

Making the Most out of Recess

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RunningBrooke offers 5 Best Practices for how to implement effective physical activity into the school day and week. This is the fourth in a five-part series to explain these practices and show how to find small pockets of time to get Alexandria's youth moving to meet the CDC-recommended 60 minutes of daily activity.

Best Practice #4: An inclusive and active recess with a variety of activities and an encouragement of free play.

According to the CDC's Strategies for Recess in Schools, "students who are physically active tend to have better grades, school attendance, classroom behaviors, and cognitive performance. Recess in schools benefits students by:

- GET MOVING**
- ❖ Increasing their level of physical activity;
 - ❖ Improving their memory, attention, and concentration;
 - ❖ Helping them stay on-task in the classroom;
 - ❖ Reducing disruptive behavior in the classroom;
 - ❖ Improving their social and emotional development (e.g., learning how to share and negotiate)."

In 2013, the American Academy of Pediatrics' Council on School Health said that "recess is a crucial and necessary component of a child's development."

The benefits of recess are partly because exercise affects us on a cellular level. It cues the building blocks of learning in the brain and increases alertness, attention, and motivation to learn. Studies

show that students who get regular physical activity perform better in school. When we compare brain scans of students, we can see that the brain scan of the physically active student has practically all synapses sparking, while the brain scan of the physically inactive student has substantially less activity. Being active makes our brains work better and prepares students to learn at their best.

Adequate recess during the school day is a simple way to help kids reach the CDC-recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day. For some students, recess may be one of the only times they get active during the school day. Research has shown that children can accumulate up to 40 percent of their total daily physical activity during recess.

There are some recommended key elements that should be in place to make recess an effective time and space for students to experience its benefits. Some of these elements include the following: appropriate equipment and low-cost supplies like hula hoops, jump ropes, and balls, which enable children to move and be active; an adult supervisor or supervisors trained in playground management and student inclusivity; and a variety of activities and emphasis on and encouragement of free play. This is a time for kids to get creative and work together. Recess can also be a great opportunity for older school children to oversee the activities of younger children and gain civic and leadership experience.

Please look for next week's piece about Best Practice #5: City-wide promotion of safe routes to school. See www.runningbrooke.org.