

Recess Resource List

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Background on Recess

The *Robert Wood Foundation* has supported recess as a very important health-related program. In 2008 it commissioned a study of parental attitudes about recess. It identified that “nearly four out of five parents believe that children aren’t getting enough physical playtime on a daily basis,” and “seven out of 10 Americans disagree with schools’ policies of eliminating or reducing recess time for budgetary, safety or academic reasons.”

It also found that “an overwhelming majority of Americans believe that recess serves many important functions for both students and teachers. For example, 91 percent believe that having a break with physical activity helps children stay focused and learn in the classroom.

For additional data see <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/articles-and-news/2008/12/americans-want-schools-to-take-recess-seriously.html>

An article for school administrators from October 2017 reported that six states required recess and 11 others officially recommended it. “Meanwhile, eight other states mandate ‘general activity,’ ranging from 30 minutes daily to 600 minutes monthly.” The article can be found at <https://www.districtadministration.com/article/lawmakers-requiring-more-recess-schools>

Despite this positive move toward required recess, there is still serious concern that not enough children have daily recess. This is especially true in schools serving low-income families.

Summary of Research on Recess

In 2013 Olga Jarrett, a professor at Georgia State University and a leading recess researcher and activist, compiled a report on recess research: “A Research-Based Case for Recess.” Among its data, are studies showing that when children have recess they are less fidgety and more on-task than when they did not have it. The paper can be found at:

http://usplay.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/13.11.5_Recess_final_online.pdf

Benefits of Loose Parts in Recess

Loose parts are open-ended materials that children can play with in multiple ways. They can be sand, earth, and water, or hammers and nails. They can be recycled materials such as boxes, tubes, crates, and tires. Children find endless ways to play with such materials and a study in Australia found that children playing with loose parts were far more active physically than children on a playground with sports areas and fixed equipment. The study can be found at:

https://www.londonplay.org.uk/resources/0000/1229/BMC_Public_Health.pdf

In England and the U.K. there are now hundreds of schools that provide loose parts during recess. They are stored in sheds called playpods. Since recess staff is already on hand, costs for the loose parts approach is generally affordable to schools. Some basic training for recess staff, however, is very helpful for learning about the nature of play and how to support children's play without unnecessary interference.

Two organizations, in particular, are focused on helping schools introduce loose parts.

- 1) *Scrapstore Playpods* has helped start loose parts play in hundreds of British schools. They are now working with some schools in the U.S. Their videos provide a very helpful picture of loose parts in action:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqi1KyJJeKg> shows loose parts used by elementary-age children

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laFA9QqPP14> shows loose parts in the early years

- 2) *Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL)* has also helped hundreds of schools in the U.K. It has recently expanded its work in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

Opal's booklet on its program and research findings can be seen at

<http://outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Oct-2017-OPAL-Booklet.pdf>.

A recent pilot project in Portland, Oregon successfully placed loose parts in a public school, and the experience has been documented in a short video at [youtube.com/watch?v=TikHCNDd7wk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TikHCNDd7wk). Two public schools in the US described their experiences with loose parts at recess in the book, *Playing It Up*. See

http://allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/Playing_It_Up.pdf, pages 109-118.

Other:

People often wonder if accident rates are higher when children use loose parts in play than when they engage in sports or play on fixed equipment that meets safety standards. Advocates for loose parts and adventure playgrounds, which are full of loose parts, point out that children seek out risk in play but risk assess and handle visible risk quite well (in contrast to hazards which they cannot see or assess.) A recent study comparing accident rates at a school that has a traditional playground with fixed equipment and an adventure playground for after school play found that the accident rate was lower on the adventure playground. And both were much lower than playing sports like soccer. For the data and a very interesting article, see

<https://popupadventureplaygrounds.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/parish-just-the-facts-final.pdf>

Two play advocates in Brazil have created a wonderful video of children playing with loose parts in very simple and traditional ways. It's a great reminder of how children have played around the world over the ages. It is available at

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ndgifr024gbw2ew/The%20Territory%20of%20Play%20%28Security%20Download%29-HD.mp4?dl=0>