

Keeping Recess in Schools

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Introduction

As the clock ticks closer to the middle of the day, school children get increasingly fidgety and unfocused. Heads are constantly turning towards the clock and ears are anticipating the sound of the bell to go off at any minute. Finally, after what seems to be forever, the bell rings and the school children jump out of their desks yelling “RECESS!” Many teachers recognize this scenario as one that happens daily. As most people can tell by the energy and excitement children show when it is time for recess, it is obvious how important that period of the day is for children. However, recently critics and parents have discussed the option of taking recess out of the school day and spending more time on academics. Recess is a vital part of the elementary school day and because of the serious debate of taking it away, the education and well-being of students could potentially be harmed.

Recess has become an increasingly popular debate about whether or not schools should get rid of recess altogether and spend more time on academics (Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner, 2010). This new trend could potentially harm the whole child academically, cognitively, emotionally, physically, and socially. Before getting deeper into the discussion, it is important to understand how recess is beneficial in these aspects.

Academic and Cognitive Benefits

After children have been let out of the structured classroom to a new environment where they have recess, they are known to be more attentive and perform better in the classroom. Children spend so much time socializing and engaging with peers during recess, and as a result, they spend less time during class talking to one another about irrelevant topics. Children are able to focus better when they are removed from the classroom and taken into a different environment for a while.

Along with that, one of the most important ways children develop is by experimenting through hands on experiences, which is something children cannot do as well in the classroom setting.

Social and Emotional Benefits

Recess is a great stress reliever for children. If a child is stressed out with a math assignment and then forced into a reading assignment right away afterwards, that child will probably be unfocused or decide he or she does not want to try anymore. Because of this, the break of recess is important to relieve any stress that could cause many issues in the child's view of school and the possibility of that child falling behind academically.

Furthermore, good social skills are one of the most important qualities a person can have. Developing these skills is extremely easy during recess when the whole time is spent interacting with peers. Through recess, children learn to negotiate, cooperate, share, and problem solve without even realizing it. These communication skills are vital for the rest of their school days along with adulthood.

Physical Benefits

Children do not spend the whole time of recess engaging in vigorous activity; however, they do get more exercise at recess than they would sitting in the classroom and in many cases, at home. This is a great time for children to learn good motor skills and get free activity for the sheer joy of it. Recess is a huge factor in decreasing childhood obesity and getting rid of it could make that issue skyrocket.

Counterarguments

Safety is one of the main arguments given, especially from parents. For whatever reason, whether it is supervision or playground equipment, parents feel like recess is unsafe and should be banned altogether. Additionally, many schools are having trouble finding supervisors because it is a job

that may not give much if any pay and many people may not be able to handle certain situations if they encounter them. Another argument is that recess is a waste of time that could be used for academics.

Some people believe that recess should not be banned, but instead, become structured. This involves children to engage in games and activities that are structured by the supervisor. People believe this would be beneficial by making children engage in exercise during recess and preventing childhood obesity even better. The problem with this is it undermines many social, cognitive, and emotional benefits as stated previously because children will not get to play what they want with who they want. It also could potentially replace physical education, which would be an issue as well.

Strategies

Because safety is a major concern for parents, there are many preventive measures that can prevent these issues. These measures include developing a safe space or facility, maintaining equipment and having regular inspections, establishing and enforcing safety rules, teaching children games and rules in physical education classes that they can play on the playground to prevent injuries and safe options, establish a school wide policy to prevent bullying and aggressive behavior, and having authorized adults who are able to intervene if a child's physical or emotional safety is at risk as the supervisor.

One recent strategy to keep recess, but make it better is the Recess Before Lunch movement. Most schools have lunch before recess, which causes children to shove food in their mouths quickly and then run out to recess as quickly as possible. It is a possibility that having recess before lunch could improve behavior during mealtime and cause less food to be wasted. Dr. Worthington made a great point when discussing this movement, saying "Children's hunger for

recess is greater than their hunger for lunch (Worthington, Personal Communication, 2008).” The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and United States Department of Agriculture both support the Recess Before Lunch movement (Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner, 2010).

Conclusion

Given these points, it seems obvious that recess should be kept. The factors that oppose recess are minor issues that could be easily fixed. Along with that, getting rid of recess for academics could actually cause even more issues with academics. Students would have more stress problems and would not be focused in the classroom. Altogether, the benefits of recess are evident and vital to children’s education. Children are not meant to sit still in a desk all day, but instead, run around with the spirit, joy, and imagination of childhood.

Bibliography

Ramstetter, C., Murray, R., & Garner, A. (2010). The crucial role of recess in schools. *Journal of School Health*, 517-526.