

Do You Need Recess?

Taking a break during the day is good for your brain and body. Should more middle schools make time for recess?

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Madeleine Hamilton was bursting with excitement. The principal of her school in Franklin, Tennessee, had just made a big announcement: Recess was coming back.

Madeleine and her sixth-grade classmates would go outside for 20 minutes every day. They could work on new jump rope tricks. They could catch up with friends and kick a soccer ball around.

Most middle school students don't get that chance. That's because most middle schools don't have recess anymore. Experts say that about 40 percent of U.S. school districts have cut back on recess time—or cut recess entirely.

Now, more and more experts agree: Schools should put recess back on the schedule.

Brain Breaks

Students have been heading outside for recess since at least the 1800s.

But in the 1980s, some U.S. schools started to cut recess. Why?

American students weren't doing as well in school as students in other countries. To catch up, many schools in the U.S. got rid of recess. This made more time in the schedule for important subjects like science and math.

But research shows that taking a break can actually help students learn. How can 20 minutes of kickball or talking with friends help you with algebra?

Your brain can get overwhelmed when you move from subject to subject without a break. That makes it harder for you to remember new information. Scientists say that resting your brain helps it work better.

Even adults have started taking breaks to rest their brains—and play. At Google, employees can stop working to use the office's LEGO® station. And workers at Facebook can play video games in the company's arcade.

Get Moving

Recess doesn't just help students learn. Moving around can also help keep kids healthy. People who exercise daily can avoid depression, or extreme sadness. They are also less likely to become obese, or very overweight.

Doctors say kids should be active for at least 60 minutes a day. But middle schoolers often juggle after-school activities, homework, and family time. That makes it tough to fit in exercise—unless you can run around at recess.

Staying Safe

Of course, kids can get hurt playing sports like dodgeball. Some schools have cut recess to avoid sprained ankles and broken wrists.

Schools also need adults to keep students safe on the playground during recess. Some schools can't afford to pay anyone to do this job.

Plus, 73 percent of school-age kids in America play sports or do other athletic activities after school. Do they really need to take time out of jam-packed school days for recess?

Madeleine thinks so. "Recess is the one break in the day to relax and have fun," she says.

What do you think? Does recess belong on the schedule?