

PLAY, POLICY AND POTENTIAL:

A Toolkit to Support Advancing Recess
in Schools Through State Laws

December 2025



This toolkit was developed by the STRONG Research Team (Striving To Reach Optimal Nutrition and Growth) in the Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, collaborators from the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, and an advisory board of experts in recess policy, practice and research (described below).

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Acknowledgements:

We would like to acknowledge the important role of our **advisory board** in developing this toolkit. Advisory board members are listed below, alphabetically by the name of their organization.

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National Association of School Nursing (NASN)	nasn.org	Kathy Schulz
National Cancer Institute, Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences, Behavioral Research Program, Health Behaviors Research Branch	class.cancer.gov	David Berrigan Frank Perna
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SHAPE Maryland	shapemd.org	Jim Barry
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SECTION 01:

Introduction to the Recess Policy Toolkit

Background Information

Physical inactivity is a major contributing factor to chronic disease in the U.S.¹ Regular physical activity offers numerous benefits for children, supporting not only physical health but also academic performance and mental and emotional well-being.²⁻⁴ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that children between the ages of 6-17 get at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day.⁵ Given that children spend a substantial portion of their weekdays in school, schools have a vital role in ensuring this recommendation is met.

“Play” often involves physical activity, however not all physical activity is play. Physical activity can be structured and goal-oriented, whereas play is typically unstructured and driven by motivation and fun. For children, active play is a primary way to achieve physical activity goals. Play is essential to children’s healthy development and promotes positive mental health. Benefits of play include improvements in executive functioning, language, early math skills (numerosity and spatial concepts), social development, peer relations, physical development and health, and an enhanced sense of agency, in addition to lower levels of stress.⁶

Children today have less access to play than previous generations. On average, children’s time in school and on homework total to more than 50 hours per week, making academic expectations more rigorous than the 40-hour work week.⁷ At the same time, children’s mental health has declined. Some have posited that a primary cause of the rise in mental health disorders among children is a decline in opportunities for play.⁷

One of the most effective strategies for the promotion of physical activity, play, and the associated benefits for school-aged children and adolescents is **daily recess**- a regularly scheduled period in the school day for physical activity and play, monitored by trained staff or volunteers.⁸ Recess supports children’s physical health while also promoting mental wellness, social development, and cognitive function. Recess, which provides intentional opportunities for unstructured breaks during the school day, is associated with greater activity and lower sedentary time, and may decrease the risk of obesity and obesity-related health conditions.⁹ In addition to physical health benefits of recess, there is extensive evidence that recess, specifically, has mental health, behavioral, and academic benefits for youth.^{10,11} Recess is an important time for socialization and peer interaction, allowing the development of essential social skills.¹² Though much of the focus on recess has been on elementary schools, there is emerging evidence that recess is beneficial to adolescents as well.¹³ Given that 84% of school-age children in the U.S. attend public school, recess offers an unmatched opportunity to use existing systems to improve the health of our nation’s children.

To ensure children have access to daily recess, an effective approach is to have a **state-level recess law** in place. Codifying recess into state law is important, as children living in states with recess laws have significantly greater odds of being physically active every day.¹⁴ Ensuring that all elementary and middle school students have access to recess is a necessity to support healthy children.¹⁵ To support the development, passage, and implementation of strong state-level recess laws, we have developed this toolkit for advancing recess in schools through state laws.

Approach to Developing This Recess Policy Toolkit

Our project team is led by Erin Hager, PhD, Professor, and Rachel Deitch, MS, Program Officer, both in the Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, in collaboration with colleagues from the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, specifically Kerri Lowerey, MPH, JD. Once funding was secured, our team invited researchers, practitioners, and stakeholder to form an advisory board. Organizations involved in the advisory board are listed in the table below. Over the course of one year (November 2024–November 2025), members attended three virtual meetings and provided iterative feedback on best practices and policy toolkit components as they were developed and refined.

ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN ADVISORY BOARD
AFT
Arizona Department of Education
East Hartford Public Schools
Free State PTA
Maryland Advisory Council on Health and Physical Education
National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)
The School Superintendents Association (AASA)
National Association of School Nursing (NASN)
National Cancer Institute, Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences, Behavioral Research Program, Health Behaviors Research Branch
SHAPE America (Society of Health and Physical Educators)
SHAPE Maryland
Special Olympics International
University of California Nutrition Policy Institute
University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law
Utah State University

At the first meeting, we discussed the goals of the project, recent research and legislation, and discussed additional advisory board members to invite to join the project. It was noted that the youth voice was not included in the advisory board. With that, we sought additional funding to conduct focus groups with youth and other school-level stakeholders to understand their perspectives on state recess laws. This work was done in Maryland; however, the focus group guides are included in this toolkit for others to incorporate youth and stakeholder voices into their state-level advocacy work.

During the second advisory board meeting, we met with Josh Newman, a U.S. State Senator, California, to learn more about his work in passing a recess law. We also heard from Tracy Steffano, an advocate from Connecticut (K-12 Supervisor for Health and Physical Education), who spoke about implementing recess in middle schools in East Hartford Public Schools. Project leadership led a structured discussion with advisory board members, asking questions throughout. From this discussion, information on advocacy supports, legislator concerns, and approaches to getting a recess law passed were incorporated in the toolkit components.



Our team then hosted a promoted content session at the SHAPE America National Convention titled “Requesting Feedback: Toolkit to Promote State-Level Recess Policies”. The session included a brief overview of the draft recess law best practices followed by a policy-to-action activity. Participants included states with and without recess laws. We heard about attempts to pass recess laws that failed, along with barriers and supports for implementation once a law was in place. We used the information garnered from this session throughout this toolkit.

We also met with leaders from local and state coalitions to identify steps to forming a coalition, as well as key considerations when advocating for new or enhanced legislation. Information gathered from these conversations, in addition to input from the advisory board regarding coalitions, has also been incorporated throughout this toolkit.

Over the next several months, the project team developed draft toolkit components, which were sent to the advisory board in two waves. Advisory board members provided detailed feedback on documents. Feedback was then incorporated into near-final drafts. The advisory board then met one last time to review remaining questions and to discuss dissemination and next steps.

Rationale for Best Practices to Include in State Law

The policy toolkit emphasizes integrating evidence-based best practices into law. These practices were developed based on current literature and input from the advisory board.

The **best practices** incorporated throughout the toolkit have been split into two groups:

- *Essential- key components of a strong recess law*
- *Enhanced- components that would improve the comprehensiveness and impact of a recess law*

There are five essential best practices and 10 enhanced, lettered from A-O. Below we present a brief summary of the evidence supporting the inclusion of these practices in this toolkit.

FIVE ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES

- *(A) The law mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess.*

This ensures that the law is timebound, which is essential for implementation, and includes the minimum time limit recommended jointly by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and SHAPE America (Society for Health and Physical Educators).¹⁶ These agencies recommend a minimum of 20 minutes of recess for elementary students, daily, in addition to a specified period of daily physical activity for middle and high school students.

- *(B) The law is inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8.*

Once students transition to middle school, they are significantly less likely to have recess compared to their elementary school counterparts,¹⁷ yet the national recommendation of 60 minutes of daily physical activity remains unchanged as children enter adolescence. National and international agencies have emphasized the need for recess for all students, through adolescence, including the Global Recess Alliance¹⁸ and the American Academy of Pediatrics.¹⁹ In addition, through a joint statement by the US Play Coalition in collaboration with the American Association for the Child's Right to Play (IPA/USA) and the Alliance for Childhood, the groups recommended 20-40 minutes of recess daily from elementary school through high school.²⁰ Finally, given the current state of adolescent mental health in the U.S., health professionals within these groups have noted the potential benefits of recess to specifically address adolescent wellbeing.¹⁸

- *(C) The law prohibits schools from withholding recess for any reason, including as a form of punishment or to complete academic work, except when a student's participation in recess poses an immediate threat to the safety of the student or others*

Each of the agencies listed above also note the importance of ensuring that recess is not withheld as a punishment.^{16,18-20} In a recent article by Massey et al, it is noted that removing recess amplifies, rather than corrects behavioral challenges.²¹ When recess is withheld for poor behavior or academic performance, students experience reduced physical activity and increased sedentary behavior,²² and this practice may contribute to poor social experiences and mental health in students for whom recess is withheld, as it deprives students of opportunities for social interaction and physical activity.²³ Moreover, the practice of withholding recess as a punishment is more prevalent in schools with a lower socioeconomic make up, compared to higher,²⁴ and more common among Black students compared to White students.²⁵ Given this, our advisory board felt that this was an essential part of a state law.

- **(D) The law prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements.**

Physical education and recess are not the same and should not be considered interchangeable. According to SHAPE America, physical education is “an academic subject that provides students in kindergarten through 12th grade with structured instruction aimed at developing motor skills, knowledge, and behaviors”.²⁶ While both physical education and recess offer opportunities for physical activity, the two serve different purposes. Physical education is structured, curriculum-based and led by an instructor, whereas recess should be unstructured, student-directed, and centered on free play and social interaction. Just as time spent in math or science class is separate from other academic subjects, physical education time must remain entirely separate from recess to ensure students receive unique benefits of both. This distinction is important to maximize the benefits of play during recess, described above, and therefore should be included in a state law.

- **(E) The law includes specific language on compliance (i.e. monitoring and/or enforcement).**

Including a plan for monitoring and enforcing a state law, within school districts and schools, is essential to ensure implementation as intended.

Enhanced Best Practices

There are 10 enhanced best practices that should be considered when developing a state recess law. Many of these are aligned with the Global Recess Alliance's recommendations to ensure that students have a high-quality recess experience, with little variability across schools. They note that common challenges include:¹⁸

- Lack of, or unsafe, equipment and space
- Insufficient or overly restrictive supervision
- Weather or environmental constraints (e.g., extreme heat, extreme UV, poor air quality)
- Exclusionary practices or policies
- Boredom and social conflict.

These and other practices can be addressed in state law and should be considered to enhance a law that includes the five essential best practices outlined above.

TEN ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES

- **(F) The law states that transition time may not be counted toward the required recess minimum.**

Transition time may include time spent walking to and from the recess location, lining up or preparing to re-enter the classroom, dressing or undressing for weather conditions, or receiving behavior-related instructions or disciplines that interrupt the opportunity for unstructured play. By ensuring that transition time is not included in the designated recess time, students are more likely to reach the recess time required in the law.

- **(G) The law requires that recess be provided on shortened school days.**

Incorporating details on how schools should address recess on scheduled half days or unscheduled delayed entry days (i.e. snow days) allows for uniformity across schools and ensures that students have time for play every school day.

- **(H) The law requires recess to be inclusive for all students, including those with disabilities.**

Specifically addressing how this law is inclusive for all students is another enhancement to a recess law, with an emphasis on inclusivity for students with disabilities.

The next three enhanced best practices (**I through K**) include language for laws around recess practices, including prioritizing outdoor recess, ensuing opportunities for active play for indoor recess, and use of personal electronic devices during recess/play time

- **(I) The law requires that recess is held outdoors when possible.**

- **(J) If recess must be held indoors due to weather, safety, or other factors, the law states that schools must provide adequate space for students to be physically active**

- **(K) The law prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess. School approved screen-time that promotes physical activity (e.g., Go Noodle) is allowed when recess must be held indoors.**

- **(L) The law requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess.**

This enhancement address several of the barriers to quality noted by the Global Recess Alliance, including insufficient or overly restrictive supervision, exclusionary practices or policies, and boredom and social conflict among students,¹⁸ in addition to prioritizing student safety. This is also a recommendation specified by the CDC and SHAPE America.¹⁶

- (M) *The law requires schools to schedule recess before lunch.*

This was included given the evidence regarding the impact of recess before lunch on reducing food waste, increasing consumption, improving the lunchtime environment, and improving overall student behavior and classroom concentration.²⁷⁻²⁹ This approach is also recommended by the CDC and SHAPE America¹⁶ and through a joint statement by the US Play Coalition in collaboration with the American Association for the Child's Right to Play (IPA/USA) and the Alliance for Childhood.²⁰

Finally, again prioritizing student safety during recess, a priority for the CDC and SHAPE America,¹⁶ two additional enhanced best practices have been included:

- (N) *The law requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment—whether structured (e.g., playgrounds) or student-initiated (e.g., balls)*
- (O) *The law requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards.*

What is in the Policy Toolkit?

Resources listed below are included to help advocates, stakeholders, and other interested groups to support the development and passage of strong recess laws. Resources include the following:

- A recess policy scorecard for use among states with recess laws in place or to use when developing a recess law. This scorecard utilizes the essential and enhanced best practices described above.
- A high-level summary of legal research conducted by our team on recess laws (or physical activity laws that may include recess) in place throughout the U.S (50 states + District of Columbia)
- State profiles for each of the 25 states and the District of Columbia with a recess or physical activity law in place. For each, we cite the name of the law and extract language from the law that aligns with scorecard components. Finally, we apply the scorecard to each state law.
- Model recess legislation that incorporates all of the essential and enhanced best practices described above. This is a “best case scenario” law.
- A list of implementation challenges and solutions based on real world examples. This list can be used as new legislation is developed or as a new recess law is implemented.
- Detailed information on how to build a coalition to introduce recess laws. This information may be used by community groups or other advocates to begin the process of developing a state recess law.
- Key stakeholder questions, in the style of focus group guides for students, teachers, and administrators. As a coalition is building, it is often helpful to get information and perspectives from key stakeholders on the need for a policy or what components should be included.
- Finally, information on how to write an op-ed for a local news outlet in support of a recess law is also included. Op-eds can be a useful tool for drawing attention to the need for a policy or drawing support for legislation that is being proposed or debated.

Dissemination

The toolkit can be downloaded by section or in its entirety through the Bloomberg American Health Initiative website (americanhealth.jhu.edu).

SECTION 02:

Recess Policy Score Card



Audience

This score card can be used by advocates and/or policy makers at the state, district, or school level.

Purpose

To assess the strength of a recess law based on recess best practices.

Application

This scorecard is designed to assess each best practice individually and is not intended to generate a total or cumulative score. A score of “2” indicates that the best practice is strongly reflected in the recess law. A score of “1” highlights opportunities to strengthen the law in that area.

This scorecard was created by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires development in that area. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES

A. The law mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess

0	Not mentioned
1	<p>Vague and/or suggested OR requires less than 20 minutes/day of recess OR law is inclusive of recess, however other physical activity-specific practices are also noted to meet time requirements (in other words, there is a “physical activity” law and not a “recess” law).</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>(1) Each local and regional board of education shall require each school under its jurisdiction to include in the regular school day for each student devoted to recess of <u>not less than 15 minutes in total</u>.</p> <p>(2) It shall <u>be the goal</u> of all schools to provide recess of at least 20 minutes per day.</p> <p>(3) The <u>time provided for physical activity may include</u> physical education classes and opportunities for unstructured physical activity, such as recess.</p>
2	<p>Required</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>(1) Recess <u>must be at least 20 minutes</u> on regular instructional days and at least 15 minutes on early release days and may be provided in one or more periods.</p> <p>(2) For any school day five clock hours or longer in length, the total time allotted for play for students <u>must be at least 20 minutes</u>.</p>

B. The law is inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8

0	Not mentioned
1	<p>Vague and/or suggested OR only covers elementary school</p> <p>Example: For students in grades kindergarten through 5, schools must provide daily recess. It <u>should be the goal</u> of all schools <u>to provide daily recess for students in grades 6-8</u>.</p>
2	<p>Required</p> <p>Example: All public schools <u>must provide</u> daily time for recess for <u>all students in grades kindergarten through 8</u>.</p>

C. The law prohibits schools from withholding recess for any reason, including as a form of punishment or to complete academic work, except when a student's participation in recess poses an immediate threat to the safety of the student or others.

0	Allowed or not mentioned
1	<p>Vague and/or suggested</p> <p>Example: Teachers <u>shall make a good-faith effort</u> to not withhold recess for punitive reasons.</p>
2	<p>Prohibited</p> <p>Example: All public schools are <u>prohibited from withholding recess as a disciplinary or punitive action</u>, except when a student's participation in recess poses an immediate threat to the safety of the student or others.</p>

ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES

D. The law prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements

0	Allowed or not mentioned Example: Recess shall not be required on any school day on which a student has had physical education or structured activity time.
1	Vague and/or suggested Example: Recess should be in addition to the physical education requirements.
2	Prohibited Example: Recess must not count as a course of physical education that fulfills the requirements of [State Physical Education Requirement], nor shall time spent in a course of physical education count towards the daily time for recess.

E. The law includes specific language on compliance (i.e. monitoring and/or enforcement).

0	Not mentioned
1	Vague and/or suggested Example: Schools are encouraged to adhere to the recess requirements outlined in this law. It is recommended that schools monitor recess practices and participation, adjusting as necessary to ensure compliance with the law.
2	Included with strong language Example: The Office of Teaching and Learning is authorized to oversee school implementation and compliance with this law and, in doing so, shall: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provide technical assistance and support to schools with implementation of the law and improve programming functions; b. Ensure schools are offered support services through various Central Office departments and Network offices; c. Establish a credential process for outside partners and community agencies to support schools; d. Establish a process to gather regular reporting and feedback from individual schools, community partners, students and parents on the implementation of the law; e. Conduct periodic evaluations and upon request report on district-wide and individual schools' compliance with the law to the Board; f. Establish a process for assessing the equity impact of this law, including how the law is implemented in relation to who is most impacted by inequity to determine targeted universalist support for schools.

ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES

F. The law states that transition time may not be counted toward the required recess minimum.

Examples to include are:

- a. *Transitions or passing time to and from the recess location*
- b. *Time spent lining up or preparing to re-enter the classroom*
- c. *Time spent dressing or undressing for weather conditions*
- d. *Time spent receiving behavior-related instructions or disciplines that interrupt the opportunity for unstructured play.*

0	Not mentioned
1	<p>Vague and/or suggested</p> <p>Example: Teachers shall make an effort to preserve recess time so that transitions to and from the designated space do not substantially reduce opportunities for student play.</p>
2	<p>Required</p> <p>Example: Time spent dressing or undressing for outdoor play time <u>shall not count towards the daily time for play.</u></p>

Note: Scoring is based on the inclusion of any mention of transition time.

G. The law requires that recess be provided on shortened school days.

0	Not mentioned
1	<p>Vague and/or suggested</p> <p>Example: For each school day that exceeds five hours in duration, schools must provide a minimum of 30 minutes of daily recess for all students. If the school day is less than five hours in duration, schools shall <u>make an effort to provide a minimum of 15 minutes of recess for all students.</u></p>
2	<p>Required</p> <p>Example: Recess <u>shall be</u> at least 30 minutes on regular instructional days and <u>at least 15 minutes on early release days</u> and may be provided in one or more periods</p>

Note: Scoring for this item does not include language for half-day Kindergarten.

H. The law requires recess to be inclusive for all students, including those with disabilities.

0	Allowed or not mentioned
1	<p>Vague and/or suggested</p> <p>Example: Schools <u>should consider the inclusion of recess in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans</u> for students with disabilities when appropriate. Schools are encouraged to provide accommodations that support student participation in recess.</p>
2	<p>Required</p> <p>Example: Schools <u>must ensure that recess is included in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan</u> for any student whose disability affects their ability to participate in recess. Needed supports, modifications, and accommodations should be documented to ensure equitable access to recess, in alignment with the student's rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Schools must provide appropriate staff training to implement these accommodations effectively.</p>

ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES

I. The law requires that recess is held outdoors when possible.

0	Not mentioned
1	<p>Vague and/or suggested</p> <p>Example: Schools <u>are encouraged to provide recess outdoors, but it may be held indoors.</u></p>
2	<p>Required</p> <p>Example: Recess <u>must be held outdoors whenever weather conditions and safety standards permit.</u> If recess must be held indoors due to adverse weather or other factors, schools are required to provide a suitable indoor space where students can engage in physical activity.</p>

J. If recess must be held indoors due to weather, safety, or other factors, the law states that schools must provide adequate space for students to be physically active.

0	Not mentioned
1	<p>Vague and/or suggested</p> <p>Example: If recess is held indoors, schools are <u>encouraged to provide it in a space that promotes physical activity.</u></p>
2	<p>Required</p> <p>Example: If recess must be held indoors due to adverse weather or other factors, <u>schools are required to provide a suitable indoor space where students can engage in physical activity.</u></p>

K. The law prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess. School approved screen-time that promotes physical activity (e.g., Go Noodle) is allowed when recess must be held indoors.

0	Not mentioned
1	<p>Vague and/or suggested</p> <p>Example: Recess may include organized games, but schools <u>should avoid including, or permitting the student use of, computers, tablets or phones during recess.</u></p>
2	<p>Required</p> <p>Example: Play time must allow unstructured play, and may include organized games, but <u>shall not include the use of computers, tablets, phones or videos.</u></p>

L. The law requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess that promotes physical activity (e.g., Go Noodle) is allowed when recess must be held indoors.

0	Not mentioned
1	<p>Vague and/or suggested</p> <p>Example: <u>Schools are encouraged to offer professional development opportunities</u> related to recess supervision and best practices for staff members who oversee student play.</p>
2	<p>Required</p> <p>Example: All school staff members responsible for leading or supervising recess <u>must participate in annual professional development training</u> focused on effective recess supervision, student engagement strategies, student safety, conflict resolution, etc.</p>

ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES

M. The law requires schools to schedule recess before lunch

0	Not mentioned
1	<p>Suggested and/or encouraged</p> <p>Example: <u>Recess before lunch is recommended</u> but is left to the discretion of the school district.</p>
2	<p>Required</p> <p>Example: <u>Schools are required to schedule recess before lunch</u> to promote student well-being and encourage healthier eating habits.</p>

N. The law requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment-whether structured (e.g., playgrounds) or student-initiated (e.g., balls).

0	Not mentioned
1	<p>Vague and/or suggested</p> <p>Example: Schools should <u>strive to provide safe, age-appropriate equipment for recess</u>.</p>
2	<p>Required</p> <p>Example: Schools <u>must ensure that age-appropriate equipment is available</u> to students during recess.</p>

O. The law requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards.

0	Not mentioned
1	<p>Vague and/or suggested</p> <p>Example: It is <u>recommended</u> that schools periodically assess playgrounds, gymnasiums, and other activity spaces to <u>ensure they adhere to general safety standards</u>.</p>
2	<p>Required</p> <p>Facilities for recess <u>must meet or exceed recognized safety standards</u>. Schools are required to conduct regular safety inspections and maintenance of playgrounds, gymnasiums, and other recreational areas where recess occurs.</p>

SECTION 03:

Legal Research Summary on State Recess Laws

Below is a summary of the laws (statutes or administrative regulations) relating to recess that have passed in 25 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (as of October 2025), for a total of 26 laws. We first provide a high-level summary and then include two data tables to summarize policy language relevant to (1) the five essential best practices and (2) the 10 enhanced best practices, as aligned with our Score Card (Section 2). Recall that the score card includes a scoring system wherein a law receives a score of “2” if the language is strong, a “1” if the language is weak, and a “0” if the language is not included or there is language specifically in opposition of the best practice. In Section 4, we have created 26 “state profiles” for each law

High-level summary of the 26 laws relating to recess in the U.S.:

- **Type of law/regulation:**
 - 11 are recess statutes
 - 2 are recess regulations
 - 10 are physical activity statutes that may include recess
 - 2 are physical activity regulations that may include recess
 - 1 is a recess detention law
- **Essential best practices within laws:**
 - 10 use strong language to mandate at least 20 minutes of recess daily
 - Of these, five exceed this best practice by specifying 30 or 40 minutes of recess per day
 - Although six include middle school students, only two use strong language to specify the inclusion of all students in K-8, however both are broad physical activity laws (not recess laws)
 - Seven use strong language to specify that recess may not be withheld as a punishment
 - 12 use strong language to ensure that recess may not fulfill physical education requirements
 - On the contrary, six include language to *allow* for overlap in recess/physical education time
 - Three use strong language related to compliance
- **Enhanced best practices within laws:**
 - Two include strong language to ensure transition time does not count toward recess
 - Two include strong language to require recess on shortened school days
 - Two have strong language to ensure recess is inclusive for all students, including those with disabilities
 - Four specify, using strong language, that recess must be held outdoors when possible
 - Two include strong language to ensure adequate space for activity during indoor recess
 - Three have strong language prohibiting the use of personal electronic devices during recess
 - Three include strong language for Professional Development for those overseeing recess
 - None require recess before lunch
 - One uses strong language for including age-appropriate equipment
 - None make note of recess equipment or facilities meeting safety standards

Summary: Essential Best Practices

State	Type of Law	A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess		B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8		C. Prohibits withholding recess		D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements		E. Includes language on compliance
	Recess or Physical Activity (PA)	Score Assigned (0=none, 1=weak, 2=strong)	Time Specified	Score Assigned (0=none, 1=weak, 2=strong)	Grade Levels Specified	Score Assigned (0=none or allowed, 1=weak, 2=strong)	Can schools withhold recess?	Score Assigned (0=none or allowed, 1=weak, 2=strong)	Is recess allowed to count toward PE requirements?	Score Assigned (0=none, 1=weak, 2=strong)
AK	PA	1	90% of recommended PA (90% of 60 minutes = 54 minutes/day)	1	K-8	0	Not mentioned	0	Time can be for PE or recess	0
AZ	Recess	1	2 periods per day	1	K-5	0	Not mentioned	1	Allows 1 recess period to count as PE	0
AR	Recess	2	40 minutes/day	1	K-4, may include 5-6	0	Not mentioned	2	Not allowed	0
CA	Recess	2	30 minutes/day	1	K-6	2	Not allowed	2	Not allowed	0
CO	PA	1	600 minutes per month	1	Elem	0	Not mentioned	2	Not allowed	1
CT	PA	2	20 minutes/day	1	Elem	2	Allowed, but guarantees 20 min/day	0	Not mentioned	0
DC	Recess	1	20 minutes/day	1	K-8	1	Unclear if law refers to PE or recess	0	Not mentioned	0
FL	Recess	2	20 minutes/day	1	K-5	0	Not mentioned	2	Not allowed	0
GA	Recess	1	every day	1	K-5	0	Up to district	0	Recess not required on days with PE	1
IL	Recess	2	30 minutes/day	1	K-5	2	Not allowed	2	Not allowed	0
IN	PA	1	every day	1	Elem	0	Not mentioned	0	Not mentioned	0
KY	PA	1	every day, cannot exceed 30 min/day	1	K-5	0	Not mentioned	0	Not mentioned	2
LA	Recess	1	15 minutes/day	1	K-5	0	Not mentioned	0	Not mentioned	0
MN	Recess (Detention)	0	--	0	--	2	Not allowed	0	Not mentioned	0
MO	Recess	2	20 minutes/day	1	Elem	0	Not mentioned	0	Allows extra PE in place of recess	0
NH	PA	1	30 to 60 minutes/day	1	Elem Middle High	0	Not mentioned	2	Not allowed	2
NJ	Recess	2	20 minutes/day	1	K-5	2	Not allowed	2	Not allowed	0
OK	PA	1	60 minutes/week *20 min/day is encouraged	1	K-5	0	Not mentioned	2	Not allowed	0
RI	Recess	2	20 min/day	1	K-6	1	Weak language	2	Not allowed	0
SC	PA	1	150 minutes/week (combine PE and recess)	1	K-5	0	Not mentioned	1	90 minutes must be PE, unclear about other 60 minutes	0
TN	PA	1	40 min/day (elem) 90 min/week (middle/high)	2	Elem Middle High	2	Not allowed	2	Not allowed	2
TX	PA	1	30 min/day	1	Full Day Pre-K, K-5	0	N/A	0	Time can be for PE or physical activity	0
VT	PA	1	30 min/day	1	K-12	0	Not mentioned	2	Not allowed	0
VA	PA	1	20 min/day 150 min/week	2	K-5 6-12	0	Not mentioned	0	Time can be for PE or recess	0
WA	Recess	2	30 min/day	1	K-5 and 6 th grade in elementary school	1	Weak language	2	Not allowed	0
WV	Recess	2	30 min/day	1	1-5	2	Not allowed	0	Not mentioned	0

SECTION 04:

State Profiles



This section includes 26 profile documents, one for each state (+ the District of Columbia), that has a law relating to recess or physical activity, as of October 2025.

Each document contains the number and name of the law and the most recent effective date.

To identify states with laws related to recess or physical activity (that may include recess), our team engaged in the following steps:

(1) Spring 2025, two members of the team independently conducted searches in Westlaw. The search terms, developed in consultation with our legal epidemiology partner from the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, Kerri Lowrey, JD, used were:

recess OR “unstructured play” OR breaks OR “play time”) /p (school)

- a. The resulting list of states was then compared with data from the Classification of Laws Associated with School Students (CLASS: <https://class.cancer.gov/>), which evaluates state laws requiring recess time and was last updated in 2022.
- b. A third team member conducted an additional search to confirm that states not identified through Westlaw or CLASS had no relevant laws.

(2) The search was updated in October 2025 to ensure inclusion of all legislation passed during the most recent session.

(3) Once the final list of 26 laws was confirmed, three team members independently extracted data for these Profiles.

- a. One member reviewed all 26 laws, while the other two reviewed 13 each. The data were then scored using the scorecard developed for this toolkit. The team met to review and compare scores, and any discrepancies that could not be resolved collaboratively were adjudicated by the project lead.
- b. Prior to publication, the list of laws included was also compared with two recent resources, listed below, to ensure that the list was complete
 - i. The Sports Institute “Youth Sports And Physical Activity Legislation Tracker”
<https://thesportsinstitute.com/youth-sports-and-physical-activity-legislation-tracker/>
 - ii. Thompson HR, Lochner-Bravo U, Talebloo J, Davis JN, Falbe J. Accountability and funding for state-level school physical education and recess laws. American Journal of Preventive Medicine. 2025 Jul 31:108017.

Please note that this search of state laws may not have included adjacent laws that were not linked in the Westlaw database (for example, a state law on safety of playground or recreation equipment that includes school grounds may not have been discovered, or a regulation regarding implementation that was not linked to the law may not have been discovered). We encourage states to provide links to adjacent laws and regulations for constituents to understand the breadth of the laws in place. Finally, this search did not include local or school district policies or regulations.

ALASKA

Alaska Stat § 14.30.360 Health Education curriculum physical activity guidelines

Effective July 1, 2022

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Alaska has a physical activity law that may include recess to meet the minimum daily amount required.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	<p>A school district shall establish guidelines for schools in the district to provide opportunities <u>during each full school day</u> for students in grades kindergarten through eight for <u>a minimum of 90 percent of the daily amount of physical activity recommended for children and adolescents in the physical activity guidelines by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, United States Department of Health and Human Services.</u></p> <p>The <u>time provided for physical activity</u> under this subsection <u>may include</u> physical education classes and <u>opportunities for unstructured physical activity, such as recess.</u></p> <p><i>Note: Physical activity law and not a recess-specific law</i></p>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	<p>A school district shall establish guidelines for schools in the district to provide opportunities during each full school day for students in <u>grades kindergarten through eight</u> for a minimum of 90 percent of the daily amount of physical activity recommended for children and adolescents in the physical activity guidelines by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, United States Department of Health and Human Services.</p>	2
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	<p>The <u>time provided for physical activity under this subsection may include physical education classes</u> and opportunities for unstructured physical activity, such as recess.</p> <p><i>Note: Time can be PE or recess</i></p>	0
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

ARIZONA

Ariz. Rev. Stat § 15-118. Recess; requirements; exceptions; definitions

Effective August 3, 2018

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Arizona defines recess as “a period of time during the regular school day, including time during a scheduled lunch period, during which a pupil is able to engage in physical activity or social interaction with other pupils.”

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	Each school district and charter school shall provide <u>at least two recess periods during the school day</u> for pupils in kindergarten programs and grades one through five <i>Note: The law does not specify the amount of time these periods should be</i>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	Each school district and charter school shall provide at least two recess periods during the school day <u>for pupils in kindergarten programs and grades one through five</u> <i>Note: The law does not include grades 6-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	A school district or charter school <u>may count a pupil's participation in a physical education course during a school day as one of that day's recess periods.</u> <i>Note: The law allows one period to count as PE, but not both</i>	1
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

ARKANSAS

Ark. Admin. Code § 005.28.43-7.00 Physical Education and Recess Requirements and Standards

Effective November 10, 2022

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Arkansas Department of Education passed a regulation that defines recess as “supervised, unstructured social time during which students may communicate with each other.”

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	<u>At least forty (40) minutes</u> of instructional time per school day <u>shall be used for recess</u> for students attending public elementary schools	2
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	At least forty (40) minutes of instructional time per school day shall be used for recess <u>for students attending public elementary schools.</u> “Elementary school” means the educational model consistent with instructional grouping and scheduling used in grades kindergarten through four (K-4) but may include grades five through six (5-6). <i>Note: Weak language for grades 5-6; does not include grades 7-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	Minutes provided under Section 7.11 <u>shall not count towards the minimum physical education requirements.</u>	2
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A A public school principal may use discretion to adjust the recess time required due to special circumstances or programs that interrupt a regular school day <i>Note: Allows for an exemption on shortened school days</i>	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	The minutes of recess required shall occur outdoors when weather and other relevant conditions permit	2
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	The minutes of recess required shall include without limitation opportunities for free play and vigorous physical activity, regardless of whether recess occurs indoors or outdoors	2
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

CALIFORNIA

Cal. Ed. Code § 49056. Recess requirements

Effective June 29, 2024

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

California defines recess as a period of time during the school day when pupils are given supervised and unstructured time for physical activity, play, organized games or social engagement with peers.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	<u>Recess shall be at least 30 minutes</u> on regular instructional days	2
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	Commencing with the 2024-2025 school year, <u>all of the following shall apply to recess provided by a public elementary school.</u> “Public elementary school” means a school that is operated by a school district or county office of education, or a charter school that maintains kindergarten or any of grades 1 to 6, inclusive. <i>Note: The law does not include grades 7-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	A public elementary school pupil <u>shall not be denied recess</u> by a member of the school’s staff unless the pupil’s participation poses an immediate threat to the physical safety of the pupil or to the physical safety of one or more of the pupil’s peers	2
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	Recess means a period of time during the school day, <u>separate and distinct from physical education courses and meal times.</u>	2
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	Recess shall be at least 15 minutes on early release days.	2
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	Recess shall comply with a pupil's individualized education programs or pupil's plan pursuant to Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973.	2
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	Recess shall be held outdoors whenever the weather and air quality permits.	2
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	If outdoor space is not sufficient, recess may be held indoors	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	<p>“Recess” means a period of time during the school day, separate and distinct from physical education courses and meal times, but may follow or precede physical education courses or meal time.</p> <p><i>Note: Follow or precede, no clear direction</i></p>	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

COLORADO

Colo. Rev. Stat § 22-32-136.5. Children's wellness—physical activity requirement—legislative declaration

Effective April 20, 2011

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of "0" indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Colorado has a physical activity law that may include recess to meet the minimum monthly amount required.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	<p>A minimum of six hundred minutes of physical activity per month if the classes at the school meet five days per week and the student attends school for a full day.</p> <p>A minimum of three hundred minutes of physical activity per month if the classes at the school meet five days per week and the student attends school for a half day.</p> <p>A minimum of thirty minutes of physical activity per day if the classes at the school meet fewer than five days per week and the student attends school for a full day.</p> <p>A minimum of fifteen minutes of physical activity per day if the classes at the school meet fewer than five days per week and the student attends school for a half day.</p> <p><i>Note: For a 4-week month, with 5 school days, this is equivalent to 30 minutes/day, however activity is not required daily, and the law is focused on physical activity</i></p>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	<p>Each school district board of education shall adopt a physical activity policy that incorporates into the schedule of each student attending an elementary school.</p> <p><i>Note: The law does not include middle school</i></p>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	A school shall not substitute noninstructional physical activity for standards-based physical education instruction	2
E. Includes specific language on compliance	<p>Each school district board of education may require the person or committee in each school designated to ensure that the school complies with the local wellness policy, or the school district accountability committee and school accountability committees created pursuant to article 11 of this title review to advise the school district or an individual school regarding the school district's or the individual school's physical activity policy and compliance with this section.</p> <p><i>Note: Weak language</i></p>	1

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	<p>The physical activity policy <u>may include an exception for any month that includes a planned or unplanned full-day or half-day school closure.</u></p> <p><i>Note: Allows for an exemption on shortened school days</i></p>	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

CONNECTICUT

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-221o. Lunch Periods. Recess. Undirected play. Boards to adopt policies addressing limitation of physical exercise
Conn. Gen. Stat § 10-220r. School playground design conformity with universal design principles
Conn. Gen. Stat § 10-24f. Play-based learning

Effective July 1, 2024

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Connecticut has a physical activity law which defines recess as “the time during the regular school day for each student enrolled in elementary school that is devoted to physical exercise of not less than twenty minutes in total.”

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	<p>Each local and regional board of education shall require each school under its jurisdiction to include in the regular school day for each student enrolled in elementary school time devoted to physical exercise of not less than twenty minutes in total.</p> <p>“Recess” means the time during the regular school day for each student enrolled in elementary school that is devoted to physical exercise of not less than twenty minutes in total pursuant to section 10-221o.</p>	2
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	<p>Each local and regional board of education shall require each school under its jurisdiction to include in the regular school day for each student enrolled in elementary school time devoted to physical exercise of not less than twenty minutes in total.</p> <p><i>Note: The law does not include middle school</i></p>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	<p>Each local and regional board of education shall adopt a policy, as the board deems appropriate, concerning the circumstances when a school employee may prevent or otherwise restrict a student from participating in the entire time devoted to physical exercise in the regular school day, pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, as a form of discipline. Such policy shall (1) permit such prevention or restriction (A) when a student poses a danger to the health or safety of other students or school personnel, or (B) when such prevention or restriction is limited to the period devoted to physical exercise that is the shortest in duration if there are two or more periods devoted to physical exercise in a school day, provided the period of time devoted to physical exercise that such student may participate in during such school day is at least twenty minutes in duration, (2) only permit such prevention or restriction once during a school week, unless such student is a danger to the health or safety of other students or school personnel, (3) not include any provisions that such board determines are unreasonably restrictive or punitive, (4) distinguish between (A) discipline imposed prior to the start of such time devoted to physical exercise and discipline imposed during such time devoted to physical exercise, and (B) discipline that (i) prevents or otherwise restricts a student from participating in such time devoted to physical exercise prior to such time devoted to</p>	2

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
	<p>physical exercise, and (ii) methods used to redirect a student's behavior during such time devoted to physical exercise, and (5) not permit such prevention or restriction if a student does not complete such student's work on time or for such student's academic performance.</p> <p><i>Note: Although this language is long and somewhat confusing, the student is guaranteed 20 minutes of recess, unless they are a danger to the health and safety of others</i></p>	
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	N/A	0
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	<p>Such playgrounds shall include, at a minimum, (1) play spaces that appeal to a variety of senses and allow multiple forms of play, (2) landform designed to encourage unstructured play, (3) <u>multiple options for accessing play spaces and equipment that allow for varying levels of ability</u>, and (4) sensory-engaging materials and use of trees and other plantings</p> <p>Each local and regional board of education shall require each school under its jurisdiction to include in the regular school day for each student enrolled in elementary school time devoted to physical exercise of not less than twenty minutes in total, <u>except that a planning and placement team may develop a different schedule for a child requiring special education and related services in accordance with chapter 1641 and the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 USC 1400 et seq., as amended from time to time.</u></p> <p><i>Note: The law needs more specificity to guarantee that students in special education will not have their access to recess revoked</i></p>	1
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	Such playgrounds shall include, at a minimum, (1) play spaces that appeal to a variety of senses and allow multiple forms of play, (2) landform designed to encourage unstructured play, (3) <u>multiple options for accessing play spaces and equipment that allow for varying levels of ability</u> , and (4) sensory-engaging materials and use of trees and other plantings	2
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

D.C. Code § 38-824.02. Physical and health education requirements

Effective April 11, 2019

D.C. Code § 38-824.03. Additional Requirements

Effective March 13, 2019

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

D.C. has a recess law that notably includes grades 6 through 8, however, the law uses the weaker language of “it shall be the goal”.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	For students in kindergarten through 5, <u>it shall be the goal of all schools to provide</u> an average of 150 minutes of physical education per week, and at least one recess of at <u>least 20 minutes per day.</u> <i>Note: Weak language</i>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	For students in <u>kindergarten through 5</u> , it shall be the goal of all schools to provide an average of 150 minutes of physical education per week, and at least one recess of at least 20 minutes per day. For students in <u>grades 6 through 8</u> , it shall be the goal of all schools to provide an average of 225 minutes of physical education per week, and at least one recess of at least 20 minutes per day.	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	<u>Requiring or withholding physical activity shall not be used to punish students;</u> provided, that students who are not wearing appropriate athletic clothing may be prohibited from participating in physical activity until properly dressed. <i>Note: Given that this is a PE and recess law, it is unclear if this provision is related to PE or recess or both</i>	1
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	N/A	0
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	The Office of the State Superintendent of Education shall provide and coordinate annual professional-development sessions for school personnel, provided by a certified instructor and based on nationally recognized standards, related to incorporating physical activity into classroom instruction, classroom instruction breaks, and active recess.	2
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

FLORIDA

Fla. Stat § 1003.455. Physical education; assessment

Effective July 1, 2017

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Florida law requires supervised, safe and unstructured free-play recess.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	Each district school board shall provide at least 100 minutes of supervised, safe, and unstructured free-play recess each week for students in kindergarten through grade 5 so that there are <u>at least 20 consecutive minutes of free-play recess per day.</u>	2
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	Each district school board shall provide at least 100 minutes of supervised, safe, and unstructured free-play recess each week for students in kindergarten through grade 5 so that there are at least 20 consecutive minutes of free-play recess per day. <i>Note: The law does not include grades 6-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	<u>In addition to the requirements in subsection (3)</u> [physical education requirements]	2
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

To view the entire toolkit please visit: americanhealth.jhu.edu/recess-in-schools

GEORGIA

Ga. Code Ann. § 20-2-323. Recess; unstructured break time policies
Ga. Code Ann. § 20-2-324.8 Distraction-free education

Effective July 1, 2022

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Georgia law requires daily recess and prohibits the use of personal electronic devices from the start of instructional time until the end of the school day, including during all school-related activities such as recess.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	Each elementary school shall schedule recess for all students in kindergarten and grades one through five every school day <i>Note: The law does not specify the amount of time these periods should be</i>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	Each elementary school shall schedule recess for all students in kindergarten and grades one through five every school day <i>Note: The law does not include grades 6-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	Each local board of education shall establish written policies allowing unstructured break time for students in kindergarten and grades one through eight. The policies shall include , but shall not be limited to, the following matters: Whether breaks can be withheld from students for disciplinary or academic reasons and, if breaks can be withheld, under what conditions	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	Recess shall not be required on any school day on which a student has had physical education or structured activity time	0
E. Includes specific language on compliance	Local boards shall provide a copy of such policies to the State Board of Education. <i>Note: This will support compliance with the law, as written, but does not ensure that students will be getting recess</i>	1

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	<u>No public school student</u> in kindergarten through grade eight <u>shall be permitted to access personal electronic devices during the school day</u>	2
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

ILLINOIS

810 Ill. Comp. Stat § 5/27-6.3. Play time required in elementary school

Effective August 15, 2025

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Illinois defines recess as “supervised, unstructured, child-directed play.”

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	For any school day 5 clock hours or longer in length, the total time allotted for play for students in kindergarten through grade five must be at least 30 minutes.	2
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	All public schools shall provide daily time for supervised, unstructured, child-directed play for all students in kindergarten through grade five. <i>Note: Does not include grades 6-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	All public schools shall prohibit the withholding of play time as a disciplinary or punitive action, except when a student's participation in play time poses an immediate threat to the safety of the student or others.	2
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	Play time shall not count as a course of physical education that fulfills the requirements of Section 27-6, not shall time spent in a course of physical education count towards the daily time for play.	2
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	Time spent dressing or undressing for outdoor play time shall not count towards the daily time for play.	2
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	For any school day less than 5 clock hours in length, the total time allotted for play each school day must be at least one-tenth of a day of attendance for the student pursuant to Section 10-19.05.	2
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	For students with disabilities, play time shall comply with a student's applicable individualized education program (IEP) or federal Section 504 plan.	2
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	Schools are encouraged to provide play time outdoors , but it may be held indoors. <i>Note: Weak language</i>	1
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	If play time is held indoors , schools are encouraged to provide it in a space that promotes physical activity. <i>Note: Weak language</i>	1
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	Play time must allow unstructured play, and may include organized games, but shall not include the use of computers, tablets, phones, or videos.	2
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

INDIANA

Ind. Code § 20-30-5-7.5 Daily physical activity

Effective July 1, 2013

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Indiana has a physical activity law that may include recess.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	The governing body of each school corporation shall provide daily physical activity for students in elementary school. The physical activity may include the use of recess. <i>Note: Physical activity law and not a recess-specific law and the law does not specify the amount of time these periods should be</i>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	The governing body of each school corporation shall provide daily physical activity for students in elementary school. <i>Note: The law does not include middle school</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	N/A	0
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	<p>On a day when there is inclement weather or unplanned circumstances that have shortened the school day, the school corporation may provide physical activity alternatives or <u>elect not to provide physical activity.</u></p> <p><i>Note: Allows for an exemption on shortened school days</i></p>	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

KENTUCKY

Ky. Rev. Stat. Ann § 160.345 Definitions; required adoption of school councils for school-based decision making;...wellness policy

Effective June 27, 2025

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Kentucky legislation requires each school council or principal to develop and implement a wellness policy that includes physical activity.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	Each school council of a school containing grades K-5 or any combination thereof, or if there is no school council, the principal, shall develop and implement a wellness policy that includes moderate to vigorous physical activity each day . The policy may permit physical activity to be considered part of the instruction day, not to exceed thirty (30) minutes per day, or one hundred and fifty (150) minutes per week. <i>Note: Physical activity law and not a recess-specific law</i>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	Each school council of a school containing grades K-5 or any combination thereof , or if there is no school council, the principal, shall develop and implement a wellness policy that includes moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. <i>Note: The law does not include grades 6-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	N/A	0
E. Includes specific language on compliance	The department shall report to the Legislative Research Commission no later than November 1 of each year on how the schools are providing physical activity under this subsection and on the types of physical activity being provided .	2

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

LOUISIANA

LA Rev Stat § 17:17.7 (2024) Required recess

Effective August 1, 2023

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Louisiana law defines recess as supervised, unstructured free play.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	Each public school that includes any of the grades kindergarten through five shall provide at least fifteen minutes of recess consisting of supervised, unstructured free play, each school day . <i>Note: The law requires less than 20 minutes of daily recess</i>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	Each public school that includes any of the grades kindergarten through five shall provide at least fifteen minutes of recess <i>Note: The law does not include grades 6-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	N/A	0
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

MINNESOTA

Minn. Stat. § 121A.611. Recess and other breaks

Effective July 1, 2023

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Minnesota does not have a statewide recess law; however, it does have a “recess detention” law which is defined as excluding or excessively delaying a student from participating in a scheduled recess period as a consequence for student behavior.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	N/A	0
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	N/A	0
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	<p>A school district or charter school must not use recess detention unless (1) a student causes or is likely to cause serious physical harm to other students or staff; (2) the student's parent or guardian specifically consents to the use of recess detention; or (3) for students receiving special education services, the student's individualized education program team has determined that withholding recess is appropriate based on the individualized needs of the student</p> <p>A school district or charter school must not withhold recess from a student based on incomplete schoolwork.</p>	2
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	N/A	0
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

MISSOURI

Mo. Rev. Stat. § 167.720. Physical education required—definitions

Effective August 28, 2009

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Missouri defines recess as a structured play environment outside of regular classroom instructional activities, where students are allowed to engage in supervised safe active free play.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	A minimum of one recess period of <u>twenty minutes per day</u> shall be provided for children in elementary schools, which may be incorporated into the lunch period.	2
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	A minimum of one recess period of twenty minutes per day shall be provided for children in <u>elementary schools</u> , which may be incorporated into the lunch period. Students in middle schools may at the school's discretion participate in at least two hundred twenty-five minutes of physical activity per school week <i>Note: Middle school physical activity/recess is not required</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	Any requirement of this section above the state minimum physical education requirement <u>may be met by additional physical education instruction.</u>	0
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

NEW HAMPSHIRE

N.H. Code Admin. R. Ed § 310.03 Developmentally Appropriate Daily Physical Activity Policy.
N.H. Code Admin. R. Ed § 310.04 Components of Developmentally Appropriate Daily Physical Activity Policy.

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New Hampshire’s Board of Education passed a regulation that recommends all students in elementary through high school participate in physical activity.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	<p>Each local school board shall adopt a written policy relative to developmentally appropriate physical activities and exercise.</p> <p>The policy shall recommend that all students in elementary school through high school participate in developmentally appropriate physical activity and exercise for a minimum of 30 to 60 minutes each day as a way to minimize the health risks created by chronic inactivity and other related health problems.</p> <p>The developmentally appropriate daily physical activity policy adopted by each local school board shall include at a minimum the following recommended practices: Encourage physical activity recess periods</p> <p><i>Note: Weak language</i></p>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	<p>The policy shall recommend that all students in elementary school through high school participate in developmentally appropriate physical activity and exercise for a minimum of 30 to 60 minutes each day as a way to minimize the health risks created by chronic inactivity and other related health problems.</p> <p><i>Note: Weak language</i></p>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	<p>The developmentally appropriate daily physical activity policy in (a) above shall be in addition to, and shall not be a replacement for, the physical education program requirement in Ed 306.</p>	2
E. Includes specific language on compliance	<p>The developmentally appropriate daily physical activity policy adopted by each local school board shall include at a minimum the following recommended practices: Support a tracking and evaluation method to ensure that all students are engaging in developmentally appropriate daily physical activity.</p>	2

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	<p>Encourage professional development opportunities for all school staff that shall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Assist them to effectively promote enjoyable and lifelong physical activity among youth; and b. Assist them in recognizing their influence as role models for active lifestyles <p><i>Note: Weak language</i></p>	1
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	<p>The developmentally appropriate daily physical activity policy adopted by each local school board shall include at a minimum the following recommended practices:</p> <p>Support committing adequate resources that include: (a) Program funding (b) Personnel (c) Safe equipment and (d) Facilities</p> <p><i>Note: Ensuring resources for equipment not specifically equipment</i></p>	1

To view the entire toolkit please visit: americanhealth.jhu.edu/recess-in-schools

NEW JERSEY

N.J. Rev. Stat § 18A:35-4.31 Daily recess period; requirements; exceptions

Effective August 10, 2018

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

New Jersey recess law requires 20 minutes of daily recess for students in grades kindergarten through five.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	A public school district shall provide a <u>daily recess period of at least 20 minutes</u> for students in grades kindergarten through five.	2
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	A public school district shall provide a daily recess period of at least 20 minutes for <u>students in grades kindergarten through five</u> . <i>Note: The law does not include grades 6-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	A student shall not be denied recess for any reason , except as a consequence of a violation of the district's code of student conduct, including a harassment, intimidation, or bullying investigation pursuant to P.L.2002, c. 83 (C.18A:37-13 et seq.) . If a student is denied recess, except under conditions set forth in subsection b. of this section, the student shall be provided restorative justice activities during the recess period. A student may not be denied recess more than twice per week.	2
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	The recess period shall not be used to meet the course requirements set forth in N.J.S.18A:35-5 [physical education instruction].	2
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	A school district shall not be required to provide a recess period on a school day in which the day is substantially shortened due to a delayed opening or early dismissal. <i>Note: Allows for an exemption on shortened school days</i>	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	The recess period shall be held outdoors , if feasible.	2
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

OKLAHOMA

70 OK Stat § 11-103.9 Physical education programs required for accreditation

Effective July 1, 2019

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Oklahoma has a physical activity law which may include recess to meet the weekly minimum.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	<p>The Board shall require, as a condition of accreditation, that public elementary schools provide to students in full-day kindergarten and grades one through five, in addition to the requirements set forth in subsection B of this section, <u>an average of sixty (60) minutes each week of physical activity</u>, which may include, but not be limited to, physical education, exercise programs, fitness breaks, recess, and classroom activities, and wellness and nutrition education.</p> <p>The Board shall also <u>strongly encourage school districts to incorporate physical activity</u> into the school day by providing to students in full-day kindergarten and grades one through five <u>at least a twenty-minute daily recess</u>.</p> <p><i>Note: Physical activity law and not a recess-specific law, although daily recess is encouraged</i></p>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	<p>The Board shall require, as a condition of accreditation, that public elementary schools provide to <u>students in full-day kindergarten and grades one through five</u>, in addition to the requirements set forth in subsection B of this section, an average of sixty (60) minutes each week of physical activity, which may include, but not be limited to, physical education, exercise programs, fitness breaks, recess, and classroom activities, and wellness and nutrition education.</p> <p><i>Note: The law does not include grades 6-8</i></p>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	<p>The time students participate in <u>recess shall not be counted toward</u> the sixty-minutes-per-week <u>physical education requirement</u>.</p>	2
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

RHODE ISLAND

6 R.I. Gen. Laws §16-22-4.2. Free-play recess

Effective June 27, 2016

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Rhode Island requires supervised, safe, and unstructured free-play recess. “Free play” means an unstructured environment, but which is supervised by appropriate school personnel or staff.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	All children attending public schools, or any other schools managed or controlled by the state, that have elementary grades kindergarten through six (6) shall receive in those schools <u>at least twenty (20) consecutive minutes</u> of supervised, safe, and unstructured free-play recess each day.	2
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	All children attending public schools, or any other schools managed or controlled by the state, that have <u>elementary grades kindergarten through six (6)</u> shall receive in those schools at least twenty (20) consecutive minutes of supervised, safe, and unstructured free-play recess each day. <i>Note: The law does not include grades 7-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	Teachers <u>shall make a good-faith effort to not withhold recess</u> for punitive reasons <i>Note: Weak language</i>	1
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	Free-play <u>recess is in addition to the requirements set forth in 16-22-4</u> [Instruction in health and physical education]	2
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

SOUTH CAROLINA

SC Code § 59-10-10 Standards established; status reports to parents; decrease in student to physical education teacher ratio
SC Code § 59-10-40 Professional Development

Effective June 1, 2005

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of "0" indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

South Carolina has a physical activity law that may include recess to meet the minimum weekly amount required.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	<p>The goal of this article is to provide every elementary student with the equivalent of thirty minutes of physical activity daily. Students in kindergarten through fifth grade must be provided with a minimum of one hundred fifty minutes a week of physical education and recess.</p> <p><i>Note: Physical activity law and not a recess-specific law. Weekly mandate not daily</i></p>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	<p>Students in kindergarten through fifth grade must be provided with a minimum of one hundred fifty minutes a week of physical education and physical activity.</p> <p><i>Note: The law does not include grades 6-8</i></p>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	<p>Students in kindergarten through fifth grade must be provided with a minimum of one hundred fifty minutes a week of physical education and recess.</p> <p>In 2006-07, a minimum of sixty minutes a week must be provided in physical education, and as Section 59-10-20 [Student to certified physical education teacher ratios] is phased in, the minimum time for physical education must be increased to ninety minutes a week.</p> <p><i>Note: 90 minutes must be PE, unclear if the other 60 minutes must be recess</i></p>	1
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	Appropriate professional development must be provided to teachers and volunteers on the importance of physical activity for young children and the relationship of activity and good nutrition to academic performance and healthy lifestyles.	2
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

TENNESSEE

Tenn. Code Ann. §49-6-1021. Physical activity requirements

Effective July 1, 2025

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Tennessee has a physical activity law which may include walking, jumping rope, playing volleyball or other forms of physical activity that promote fitness and well-being.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	For elementary school students, <u>a minimum of forty (40) minutes</u> of physical activity per full school day; and For middle and high school students, <u>a minimum of ninety (90) minutes</u> of physical activity per full school week <i>Note: Physical activity law and not a recess-specific law</i>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	For <u>elementary school students</u> , a minimum of forty (40) minutes of physical activity <u>per full school day</u> ; and For <u>middle and high school students</u> , a minimum of ninety (90) minutes of physical activity <u>per full school week</u> .	2
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	A student <u>shall not be withheld from participating in physical activity</u> as a form of punishment.	2
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	<u>Physical activity does not include (b) time spent by a student in a physical education class.</u>	2
E. Includes specific language on compliance	The office of coordinated school health in the department of education shall <u>provide an annual report</u> by October 1, to the education committees of the house of representatives and the education committee of the senate on the implementation of subsection (a)	2

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	Walking to and from class is not physical activity for purposes of this section.	2
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	Physical activity must include unstructured play outside , unless weather conditions negatively impact reasonable execution of physical activity outside.	2
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	Physical activity does not include time during which a student is permitted to use an electronic device.	2
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

TEXAS

TX Educ Code § 28.002 Required Curriculum

Effective September 1, 2025

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Texas has a physical activity law that can be met by structured activity during a school campus's daily recess.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	A school district shall require a student enrolled in full-day prekindergarten, in kindergarten, or in a grade level below grade six to participate <u>in moderate or vigorous daily physical activity for at least 30 minutes.</u> <i>Note: Physical activity law and not a recess-specific law</i>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	A school district shall require a student enrolled in <u>full-day prekindergarten, in kindergarten, or in a grade level below grade six</u> to participate in moderate or vigorous daily physical activity for at least 30 minutes. <i>Note: The law does not include grades 6-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	Require a student... to participate in moderate or vigorous daily physical activity for at least 30 minutes throughout the school year <u>as part of the district's physical education curriculum</u> or through structured activity during a school campus's daily recess.	0
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

VERMONT

Vt. Admin. Code § 7-1-2:2120. Instructional Practices and Curriculum Development

Effective July 1, 2025

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Vermont’s Department of Education set a regulation that recommends but does not require physical activity for students in grades K–12.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	Each school district shall offer options for students in grades k-12 to participate in at least thirty minutes of physical activity within or outside of the school day. <i>Note: Physical activity law and not a recess-specific law, weak language that could be an afterschool activity</i>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	Each school district shall offer options for students in grades k-12 to participate in at least thirty minutes of physical activity within or outside of the school day. <i>Note: Weak language that could be an afterschool activity</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	Physical activity may include recess and movement built into the curriculum but does not replace physical education classes	2
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

VIRGINIA

VA Code § 22.1-253.13:1 Standard 1. Instructional programs supporting the Standards of Learning and other educational objectives

Effective July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026

8VAC20-132-190. Extracurricular and other school activities, recess

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Virginia has a physical activity law that may include recess to meet the minimum daily/ weekly amount required. Virginia also has a regulation that mandates recess in elementary schools.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	<p>A program of physical activity available to all students in grades kindergarten through five consisting of at least 20 minutes per day or an average of 100 minutes per week during the regular school year and available to all students in grades six through 12 with a goal of at least 150 minutes per week on average during the regular school year.</p> <p><i>*Physical activity law and not a recess-specific law and does not guarantee daily physical activity</i></p> <p>Each elementary school shall provide students with a daily recess during the regular school year as determined appropriate by the school.</p> <p><i>Note: The law does not specify the amount of time</i></p>	1
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	<p>A program of physical activity available to all students in grades kindergarten through five consisting of at least 20 minutes per day or an average of 100 minutes per week during the regular school year and available to all students in grades six through 12 with a goal of at least 150 minutes per week on average during the regular school year.</p> <p><i>Note: Weak language</i></p>	2
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	N/A	0
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	Such programs may include any combination of (i) physical education classes , (ii) extracurricular athletics, (iii) recess, or (iv) other programs and physical activities deemed appropriate by the local school board.	0
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

WASHINGTON

Wash. Rev. Code § 28A.230.295 Daily Recess

Effective July 23, 2023

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

Washington's recess law states that recess must be supervised and student directed.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	Public schools, for each school day that exceeds five hours in duration, must provide a minimum of 30 minutes of daily recess within the school day for all students in grades kindergarten through five and students in grade six that attend an elementary school.	2
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	Public schools, for each school day that exceeds five hours in duration, must provide a minimum of 30 minutes of daily recess within the school day for all students in grades kindergarten through five and students in grade six that attend an elementary school. <i>Note: The law does not include grades 7-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	Recess should not be withheld as a disciplinary or punitive action during the school day, and that recess should not be withheld to compel students to complete academic work. <i>Note: Weak language</i> <i>Note: While not in the statute itself, this language was included in the legislative intent portion of the enacted bill and subsequently included in the statute's Official Notes to guide interpretation</i>	1
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	The daily recess required under this section may not be used to meet the physical education requirements under RCW 28A.230.040.	2
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	Time spent changing to and from clothes for outdoor play should not be used to meet the requirements of this subsection (1) <i>Note: Weak language</i>	1
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	Recess must be supervised and student directed and must aim to be safe, inclusive, and high quality as described in the model policy and procedure referenced in RCW 28A.210.368.	2
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	Recess should be held outside whenever possible <i>Note: Weak language</i>	1
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	It may include organized games, but public schools should avoid including, or permitting the student use of, computers, tablets, or phones during recess. <i>Note: Weak language</i>	1
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	1
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

WEST VIRGINIA

W. Va. Code St. R. § 126-42-4 Early and Elementary Learning Programming
(Pre-K-Grade-5)

Effective July 1, 2024

The scorecard was created as part of a policy toolkit that supports advancing recess in schools through state laws. It was developed by the research team, with input from the advisory board, to provide a starting point for advocates and policymakers seeking to improve recess legislation. A score of “0” indicates that the law requires further development. We recommend first incorporating all essential best practices, followed by any enhanced best practices that are appropriate for your state.

West Virginia’s Board of Education passed a regulation that includes physical activity in the form of recess or informal physical activity for grades one through five.

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ESSENTIAL BEST PRACTICES		
A. Mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess	Physical activity in the form of recess or informal physical activity shall be provided for at least 30 minutes daily.	2
B. Inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8	Primary Elementary Learning- Grades 1-2 Intermediate Elementary Learning- Grades 3-5 <i>Note: The law does not include grades 6-8</i>	1
C. Prohibits schools from withholding recess	Physical activity may not be withheld as a disciplinary action against a student or to complete assignments.	2
D. Prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements	N/A	0
E. Includes specific language on compliance	N/A	0

BEST PRACTICE	LANGUAGE IN LAW	SCORE
ENHANCED BEST PRACTICES		
F. Transition time does not count toward minimum time	N/A	0
G. Requires recess be provided on shortened school days	N/A	0
H. Requires recess to be inclusive for all students	N/A	0
I. Requires recess to be held outdoors	N/A	0
J. If recess is indoors, the law requires there to be adequate space for students to be physically active	N/A	0
K. Prohibits the use of personal electronic devices during recess	N/A	0
L. Requires schools to provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who lead or supervise recess	N/A	0
M. Requires schools to schedule recess before lunch	N/A	0
N. Requires schools to provide age-appropriate equipment	N/A	0
O. Requires all recess equipment and facilities to meet or exceed safety standards	N/A	0

SECTION 05:

Model Recess Legislation

Key Considerations When Drafting a State Recess Law

This section provides language for drafting a law: a statute or regulation that would require some kind of action around providing recess, whether that action is voluntary or mandatory. There are legitimate reasons that jurisdictions may prefer an informal (noncodified) approach. These reasons may include cost concerns, political palatability, and infrastructure or personnel readiness. See the Frequently Asked Questions section for considerations on a non-legislative approach.

Clearly Define Recess

Ensure the policy includes a clear definition of recess. Choose language that reflects the intent of your policy and supports the kind of recess you aim to promote.

The CDC, SHAPE America, and the National Academy of Medicine define recess as “a regularly scheduled period within the school day for physical activity and play that is monitored by trained staff or volunteers”.^{1,2} Examples of recess definitions from existing state laws include:

- “Supervised, safe, and unstructured free play”
- “Supervised, unstructured social time during which public school students may communicate with each other”
- “Supervised recess where supervisory staff encourage moderate to vigorous physical activity”

Include all Essential Best Practices

This toolkit prioritizes five essential best practices to maximize the effectiveness of a law:

- (A) The law mandates a time requirement of at least 20 minutes of daily recess.
- (B) The law is inclusive of all students in grades kindergarten-8.
- (C) The law prohibits schools from withholding recess for any reason, including as a form of punishment or to complete academic work, except when a student’s participation in recess poses an immediate threat to the safety of the student or others.
- (D) The law prohibits schools from using recess to fulfil state mandated physical education requirements.

- (E) The law includes specific language on compliance (i.e. monitoring and/or enforcement).

Refer to our implementation guide for detailed recommendations on how to integrate these practices into the school day.

Use Strong, Clear Language

The wording of the policy matters. Use strong, directive terms such as *shall*, *must* or *is required* rather than the weaker alternatives like *should* or *is encouraged to*. Strong language increases the likelihood of consistent implementation.

Aim High from the Start

Include as many essential and enhanced best practices as possible in the initial draft (the 5 essential best practices are described above; an additional 10 enhanced best practices are also included in this toolkit). Policies often undergo revisions during the legislative process, and starting strong helps preserve key components, even if compromises are later required.

Specify Enforcement and Accountability Measures

Enforcement mechanisms increase policy effectiveness. Clearly outline how the policy will be monitored, what documentation schools are expected to maintain, and how compliance will be assessed. We recommend emphasizing positive reinforcement, such as recognition or incentives for compliant schools, rather than punitive measures for those that fall short.

Example Legislation

This is an example of legislation that states can adopt or adapt. It incorporates all essential and enhanced best practices to strengthen implementation and impact.

BILL NUMBER: [To be assigned]

SESSION: 202X Regular Session

TITLE: Education – Recess Requirement – Kindergarten Through Grade 8

SPONSORS: [Insert sponsor names]

Effective Date: [Date the law would become effective]

Definitions

For the purposes of this Act, the following definitions apply:

- (a) Recess is defined as a regularly scheduled period within the school day for physical activity and play that is monitored by trained staff or volunteers
- (b) "Public elementary school" means a school that is operated by a school district or county office of education, or a charter school that maintains pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, or any of grades 1 to 6, inclusive.
- (c) "Public middle school" means a school that is operated by a school district or county office of education, or a charter school that maintains any of grades 6 to 8, inclusive.
 - a. For a school that maintains a grade of higher than grade 8, the provisions of this section apply only to recess provided to students in grades 6 to 8, inclusive.

-OR-

These definitions should conform with the existing definitions in state law.

Commencing with the 202X-202X school year, all of the following shall apply to recess provided by a public elementary or public middle school:

- (a) Recess must be at least 20 minutes on regular instructional days and at least 10 minutes on delayed opening or early release days.
 - i. Additional recess time beyond the 20-minute minimum is strongly encouraged.
 - ii. Recess time is exclusive of transition time (e.g., lining up, putting on coats, or walking to the recess area).
- (b) A public elementary or middle school student cannot be denied recess by a member of the school's staff unless a student's participation in recess poses an immediate threat to the safety of the student or others.
- (c) Recess time may not be used to fulfill state mandated physical education requirements.
- (d) School districts must provide annual professional development opportunities for staff members who supervise recess.
- (e) Recess must be scheduled before lunch for all grade levels.
- (f) Age-appropriate equipment must be provided to students during recess time. All recess equipment must meet or exceed safety standards.
- (g) Recess must be inclusive of all students
- (h) Recess must be held outdoors whenever possible. If recess must be held indoors due to weather, safety, or other factors, schools must provide a suitable indoor space where students can engage in physical activity.
- (i) Students are prohibited from using personal electronic devices during recess. School approved screen-time that promotes physical activity is allowed
- (j) Schools must adhere to the recess requirements set forth in this law/policy. Compliance will be monitored through regular reports submitted to the school district and then to the state, including documentation of recess time included in a master schedule and compliance with outlined practices. For schools found out of compliance, additional training requirements or other interventions as determined by the district will be required.
- (k) The State Department of Health and the State Department of Education shall jointly assess the effect of the law at least once every five (5) years, making a report available to the Department Secretaries, the state committees for health and education, the governor's office and the general public via the Department websites. Such a report will survey and detail
 - the number of schools currently offering recess to students ages five through thirteen years;
 - the length of such recess and how often it is provided;
 - information pertaining to the location of such recess, including whether such recess is held indoors or outdoors;
 - if schools provide a dedicated space for such recess;
 - if the school's recess is supervised or unsupervised; and
 - what the barriers are to providing recess in accordance with these provisions.

SECTION 06:

Implementation Challenges and Solutions

The table below outlines common challenges that schools may encounter when implementing a recess law requiring the five essential and 10 enhanced best practices. These challenges are drawn from real-world examples and school-level experiences we heard from advisory board members, invited speakers at advisory board meetings, and during a session we hosted at the 2025 SHAPE America National Convention. Each challenge is paired with practical solutions designed to support successful implementation.

CHALLENGE	SOLUTION
Time management/scheduling conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from sample master schedules from compliant but similarly sized/resourced school districts. • Consider breaking recess into smaller timeframes if 20+ minutes isn't feasible (e.g., two 10-minute breaks). • Delegate a student "Recess Captain of the Week" to help support teachers in starting recess on time • Integrate recess into daily routines by scheduling it immediately after lunch or specials to reduce transition time. • Build in short transition buffers in the master schedule to protect the full 20-minute recess window.
Supervision and staffing shortages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage community volunteers or parent-teacher association (PTA) support to assist • Explore creative staffing options—pairing recess with paraprofessional or special area teacher coverage. • Provide teacher duty rotations that ensure equitable workload and minimize burnout. • Offer professional development for recess supervisors focused on positive play facilitation and conflict resolution.
Inconsistent implementation across grades or classrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize and celebrate teachers/teams promoting high-quality recess (e.g., newsletters or at staff meetings). • Provide opportunities for these teachers to share strategies or ideas with colleagues
Physical space limitations (indoor and outdoor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create indoor recess kits with movement-based activities students can play in small areas • Stagger recess times or use multiple smaller play zones to avoid crowding. • Partner with nearby community spaces (e.g., parks, recreation centers, churches) for additional play areas. • Integrate low-equipment games such as Four Square, Simon Says, or yoga stretches.
Culture of withholding recess as a punishment/need the time for makeup work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide alternatives for teachers to manage behavior without withholding recess <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Implement restorative practices (versus punishment) for students who are misbehaving in class ◦ Lead a professional training session that provides examples of real-world alternatives (for example, • Support communication between educators, students, and families to create flexible timelines for makeup work so students can still participate in recess.

CHALLENGE	SOLUTION
Lack of equipment, funding in general	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for grants to procure recess equipment and supplies • Utilize community resources • Host fundraisers • Encourage imaginative play and free play stations • Work with families and school staff to create homemade equipment • Allow students to bring favorite active play materials from home (e.g., chalk, balls) • Partner with local businesses or recreation organizations for in-kind donations or sponsorships • Rotate simple “activity stations” that require little or no equipment.
Making sure recess is inclusive and high-quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a student “Recess Council” to give feedback and suggest games or improvements to make recess inclusive for all students • Train recess supervisors on inclusive practices, ensuring all abilities, identities, and interests are represented. • Offer a variety of activities to meet diverse student needs (e.g., quiet zones, creative play, and active games)
Problematic behavior during recess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily prohibit activities that cause recurring issues • Teach students self-calming and problem-solving strategies • Create a “reflection zone” where students can think about behavior and demonstrate readiness to rejoin play, instead of losing recess time • Establish a clear, consistent behavior plan specific to recess (e.g., “Recess Code of Conduct”). • Use peer mediators or Recess Captains to help resolve minor conflicts.
Difficult transitions from classroom to recess and back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide incentives or recognition for positive hallway behavior • Allow brief transition time for reflection • Utilize “Recess Captains”- students who model positive behavior and encourage peers • Use brief mindfulness or stretching exercises post-recess to help students refocus. • Develop teacher-led transition routines that smoothly move students between settings.
Unstructured play time will provide stress for a generation of kids used to having everything scheduled/arranged for them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce students to easy to pick up games and activities such as jump rope or pickleball that could lead to a lifetime of play • Offer optional “game of the week” demonstrations to build confidence in unfamiliar play activities. • Provide social-emotional learning lessons that teach teamwork, cooperation, and flexible thinking during play.
Weather-related or seasonal barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop indoor recess plans that maintain physical activity (e.g., active video games, yoga, dance routines). • Ensure access to appropriate clothing and outerwear through donation drives or school lending closets.

SECTION 07:

Building a Coalition to Introduce Recess Laws

Creating a strong coalition is a crucial step in successfully introducing and passing recess laws. A coalition brings together diverse stakeholders who share a common goal, amplifying advocacy efforts and increasing influence with policymakers. It also helps pull resources together, and leverages expertise across interconnected sectors. This section outlines key steps to build an effective coalition to support recess laws.

1. Identify Potential Coalition Members

Start by identifying individuals and organizations that have a vested interest in promoting recess and children's health and development. Ensure diversity of membership to promote recess as an experience inclusive for all. Consider including:

- **Parent and family advocacy groups**
- **School administrators and educators**
(teachers—especially health and physical education teachers, principals, school district representation, for example)
- **Students**
- **Child health, disability, and pediatric organizations** (local chapters of the American Academy of Pediatrics, public health departments, or disability advocacy organizations like the “Parent Alliance for Students with Exceptional Needs” who have advocated for recess for children with ADHD and/or autism, for example)
- **State and local government representatives**—there are many individuals who work in state and local government, particularly departments of health and education, who may be wonderful champions for this work. They may have advocacy restrictions with respect to the legislature, but they are likely to be able to join a coalition as an individual.
- **University or research partners who study recess, policy, and/or physical activity in schools**
- **Youth organizations and afterschool program providers**
- **Community-based nonprofits or grassroots organizations focused on child wellness and education** (local chapters of SHAPE, for example)
- **State public health associations**
- **Recreation and parks departments**
- **Local or state advocacy groups focused on education or children's health**

- **Legislators and policy champions who have shown interest in child wellness**

Consider who is getting left behind in existing plans, programming, and systems as you build your coalition. Sample outreach e-mails are included in the resources section accompanying this section.

2. Clarify Shared Goals and Values

Clear, shared goals will help unify the coalition and keep members motivated and focused. Bring potential coalition members together for an initial meeting to:

- Share information about the importance of recess for children's physical, social, and cognitive development
- Discuss the goal of introducing or strengthening recess legislation in the state
- Share best practices from other states with success in implementing strong recess legislation
- Identify common priorities and potential challenges
- Establish shared values and commitment to the cause

3. Define Roles and Responsibilities

A successful coalition has clear roles to distribute work efficiently. Roles may include:

- Lead organizer or coordinator: Oversees coalition activities and communications
- Policy experts or legal advisors: Provide guidance on drafting and introducing legislation
- Community outreach leads: Engage families, schools, and local groups to build broader support
- Communications and media contacts: Manage public relations, social media, and messaging
- Legislative liaisons: Maintain relationships with policymakers and track legislative progress

Clarifying roles early helps prevent duplication



and ensures accountability. It's also important to ensure that each member has a meaningful role that is within their ability/bandwidth. For example, if you are including students to gain their perspectives, ensure they have clear activities or actions that they can take as part of the coalition to avoid tokenizing members. In addition, some coalition members may struggle with technology or modes of communication and may need additional support to get involved.

Some resources for identifying different roles one can use within a coalition are listed below (links active as of 11/13/2025):

- The Commons Social Change Library
“Engagement Pyramid: Visualise the different ways a person might get involved with your Campaign”
<https://commonslibrary.org/engagement-pyramid/>
- The Centre for Effective Altruism “The Concentric Circles model”
<https://www.centreforeffectivealtruism.org/the-concentric-circles-model>

4. Develop a Strategic Plan

Work together to create a coalition action plan, which may include:

- Timelines for key milestones such as drafting legislation, public hearings, and votes
- Outreach strategies to educate the public and legislators on the benefits of recess
- Coalition events, such as press conferences, community forums, or letter-writing campaigns
- Garnering stakeholder feedback
 - One strategy for doing this is to conduct listening sessions of focus groups. Questions that have been used in prior focus groups with key stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, and middle school students are included in Section 8 of this toolkit.
- Fundraising or resource-sharing strategies
- Plans for monitoring and responding to legislative developments

5. Maintain Communication and Engagement

Sustain momentum through regular meetings, updates, and transparent communication. Tools such as email newsletters, group chats, or virtual meetings can keep members informed and connected. Celebrate small wins to maintain enthusiasm. Consider the communication needs of your coalition members and make accommodations as needed (for example: interpreters or using plain language).

6. Leverage Coalition Strengths

Use the diversity of coalition members to reach different audiences and sectors. Leveraging these varied strengths builds a broad base of support and credibility. For example, specific to recess in schools:

- Parent groups can mobilize families for advocacy days
- Health organizations can provide evidence-based research and expert testimony
- Educators can share classroom experiences to illustrate recess needs
- Youth organizations can engage students as advocates

7. Prepare for Long-Term Advocacy

Passing recess laws may take time and persistence. A sustainable coalition can drive change beyond legislation to ensure recess benefits are realized for all children. The coalition should be prepared for:

- Building ongoing relationships with policymakers
- Responding to opposition or challenges
- Advocating for implementation and monitoring once laws are passed
- Expanding coalition membership to include new partners
- Adjusting timelines and goals- remember progress takes time. Maintaining flexibility to account for setbacks can sustain motivation among coalition members.

Resources: Sample Coalition Outreach Templates

Initial Email Invitation to Potential Members

New Message — ↗ X

To

Join Us in Advocating for Recess Laws to Support Children's Health

Dear [Name],

I hope this message finds you well. We are reaching out to invite [Organization Name] to join a coalition dedicated to promoting legislation that ensures daily recess for all elementary and middle school students in [State].

Recess is essential for children's physical health, social development, and academic success. Together, we can amplify our voices to encourage state policymakers to prioritize recess in state laws.

We would love to have you involved as a valued partner. Please join us for an initial meeting on [Date] at [Time] to discuss how we can work together toward this goal.

Please RSVP by [Date]. Feel free to contact me at [Phone/Email] with any questions.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to collaborating with you!

Best regards,

[Your Name]
[Your Title]
[Your Organization]

A       Send Save Cancel

Follow-Up Email After Initial Meeting

New Message — ↗ X

To

Thank You for Joining Our Recess Coalition – Next Steps

Dear Coalition Members,

Thank you for your participation in our recent meeting to discuss advancing recess legislation in [State]. Your insights and enthusiasm are invaluable.

As discussed, our next steps include:

- Finalizing coalition membership and roles
- Developing a strategic advocacy plan
- Planning outreach to families, schools, and legislators

We will be scheduling our next meeting on [Date]. Please reply with your availability and any additional ideas you wish to share.

Together, we can make recess a priority for children's well-being in [State].

Best,

[Your Name]

A       Send Save Cancel

SECTION 08:

Key Stakeholder Questions

To determine the most appropriate components to include in or add to your state's recess law, it is essential to engage key stakeholders. These groups may include state legislators, advocacy organizations, school administrators, teachers, and students. We've provided a list of questions you can use in interviews, focus groups, or even podcasts- we encourage you to be creative in how you gather this valuable information.

Interview Questions for state legislators or advocacy organizations

1. Tell us about why you believe it is important to create a state law with recess mandates in [name of state].
 - a. (State Legislators): Was this something brought to you by your constituents or by outside organizations?
 - b. (Advocacy organizations): Are you working with a state legislator to draft a bill?
2. How did you decide on a minimum recess time of [number of minutes]?
3. How did you decide what grade levels to include?
4. How did you decide on the other mandates/statues included in this bill?
5. What are the barriers you foresee with passing this bill into law?
 - a. What can be done to overcome these barriers?
6. What positive/negative feedback have you heard regarding this bill?
 - a. Has a similar bill been discussed in [name of state] previously? What was the reasoning for the bill not passing?
7. Can you tell us about the response that you have heard from school districts or school personnel?
 - a. What concerns, if any, have you heard regarding implementation in the schools?

Focus Group Questions for School Administrators

Current Recess Environment

1. Let's start by talking about recess at your school now. [If all administrators in the focus group report not having recess, skip to New Proposed Recess Law section]
 - a. Does your school have a recess policy? (If yes) Can you tell us about it? [Probe: length of time, prohibiting withholding recess, etc.]
 - b. How are recess policy or recess related decisions made? [Probe: who is involved, what the process looks like, what factors in to the decision-making process, scheduling]
 - c. How do you enforce the policy?
 - d. Does your school have a budget to support recess? How are the funds spent? Who makes these decisions?
 - e. What facilities or equipment does your school have that students use during recess?
 - f. What does supervision of the students during recess look like?
 - g. Tell me the difference between outdoor vs. indoor recess. [Probe: how does your school decide when to stay indoors vs. going outdoors?]
2. Tell me about your thoughts on the benefits of recess for your students.
 - a. What about for your teachers and staff?
3. Now, tell me about your thoughts on the challenges of recess for your students.
 - a. What about for your teachers and staff?

New Proposed Recess Law

In this next section, we are hoping to hear your thoughts on a recess policy that Maryland legislators plan to propose at the next legislative session. If passed, this law would require elementary and middle schools in Maryland to provide 30 minutes of recess to all students every day. It would also prohibit withholding recess from students.

4. What are your thoughts on this proposed law?

We are interested in learning about how this law might affect all the people who work at or attend your school.

5. Let's start with you and the other administrative staff. Are there any ways that this law might make your jobs as administrators easier?

a. How about harder?

6. Next, let's talk about your teachers and support staff. Are there any ways that this law might make their jobs easier? Elaborate.

a. How about harder?

7. What about your students? Are there ways that this law might make a student's school day easier?

a. How about harder?

8. If your school was required to implement this policy, what support would you or your school need to do so effectively?

9. Are there any other concerns you have regarding this proposed policy?

10. What would you like policymakers to know before finalizing the law?

Future

11. How would you weigh the benefits of recess against the challenges of implementation?

12. What kind of impact do you think a law like this would have on your school in the distant future?

Focus Group Questions for Teachers

Current Recess Environment

1. Let's start by talking about what recess looks like at your school now. [If all teachers in the focus group report not having recess, skip to New Proposed Recess Law section]

a. How long is the recess period? What time of day?

b. Who is responsible for taking the students to and from recess? [Probe: supervision during recess]

c. What do most students like to do during recess? [Probe: playground, fields, equipment, etc.]

d. Tell me about any rules your school has during recess? [Probe: technology use]

e. Tell me the difference between outdoor vs. indoor recess. [Probe: how does your school decide when to stay indoors vs. going outdoors?]

2. What are the benefits that your students experience due to recess?

a. What about benefits that you or other teachers experience due to recess?

3. What are the challenges that your students experience due to recess?

a. What about challenges that you or other teachers experience due to recess?

4. Tell me about any policy your school has when it comes to withholding recess. [Probe: If there is a policy, do you and other teachers at your school enforce it?]

New Proposed Recess Law

In this next section, we are hoping to hear your thoughts on a recess policy that Maryland legislators plan to propose at the next legislative session. If passed, this law would require elementary and middle schools in Maryland to provide 30 minutes of recess to all students every day. It would also prohibit withholding recess from students.

5. What are your thoughts on this proposed law?
6. Are there any ways this law might make your job easier? Elaborate.
7. Are there any ways this law might make your job harder? [Probe: logistics, supervision, instructional time]
 - a. How do you think those challenges could be addressed?
8. How do you think this law might affect your students?
 - a. [For middle school teachers] How do you think this law might affect middle school students in general?
9. If your school needed to implement this policy, what would your school OR staff need to do so effectively?
10. Are there any other concerns you have regarding the proposed policy?
11. What would you like policymakers to know before finalizing the law?

Future

12. What kind of impact do you think a law like this would have on your school in the distant future?

Focus Group Questions for Students

Recess in Elementary School

1. Let's start by talking about recess when you were in elementary school
 - a. What did you or other students usually do at recess? [Prompt for outdoor recess and indoor recess]
 - b. Were there any rules you had to follow during recess? What were they like?
 - c. Were there any times when a teacher didn't let you or your class have recess? What happened?
2. How did having recess make you feel during the school day? [Prompt if needed: did recess affect mood, focus, energy, etc.]
3. Was there anything about recess that you didn't like or found frustrating? [Prompt if needed: rules, equipment, games, fairness, etc.]

Recess in Middle School

Now, let's talk about this past school year.

4. This past year in 6th grade, did your class ever get recess or free time during the school day? [If yes]: What was that like? How often did it happen?
5. It sounds like most of you did not have recess often-or at all- this past school year. What are your thoughts on this?
 - a. How does not having recess-or having less recess-make you feel during the school day?
6. Why do you think middle school students don't get recess? [Prompt if needed: time, rules, different expectations, etc.]

Thoughts on a New Recess Law

There's an idea for a new law that would give middle school students at least 20 minutes of recess every day.

7. What do you think about that idea?
8. If your school gave you 30 minutes of recess every day, how might it make your school day easier? [Prompt if needed: would it affect your mood, energy, friendships, schoolwork, etc.?]
9. How might having 30 minutes of recess every day make your school day harder?
10. What are some things you would want to be able to do during recess in middle school?
11. Are there people you can think of who might be against the idea of recess for middle school students? Why do you think this is?
12. What would you want decision makers- like principals or lawmakers- to know about recess for students your age?

SECTION 09:

Writing an Op-Ed or Commentary

The purpose of an op-ed, which is short for “opposite the editorial page”, is for someone with either personal experience or expertise on a topic (ideally, someone with a vested local interest), to provide a persuasive opinion related to their area of expertise. In this case, one could write an op-ed in support of enacting a new recess law in their state or advocate for improvements to an existing recess law. Below, we share some tips and resources for writing and publishing an op-ed in a local news outlet in your state.

Content

- Op-eds are short (~600-800 words) and are typically authored by just one person (sometimes two)
- Op-eds should be written in plain language, avoiding jargon, with brief, concise sentences
- Essential elements of an op-ed include:
 - A “hook” to grab your reader and make your piece timely
 - A clear, to the point, argument or thesis
 - Key points (usually ~3 pieces of data or evidence) to support your argument
 - A statement acknowledging the counter argument
 - A clear call to action at the conclusion, often circling back to your news hook

Timing

Regarding state-level recess laws, op-eds are a strategy that can be used at any time to promote the importance of state-level recess laws. For coalitions planning to promote the passage of a specific law, op-eds can play an additional role during several different periods:

- Prior to the introduction of a bill: to call attention to the lack of an existing law or a weak law
- After a bill has been introduced within your state’s legislative session: to call for support for the bill or modifications that may be needed
- After the passage of a law: to thank lawmakers and call for the new law to be well implemented
- After the passage of a law: to encourage strong implementation of/compliance with that law
- After the failure of an introduced bill to be signed into law: to call attention to the failure and for the bill to be revisited in the future

When writing an op-ed, consider the potential unintended consequences of your argument or call to action, particularly as it aligns with the timing of the publication.

Submission

Local news outlets typically have online portals for op-ed submissions. Follow the directions in the portal; these may be very prescriptive, so you may not be able to include many of the tips below. If you are able to e-mail or contact an editor directly, it may increase the likelihood of publication.

The following are general tips of what to say when contacting an editor. Most importantly, be respectful. Email once, upon submission, and follow-up one to two business days later if you do not hear back indicating that you are planning to submit elsewhere if they are not interested. If you do not hear back or are rejected, then move on to a new outlet. **Do not submit to multiple outlets at once.**

- Introduce yourself, including your expertise and local relevance (e.g.: “I am an elementary school principal and have worked for X school district in X state for 20 years; I have seen firsthand the positive benefits of recess for children”).
- Briefly summarize the argument you make in your op-ed and why it is unique (1-2 sentences).
- Note why this outlet should publish this op-ed (regional relevance, recent relevant publications, etc.)

Your organization may have media liaisons or internal resources for op-ed submissions- these entities are often very helpful in supporting your submission and providing feedback. Anyone can submit an op-ed, as a local expert/citizen, so don't worry if you are not affiliated with an organization that has media support.

General Tips

- Society for Behavioral Medicine "Top Sheet: Purpose of an Op-Ed"
<https://www.sbm.org/scicomm/guide-to-ops-eds/purpose-of-an-op-ed>
- Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; Learner Center for Public Health Advocacy "How to write an Op-ed or Letter to the Editor"
<https://publichealth.jhu.edu/lerner-center/resources/how-to-write-an-op-ed-or-letter-to-the-editor>
- The Op Ed Project
<https://www.theopedproject.org/resources>
- The commons: Social Change Library "The Power of Story- The Story of Self, Us and Now": General information on using story telling in organizing
<https://commonslibrary.org/the-power-of-story-the-story-of-self-us-and-now/>

Free Op-Ed Training

- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Healthy Eating Research op-ed training for researchers (free):
<https://healthyeatingresearch.org/2023/09/writing-effective-op-eds-a-training-for-researchers/>
- Your school district, union, university affiliate (including as alumni), or other collaborating organization may also be able to provide training free of charge.

Examples

1. Op Ed in support of the Washington State recess law
"Recess is a critical part of a child's education"
By: Jennifer Dunne and Matt Wood (educators)
Published in the Seattle Times on March 5, 2023
<https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/recess-is-a-critical-part-of-a-childs-education/>
2. Op Ed calling for a state recess law in Michigan:
"Labor Voices: Students need recess for academic, emotional and physical wellness"
By Chandra Madafferi
Published in The Detroit News on April 1, 2025
<https://www.detroitnews.com/story/opinion/columnists/labor-voices/2025/04/01/labor-voices-students-need-recess-for-academic-emotional-and-physical-wellness/82758872007/>
3. Op Ed in support of the California State recess law going further
"Our students need more recess"
By: Timothy Walker (educator)
Published in the Desert Sun on April 5, 2024
<https://www.desertsun.com/story/opinion/2024/04/05/why-students-need-more-recess/73205370007/>
4. Commentary published after the passage of the state-wide recess law in California:
"Let's ensure 'Recess for All' law really does apply to all"
By: Rebecca London and Hannah Thompson
Published in EdSource on August 27, 2024
<https://edsource.org/2024/lets-ensure-recess-for-all-law-really-does-apply-to-all/718097>

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