



JOHNS HOPKINS  
BLOOMBERG SCHOOL  
of PUBLIC HEALTH

Bloomberg American  
Health Initiative

**PLAY, POLICY, AND POTENTIAL:**

# **ADVANCING RECESS IN SCHOOLS THROUGH STATE LEGISLATION**

**SPONSORED BY BLOOMBERG AMERICAN HEALTH INITIATIVE**

**AT THE JOHNS HOPKINS BLOOMBERG SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH**



# CONVENING AGENDA

## Play, Policy, and Potential: Advancing Recess in Schools through State Legislation

A collaborative discussion featuring legislators, advocates, educators, and health professionals to discuss state-level recess laws

**Monday, December 15<sup>th</sup> 2025**

Time	Agenda
10:00–10:15	<b>Welcome and Opening Remarks</b> Erin Hager, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
10:15–11:15	<b>Why Recess Matters: The Research and the Realities (<i>Keynote Address</i>)</b> Hannah Thompson, University of California Nutrition Policy Institute
11:15–12:15	<b>Voices from the Field: Moderated Panel Discussion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kayla Jackson, The School Superintendents Association (AASA)</li><li>• Chelsea Prax, AFT</li><li>• Ashley Cotton, Free State PTA</li><li>• Zachary Parker, DC Councilmember for Ward 5 (former DC State Board of Education Member)</li><li>• Moderator: Saniyah Ikard, Student, Towson University</li></ul>
12:15–12:30	<b>Overview of a New Policy Package focused on State-Level Recess Policies</b> Erin Hager, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
12:30–1:45	<i>(Recess Before Lunch!)</i> <b>Lunch and Networking</b> Moderators for Lunch Discussions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• David Berrigan, National Cancer Institute</li><li>• Brian Griffith, SHAPE MD</li><li>• Jim Barry, SHAPE PA</li><li>• Kimberly Clevenger, Utah State University</li></ul>
1:45–2:45	<b>Legislation Lightning Talks: How States Have Passed Recess Laws</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Councilmember Charles Allen, Washington DC</li><li>• Former State Senator Josh Newman, California</li><li>• Julie McCleery, College of Education at the University of Washington</li></ul>

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Time	Agenda
2:45-4:00	<b>Breakout Groups: From Policy to Practice</b> <i>(30 minutes each, choose 2)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Group A: Building district- community- and school-level support Carly Wright, SHAPE America</li><li>Group B: Legislative advocacy Kerri Lowrey, University of MD Carey School of Law</li><li>Group C: Equity considerations (schools with few resources, populations with disabilities, etc.) Lysa Ratliff, Kaboom Melissa Otterbein, Special Olympics International</li><li>Group D: After a law is passed, what comes next? (training and implementation) Keri Schoeff, Arizona State Department of Education</li></ul>
4:00-4:30	<b>Breakout Group: Report Out</b>
4:30-5:00	<b>Action Planning &amp; Closing Remarks</b> Erin Hager, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
5:00-6:00	<b>Advisory Board Office Hours</b>

# INVITED SPEAKERS



## ERIN HAGER

**Affiliation:** Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Session:** (1) Welcome and Opening Remarks; (2) Overview of a New Policy Package focused on State-Level Recess Policies; (3) Action Planning & Closing Remarks

**Bio:** Dr. Hager is a Professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in the Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health. She is a nutritional epidemiologist with additional training in physical activity assessment and promotion. She has had funding from the USDA, NIH, and other local and federal agencies to evaluate the impact of policies and programs to promote healthy eating, physical activity, and food security for children and families, with a focus on schools. In addition to her research, she serves as the co-chair of the CDC NOPREN School Wellness Working Group and the chair of the Maryland State School Health Council.



## HANNAH THOMPSON

**Affiliation:** University of California Nutrition Policy Institute

**Session:** Why Recess Matters: The Research and the Realities

**Bio:** Hannah R. Thompson, PhD, MPH is the Director of the University of California Nutrition Policy Institute. Her research focuses on improving cardiometabolic health at the intersection of science, community, and policy. She seeks to design and evaluate scalable, cost-effective, and policy-relevant interventions to increase healthy food and beverage consumption, increase physical activity and fitness, and reduce health inequities. She focuses on youth-facing policies like mandated physical education, recess, and nutritious meals in public schools, as well as federal programs like WIC, CACFP, and SNAP, that have tremendous potential for both short- and long-term health impact.





## KAYLA JACKSON

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**Affiliation:** The School Superintendents Association (AASA)

**Session:** Panel – Voices from the Field

**Bio:** Kayla Jackson has oversight for AASA's work related to health and mental health, especially as they relate to positive academic outcomes for students. Prior to joining AASA, Jackson was the Vice President of Programs at the National Network for Youth. She has extensive background in women's and adolescent health, youth, and youth at high risk for negative health outcomes related to reproductive health, breast cancer, mental health, and sexually transmitted infections/HIV.



## CHELSEA PRAX

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**Affiliation:** American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

**Session:** Panel – Voices from the Field

**Bio:** Chelsea Prax, MPH, CPH directs Children's Health and Well-Being programs and policy for AFT. Prax supports affiliates with research, advocacy, strategic partnership, technical assistance and more to address union members' priorities in children's health. Her recent work includes elevating mandated support to strengthen schools as sites of effective child maltreatment prevention and intervention, coordinating graduate-level professional learning on evidence-based, universal trauma-informed practices, and amplifying the power of Medicaid as the nation's largest children's health insurance program.



## ASHLEY COTTON

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**Affiliation:** Free State PTA

**Session:** Panel – Voices from the Field

**Bio:** Ashley Cotton is the President Elect of Free State PTA, an organization which works to promote the welfare of children and youth, fostering collaboration between parents, educators, and stakeholders to enhance education and well-being.



## COUNCILMEMBER ZACHARY PARKER

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**Affiliation:** Washington DC Council, Ward 5

**Session:** Panel – Voices from the Field

**Bio:** Zachary Parker is an educator and public servant who grew up on the South Side of Chicago and earned his Bachelor of Science in Communication Science and Disorders from Northwestern University. He began his career as a 7th-grade math teacher in New Orleans post-Katrina with Teach for America and spent nearly a decade supporting DC school leaders. In 2018, he was elected to the DC State Board of Education and was unanimously selected as President in 2021. In 2022, Zachary was elected to represent Ward 5 on the DC Council, becoming the first Black openly gay councilmember to serve. Since taking office, he has championed transformative legislation, including a bill that would make D.C. the first city to implement a local child tax credit, and was appointed Chair of the Committee on Youth Affairs in January 2025.



## SANIYAH IKARD

**Affiliation:** Student, Towson University; Maryland State School Health Council Fellow

**Session:** Panel Moderator – Voices from the Field

**Bio:** Saniyah Ikard is a senior Public Health major with a Community Health Promotion minor at Towson University and a proud graduate of Prince George's County Public Schools. She currently serves as the Maryland State School Health Council's 2025–2026 Fellow, supporting statewide school health and wellness initiatives. Saniyah's interests include health education, reducing health disparities, and advancing equitable community health programs. She brings experience in community engagement, youth support, and health advocacy, and is dedicated to promoting healthier, more equitable environments for all students and families. In her free time, she enjoys dancing and discovering new TV shows.



## COUNCILMEMBER CHARLES ALLEN

**Affiliation:** Washington DC Council, Ward 6

**Session:** Lightning Talks – How States have Passed Recess Laws

**Bio:** Ward 6 Councilmember Charles Allen has successfully championed bold legislative efforts around education, the environment, safer streets, public safety and criminal justice, and campaign finance reform. His first piece of legislation, "Books from Birth", has delivered more than 3 million books to the homes of DC families with a child under the age of five. As Ward 6 Councilmember, he has focused on ensuring every student has a great neighborhood school, improving public safety, and creating more affordable housing. His "Vision Zero" and "STEER Act" legislation have pushed the District to create safer streets for all. Councilmember Allen graduated from Washington and Lee University and holds a Master of Public Health from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.





## FORMER STATE SENATOR JOSH NEWMAN

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**Affiliation:** Candidate for California State Superintendent of Public Instruction

**Session:** Lightning Talks – How States have Passed Recess Laws

**Bio:** With a career spanning military service, entrepreneurship, teaching, and elected office, Josh Newman brings a uniquely well-rounded perspective to public service. He most recently served as State Senator for California's 29th Senate District, where he focused on strengthening local communities and championing policies that improve opportunities for veterans and working families. As Chair of the Senate Education Committee, Josh authored SB 291, landmark legislation guaranteeing every California K–6 student at least 30 minutes of protected, unstructured play each school day. He is currently a candidate for State Superintendent of Public Instruction, running on a vision of healthier students, stronger schools, and a more equitable public education system. A graduate of Yale University, Josh served in the U.S. Army with nuclear artillery and field artillery battalions.



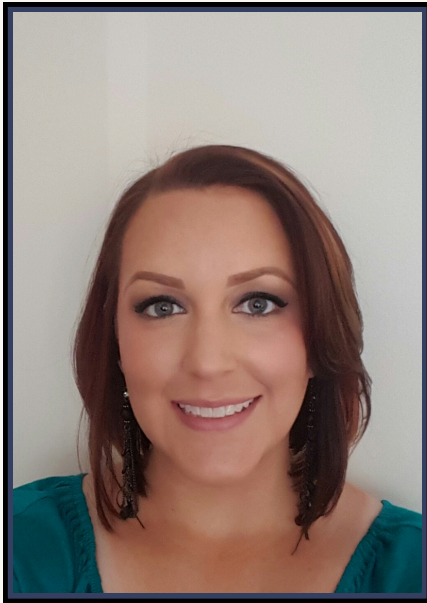
## JULIE MCCLEERY

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**Affiliation:** College of Education, University of Washington

**Session:** Lightning Talks – How States have Passed Recess Laws

**Bio:** Dr. McCleery is a Professor of Practice in the College of Education at the University of Washington and Co-Director of the UW's Center for Leadership in Athletics. She is a researcher, teacher, and advocate who specializes in research translation and interdisciplinary work in youth sports, women's sports, coaching, and physical activity and play equity. A co-founder of the King County Play Equity Coalition, she is passionate about using research to co-create interventions and systemic changes that support youth to thrive through sport and physical activity. She received her BA from Georgetown, MEd from Harvard, PhD from UW, and will receive her JD from Seattle University in 2026.



## CARLY WRIGHT

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**Affiliation:** SHAPE America

**Session:** Breakout Groups (Group A): Building district- community-and school-level support

**Bio:** Carly Wright serves as the Chief Program Officer for SHAPE America, the leading voice for over 200,000 health and physical education professionals in the United States. With 18 years of service to the organization, Carly spearheads advocacy and policy initiatives at the federal, state, and local levels, focusing on school health and physical education. She leads the annual SPEAK Out! Day event, provides regular advocacy trainings and presentations to SHAPE America members, and represents SHAPE America before Congress and federal agencies, while actively participating in national coalitions dedicated to protecting public education. Carly has been instrumental in advancing health education and physical education provisions in federal law and expanding access to federal funding for health and PE programs. In addition to her advocacy work, she oversees key initiatives such as the SHAPE America National Convention & Expo, professional development opportunities, the National Standards for Health Education and Physical Education, as well as federal grant management and educational content development.



## KERRI MCGOWAN LOWREY

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**Affiliation:** University of Maryland Carey School of Law

**Session:** Breakout Groups (Group B): Legislative Advocacy

**Bio:** Kerri McGowan Lowrey, JD, MPH, is Associate Director for Grants & Research of the Legal Resource Center for Public Health Policy and Deputy Director of Network for Public Health Law, Eastern Region, at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law. She has more than 20 years of experience as a public health lawyer and legal epidemiologist, with focus on injury prevention policy, school health data privacy, and law as a social driver of health. She was Principal Investigator on a NHTSA cooperative agreement to create a comprehensive database of novice driver licensing laws. Since 2019, she has served as co-chair of the Children's Safety Now Alliance Steering Committee, an alliance of more than 35 organizations seeking to elevate child safety as a national priority. She also serves as adjunct professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, teaching Leadership in Health Law & Ethics.



## LYSA RATLIFF

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**Affiliation:** KABOOM!

**Session:** Breakout Groups (Group C): Equity Considerations

**Bio:** Lysa Ratliff is the CEO of KABOOM!, the national non-profit that works to end playspace inequity for good. Throughout her career, she has been a champion for kids and the protection of childhood, leading efforts to connect diverse partners to unite and make change for communities and kids across the country and around the world. Since becoming CEO, Lysa has emerged as a leading national advocate for equitable access to playspaces and has been invited to represent KABOOM! at several White House events. She continues to engage with members of the Administration, Congressional leaders, and Mayors to ensure that creating more opportunities for kids to play remains a national priority. Prior to becoming CEO, she was Vice President of Partnership Development at KABOOM! and has held senior leadership roles at Habitat for Humanity International and Save the Children.



## MELISSA OTTERBEIN

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**Affiliation:** Special Olympics International

**Session:** Breakout Groups (Group C): Equity Considerations

**Bio:** Melissa Otterbein is a Certified Health Education Specialist and Director of Fitness and Healthy Lifestyles at Special Olympics International, where she leads global health programming focused on inclusive, lifelong physical activity and health education. Her career began in HIV/AIDS research at Johns Hopkins University, followed by work as a Global Health Corps fellow with The Grassroot Project. Melissa earned her Master of Public Health in Physical Activity at George Washington University, where she focused her research on nutrition, sport-based youth development, and the power of sport to advance United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. She is an ACSM Physical Activity in Public Health Specialist, Co-Managing Editor for the Journal of Emerging Sport Studies, and serves on the US Center for Coaching Excellence Board of Directors. A lifelong athlete, she is a Certified USA Triathlon Level II Coach, U.S. Masters Swimming Coach, and ACSM Certified Inclusive Fitness Trainer.





## KERI SCHOEFF

**Affiliation:** Arizona Department of Education; SHAPE America

**Session:** Breakout Groups (Group D): After a law is passed, what comes next? (training and implementation)

**Bio:** Keri Schoeff serves as the Title IV-A Safe, Healthy & Active Students Specialist for the Arizona Department of Education, providing leadership to ensure every student has access to safe, healthy, active, and supportive learning environments. She brings extensive experience in education, having taught health and physical education and supported schools in implementing USDA's Local Wellness Policy. As a national Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP) Trainer, she has promoted advancing physical activity opportunities such as recess and classroom physical activity. Her leadership extends nationally through SHAPE America, where she currently serves as Western District Director and contributor to the Physical Activity Council. Passionate about advocating for student health and physical activity, Keri focuses on securing funding and expanding access to quality programs for all students.





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