

POWER-PAC

Parents Organized to Win, Educate and Renew – Policy Action Council

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ELEMENTARY JUSTICE CAMPAIGN: REDIRECTING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

FACT SHEET: The Importance and Benefits Of Reinstating Recess in Chicago Public Schools

Thirty years ago recess for elementary school children in Chicago was the norm; now it is the exception. Nine out of ten elementary school students in the Chicago Public Schools do not have recess¹ and the number of schools in which “silent lunches,” where children are not allowed to speak, is on the rise². With the increased pressure for students to do well on tests, many administrators argue that providing recess would take needed time away from the classroom, but parents and expert empirical data argue otherwise, showing recess has a positive correlation with higher test scores and does not need to take time away from classroom work.

Children learn more quickly and better when they are given breaks during an assignment³. This especially applies to native and foreign language recall, mathematical facts and text recall⁴. Students pay better attention to tasks when they are given breaks. Children become temporarily bored with the stimulus in their environment rapidly. During recess, children experience the novelty of a new environment. After recess the classroom is a new stimulus again and children can pay better attention to the task they are on which they are concentrating⁵.

Recess gives children the opportunity to develop socially and emotionally. A child’s behavior on the playground is preparation for adulthood. They learn to make decisions, resolve conflict, respect rules, be self-disciplined, control aggression, solve problems and develop leadership skills⁶. The relationships students create on the playground enhance and foster learning inside the classroom⁷.

¹ Duffrin, E. (April 2005) Schools bring back longer lunch and recess, see gains. Catalyst Chicago.

² Jambor, T. Recess and social development. Early Childhood.com.

³ Hunter, W. (1929) Learning III: Experimental studies of learning. The Foundations of Experimental Psychology.

⁴ Dempster, F. N. (1988) The spacing effect. American Psychologist, 43.

⁵ Pellegrini, A.D. (1991) Outdoor recess: Is it really necessary? Principal, 70(5).

⁶ Jarrett, O. S., and D. M. Maxwell. (2000) What research says about the need for recess. Elementary School Recess: Selected Games and Activities for Teachers and Parents.

⁷ Pellegrini, A.D. (1992) Kindergarten children’s social-cognitive status as a predictor of first-grade success. Early Childhood Research Quarterly 7(4).

In Asia and around the world, children have recess as an integral part of their school day. The success of American children academically is often compared to the academic success of children in Asia. In Asian countries, including China, Taiwan, and Japan, children go to school for eight hours, but at least two of these hours consist of recess, long lunch periods and non-academic clubs⁸.

Children will be healthier if given time during the day for recess. Since 1980, the number of overweight children (ages 6 to 11 years) has doubled and since 1970 it has tripled⁹. Daily physical activity helps children control weight gain and augments the development of muscles and the growth of the heart and lungs in 4 to 12 year olds¹⁰. It also has been correlated with higher self-esteem in adolescents¹¹. Recess has additional benefits, as children that are more physically active at school are more physically active at home after school¹².

Teachers benefit from having a break during the school day. “There’s more teaching and learning going on in the afternoon,” according to Charlotte Stoxstell, the principal of Bethune Elementary in East Garfield Park. “The teachers aren’t tired. The kids aren’t tired¹³.” When students don’t have recess, teachers don’t have a lunch break until after school ends. Teachers, like all workers, deserve a break during their workday.

Nationally African-American students have less time for recess than their white counterparts. Across the country, one out of every three African-American students in elementary school doesn’t have recess, whereas one out of every six white students doesn’t have recess¹⁴. And in a recent study completed by POWER-PAC, of 33 schools represented – 30 of which were in predominantly low-income communities of color, 28 of those schools did not provide recess. Of the three schools represented that were in predominantly white, affluent neighborhoods, all three provided recess.

Given all the benefits of recess, POWER-PAC parents believe that the lack of recess for African-American children and other children of color is having a significant detrimental impact on the social, emotional and academic development of their children.



⁸ Stevenson, H.W. (1992) Learning from Asian schools. *Scientific American* 267(6).

⁹ Dwyer, J.T., E.J. Stone, M. Yang, L.S. Webber, A. Must, H.A. Feldman, P.R. Nader, C.L. Perry and G.S. Parcel. (2000). Prevalence of marked overweight and obesity in a multiethnic pediatric population. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 100(10).

¹⁰ Clements, R. and O.S. Jarrett. (2000) Elementary school recess: Then and now. *Streamlined Seminar: National Association of Elementary School Principals* 18(4).

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1997) Guidelines for school and community programs to promote lifelong physical activity among young people. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 46.

¹² Dale, D., C.B. Corbin, and K.S. Dale (2000) Restricting opportunities to be active during school time: Do children compensate by increasing physical activity levels after school? *Research Quarterly for Exercise & Sport* 71(3).

¹³ Duffrin, E. (April 2005) Schools bring back longer lunch and recess, see gains. *Catalyst Chicago*.

¹⁴ Roth, J.D., J. Brooks-Gunn, M.R. Linver, and S.L. Hofferth. (April 2003) What happens during the school day? *Time diaries from a national sample of elementary school teachers. Teachers College Record* 105 (3).