

# Study shows importance of recess during school day

By Linda Ebbing, Staff Writer

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MADISON TWP. — It comes as no surprise to Mike Chaney, principal of Madison Primary School, that a recent study indicates just how important recess is for elementary students.

He said recess allows students to “burn off some of their energy” after sitting in the classroom.” He added: “It is important for better behavior.”

A comprehensive review of published literature on recess throughout the United States showed that recess breaks as short as 10 minutes improve children’s learning efficiency and the teacher’s aptitude during the other 50 minutes of a school hour, said the study’s author, Catherine L. Ramstetter, a doctoral candidate at the University of Cincinnati.

“Kids need breaks far more than adults do during the day,” she said.

A member of the Home and School Health Committee for the Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, Ramstetter said many districts curtailed or cut recess time to better deal with testing mandates from the No Child Left Behind Act.

While hoping to add educational content, she said, the recess reduction takes away from a child’s ability to function in a classroom.

“A child’s attention spans begin to wane after 40 minutes of intense instruction,” she said. “Recess provides children a chance to refocus.”

In addition to the mental benefits of recess, Ramstetter said an unstructured play time offers kids physical benefits, especially for young children still reinforcing movement and motor skills.

“The physical, cardiovascular activity of running and playing on the equipment is helpful,” Chaney said. “And students get to practice their social skills at recess.”

For Madison Primary first-grader Halle Margerum, recess is her favorite part of the day.

She agrees that it’s good to get a break after working in the classroom, and she said it helps because she is more relaxed when she gets back to class.

She and classmate Haley Hayes say they start playing the minute they hit the playground up until the minute they are called inside “by the sound of the whistle.”

## **Recess time cut to comply with No Child Left Behind**

Ramstetter’s study suggests that Ohio children should be getting more — not less — recess time, information many school district administrators support.

“Recess is a good opportunity to build social and communication skills,” said Melissa Kircher,

superintendent for the New Miami Local School District. “And we have found that if they have recess before lunch they typically behave better.”

A member of the Home and School Health Committee for the Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, Catherine Ramstetter, author of the study, said many districts curtailed or cut recess time to better deal with testing mandates from the No Child Left Behind Act.

While hoping to add educational content, Ramstetter said, the recess reduction actually takes away from a child’s ability to function in a classroom.

“A child’s attention span begins to wane after forty minutes of intense instruction,” she said. “Recess provides children a chance to refocus.”

It’s intuitive, she said.

“If kids are off task and fidgety, take 10 minutes and let them do something different. Ideally you give them a non-cognitive task that will allow them to come back to focus on a cognitive task and be prepared to absorb it.”

For Isaiah Murph , a sixth-grader at Harrison Elementary School in Hamilton, recess is a time to play some football.

Classmate Jahmez Mitchell looks at recess as a “break from doing all our work so we don’t have stay in all day.”

According to the study, teachers and researchers saw better behavior at and after meal time when it followed recess.

In addition to the mental benefits of recess, Ramstetter said an unstructured play time also offers kids physical benefits, especially for young children still reinforcing movement and motor skills.

The CDC, the United States Department of Agriculture, the National Food Service Management Institute and Action for Healthy Kids support the “Recess Before Lunch” initiative.

Dr. Robert Murray, chairman of the Home and School Health Committee, said the benefits of recess go “beyond the classroom,” with children developing better social-emotional skills.

“Finding time to engage in social interactions helps children better communicate, share and cooperate,” Murray said.

Murray plans to share the report’s findings with local school leaders, legislators and other child advocates.

Ramstetter hopes sharing those success stories helps drive change.

“We know everyone has to do more with less,” she said. “We want to work with schools to help better the educational, physical and social development of Ohio’s children.”

**To make recess periods effective, schools should:**

- **Have enough trained adults** on hand to enforce safety rules and prevent aggressive, bullying behavior.
- **Work with police departments** and community agencies to address safety concerns about children playing in school playgrounds in high-crime areas.
- **Provide space, facilities, equipment and supplies** that can make active participation in physical activity during recess appealing to children.

- **Have staff encourage students** to be active during recess.
- **Schedule recess before**, rather than after, lunch; studies have found that students eat more of their lunches when recess comes before lunch.

Source: Wechsler H, Devereaux AB, Davis M, Collins J.

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