SAY YES TO RECESS NEVADA
45 TO THRIVE

What the research says about recess

> *"Recess represents a temporary suspension of academic cognitive effort helping to maintain efficiency, concentration and morale. Breaks offer an opportunity for students to manage stress and promote prosocial development, a universal benefit for all ages. Recess positively impacts the teaching-learning environment and children's mental health."*
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> **American Academy of Pediatrics, "The Crucial Role of Recess in School," policy statement** (Pediatrics, June 2026)

Recess improves attention, behavior

Kindergarteners, first-graders and second-graders who received 45 minutes of recess a day experienced a significant decrease in classroom off-task behaviors and a significant increase in attentional focus compared to those who received 30 minutes of recess a day. (Frontiers in Education, 2018)

Recess lowers chronic stress

Across three elementary schools, fourth-graders who received three 15-minute recess breaks a day had significantly lower hair cortisol (chronic stress) levels than fourth-graders who received two 15-minute recess breaks a day. (Children, 2025)

Recess provides whole-child education

By meeting children's developmental need to play, adequate recess can provide a critical balance to the demands of structured seat time at school. Play builds social-emotional, cognitive, language and self-regulation skills. It also supports executive function and buffers toxic stress. (Pediatrics, 2018)

Recess provides much-needed movement

A systematic review of 43 studies on physical activity among children found 58 percent do not meet the minimum daily recommendation of 60 minutes a day. The review found that moderate-to-vigorous physical activity was higher among children at recess than in PE class. (Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health, 2021)

Recess benefits children with disabilities

Physical activity programs, like recess, improve locomotor performance and skills, object control, social skills, peer interactions, quality of life, and self-confidence in children with disabilities. It is also beneficial for children with cognitive and behavioral disabilities. Periods of running or walking before learning help children with autism increase the proportion of correct academic responses and work tasks completed at school. (Pediatrics, 2021)

Recess promotes healthy weight

Fourth-graders from three elementary schools who received 45 minutes of recess per school day had a decrease in overall body fat from fall to spring, whereas those who engaged in 30 minutes of recess showed an increase in overall body fat percentage. (Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health, 2024)

Recess supports whole-child health

An international expert consensus, informed by 18 evidence reviews including an umbrella review of 381 studies, found that active outdoor play is broadly associated with better health in children. Experts from 38 countries endorsed the statement. (Int. J. Behav. Nutr. Phys. Act., 2025)

Recess supports the developing brain

The movement children get at recess appears to benefit the growing brain. A review of brain-imaging studies found that physical activity in youth may strengthen white-matter connections and change activity in regions key to attention, memory and learning, including the frontal lobes and hippocampus. (Pediatrics, 2019)

Movement sharpens thinking skills

In a 20-week randomized trial of 8- to 11-year-olds with overweight or obesity, regular exercise led to improved intelligence scores and cognitive flexibility, the ability to shift between tasks, along with modest gains in academic performance. (JAMA Network Open, 2022)

Note: Given the volume of research, we limited this sample to the most relevant studies and policy statements published in top-tier (Quartile 1) journals within the past decade. washoeparents.org/say-yes-to-recess-nevada