## Reading Part A

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**The Value of School Recess and Outdoor Play**

*adapted from* [**https://oldweb.naeyc.org/ece/1998/08.asp**](https://oldweb.naeyc.org/ece/1998/08.asp)

When parents work, kids may have no time to play outside. Instead, they watch TV, play video and computer games, or take lessons. Recent studies show not playing outside leads to higher levels of obesity.

Many U.S. public schools are cutting out recess. Some educators say the time is better spent on academics. They note that playground injuries can result in lawsuits. They worry that children will be bothered by strangers while outdoors, especially because there is a shortage of adults to supervise recess.

Others say recess is needed to reduce stress in children’s lives. Research shows that physical activity improves children’s attentiveness. It also decreases restlessness. Children can work out their emotions while playing. During recess, children learn about cooperating, helping, sharing, and solving problems.

**Despite Benefits, Recess for Many Students Is Restricted**

***by*** [***Holly Korbey***](http://blogs.kqed.org/mindshift/author/hollykorbey/)***in MindShift***

In New Jersey, legislators are trying to turn 20 minutes of daily recess into law. They want to make outdoor play mandatory for all students from kindergarten through fifth grade. The bill also says recess can’t be taken away as punishment for breaking minor rules.

According to State Senator Shirley K. Turner, who sponsored the bill, “For the health and well-being of future generations, it is important we continue to look at recess and physical education, not as something that takes time away from learning in the classroom, but as part of a curriculum that will teach lasting and important life skills. Like generations before them, children just need to get out and play.”

But in states, academic requirements and a lack of staff to cover recess have ended recess time. For many American students, time for recess is at an all-time low.

But the research on the cognitive, social and emotional benefits of physical outdoor play for children continues to grow. Research shows that exercise and play

* + Lowers childhood obesity;
  + Makes kids smarter
  + Makes kids less depressed and anxious.
  + Is linked to higher grades

The American Academy of Pediatrics is calling for all schools to have recess, calling it “crucial” to development and learning.

Boston University Psychologist Peter Gray has spent his career studying and advocating for children’s free play. “When I was in elementary school, in the 1950s, we had six-hour school days: two hours of outdoors playing per day, half hour in the morning, half hour during lunch, and a full hour in the afternoon. Including going off-campus! It’s such a different world [now], and so recess has been eroded over time.”

Gray calls this a “nurturing” environment. Recess, however, is mostly in same-age groups. Same-age groups can lead to cliques, competition, and bullying.

And then there’s the time issue: when students don’t get much of a break, they don’t have time to settle disputes before they head back to class. Gray said, “[T]he kids would get outside, and they didn’t have time to settle any problems. They were still focused on the conflict, and it was a big deal to calm them down” once they went back to class.

“Because kids are not growing up playing outdoors on their own, they haven’t learned how to solve their own problems,” he said.

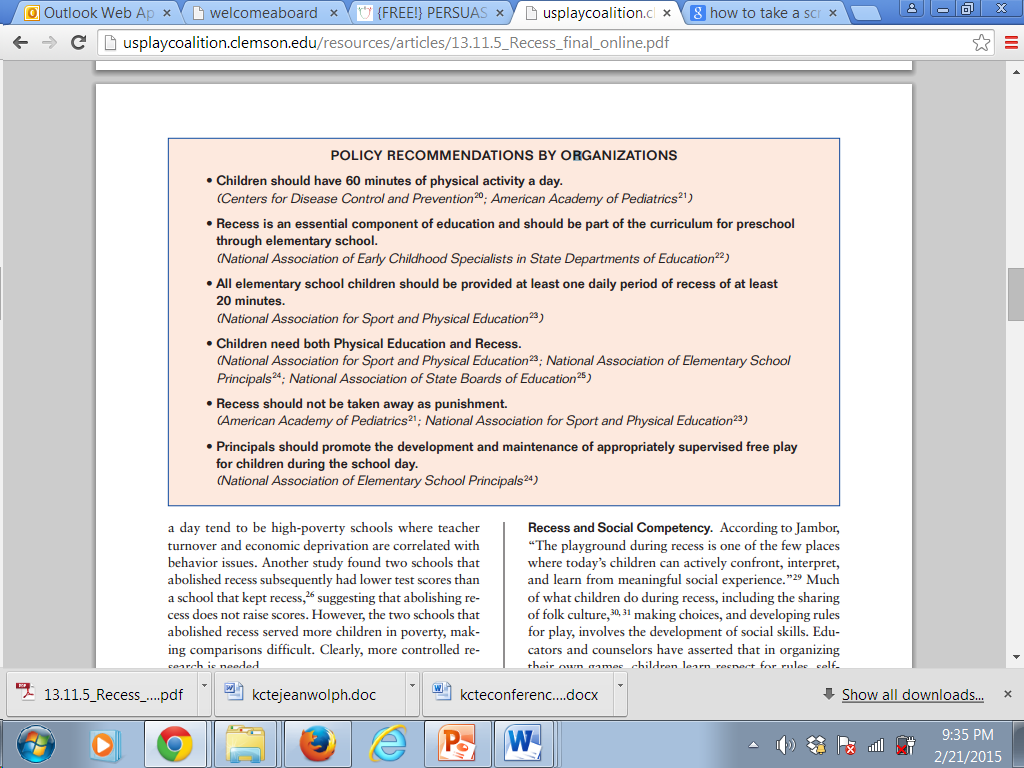
“Staffing is the largest obstacle to recess, as the students must be actively monitored all the time,” said Jerry Burkett, former principal in Grand Prairie, Texas. Scheduling became difficult because staff was needed at both lunch and recess. In addition, free play led to problems. “Recess is often the time where discipline problems spike if there is not a structured lesson, defined rules, or active monitoring of the students. Social problems are rampant on the playground, which enhances the need for more adults to monitor the students.”

TAKING SCHOOL OUTDOORS

In Canada, they are taking a different approach to recess. They are creating outdoor classrooms and even outdoor schools. They mix academics and play in an outdoor setting.

* One Toronto school created an outdoor classroom for their kindergarten students, where they spent at least 75 minutes per day playing in sand, mud, snow, water and grass – no matter the weather. Teachers report that students are more engaged. They say students’ attention spans have increased both outside and inside. Students with autism and special needs have shown great improvement in their academic and social skills.

**A Research-Based Case for Recess** *by Olga S. Jarrett, Georgia State University* / *http://usplaycoalition.clemson.edu/*



**Writing Part B**

**Writing situation:**

* **Your school is considering a change in the daily schedule. Some teachers want to have a recess period and some want students to get academic enrichment instead. Your class has been researching the pros and cons of recess. Your principal has invited students to share their opinions about the schedule change.**

**Writing directions:**

* **Write a letter to the principal in which you recommend having recess or not. Use information from the articles to explain why recess should or should not be part of the school day.**