recess time should range from 15-20 minutes. If children need a second recess it should be allowed. Some classrooms have children with ADD, autism, or other needs and should be allowed the opportunity for an additional recess, if needed.

Especially for children with special needs recess has proven to be beneficial, and even though it takes time from the academic curriculum it benefits all children. The findings in this literature review documented that recess is still needed.

3. Recess should be implemented according to the guidelines for developing an effective recess program.

To get the most out of recess time, the guidelines for developing an effective recess program should be considered. These guidelines, which are included above, should be implemented to the best that they can be. For example, some schools may not have the resources to provide a variety of equipment for their students. In this situation, schools should do what they can to provide this for their children. Perhaps recess should be designed with the same care and attention given to other curricular areas.

Recommendations

Based on the review of the literature, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Even with the increased pressures of NCLB, schools should still make recess a priority. Children can learn many skills necessary for life, such as social skills. Not allowing children to run and play during the school day would be a disservice to our children.
2. Recess should be viewed as a subject area. Just like math and reading are considered to be core curricular areas, so should recess. Children learn many social and physical skills during recess that they will carry with them through their lifetime.
3. Recess should not be replaced with physical education. Recess provides an unstructured time without the continuous intervention of adults. Physical education has its own standards and benchmarks to fulfill. Recess and physical education should be seen as two different areas of learning.
4. The guidelines listed above are needed to develop an effective recess program.
5. Teachers and administrators should recognize and support the research on the

benefits of recess. In addition, school personnel should be educated on the negative effects of eliminating recess. Lastly, in buildings where recess is being eliminated, teachers should convince their superiors of the importance of including recess in the school day. "If we want to allow students to find their own tasks or to construct their own meanings, then we need to give them unstructured time to invent and discover, to explore and imagine alone and with others" (Schultz, 1998, p. 38).

REFERENCES

- Bland, K. (2005, May 12). Schools pressured to cut recess: Instructional needs mean less time for kids to play. *The Arizona Republic*, (page numbers not indicated).
- Blatchford, P. (1996). We did more then: Changes in pupils' perceptions of breaktime (recess) from 7 to 16 years. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 11 (1), 14-23.
- Clements, R., & Jarrett, O. (2000). Elementary school recess then and now. *Streamlined Seminar*, 18 (4), 1-4.
- Cromwell, S. (2005). Should schools take a break from recess? Retrieved June 14, 2005 from http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin088.shtml
- Decker, C. & Decker, J. (2001). *Planning and Administering Early Childhood Programs*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Doheny, K. (2005, June 5). No child left behind: But physical activity may suffer. *Healthday Reporter*, (page numbers not indicated).
- Flaxman, S. (1999). Play: An endangered species. *Instructor*, 110(2), 39-41.
- Geiger, B. (1996). A time to learn, a time to play: Premack's principle applied in the classroom. *American Secondary Education*, 25, 2-6.
- Jarrett, O. (2003). Recess in elementary school: What does the research say? Retrieved June 6, 2005 from <http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-2/recess.html>
- Jarrett, O., Maxwell, D., Dickerson, C., Hoge, P., Davies, G., & Yetley, A. (1998). Impact of recess on classroom behavior: Group differences and individual differences. *Journal of Educational Research*, 92, 121-126.
- National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (2003) Recess and the importance of play: A position statement on young children and recess. Retrieved June 14, 2005 from <http://naecs.crc.uiuc.edu/position/recessplay.html>
- National Association for Sport and Physical Education, an Association of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. (2001) Recess in elementary schools: A position paper from the national association for sport and physical education. Retrieved June 14, 2005 from http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/pdf_files/pos_papers/current_res.pdf

No-Recess Policies Being Implemented in U.S. School Districts. Retrieved June 14, 2005 from <http://library.adoption.com/Education/No-Recess-Policies-Being-Implemented-in-US-School-Districts/article/3811/1.html>

Pellegrini, A., & Bohn, C. (2005). The role of recess in children's cognitive performance and school adjustment. *Educational Researcher*, 34(1), 13-19.

Pellegrini, A., & Bjorklund, D. (1996). The place of recess in schools: Issues in the role of recess in children's education and development. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 11(1), 5-13.

Richmond, E. (2004, March 9). Elementary schools phasing out recess: District sees teaching time as higher priority. *Las Vegas Sun* (page numbers not indicated).

Schultz, K. (1998). On the elimination of recess. *Education Week*, 17(39), 38-39.

Svenson, A. A recess for recess? Retrieved June 14, 2005
<http://www.familyeducation.com/article/0,1120,24-3496,00.html>