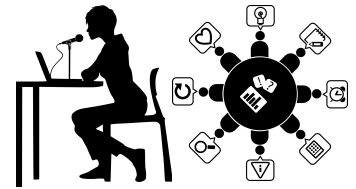




Recess Subcommittee Advisory

An advisory summarizing the findings on the subject of
removing recess as a punishment to the Chelmsford School Committee.
December 2019



Education in the 21st Century is data driven. Like all school districts in the Commonwealth, Chelmsford Public School prides itself on the use of data to drive big decisions, like district wide policies, as well as smaller decisions, like the use of formative assessments to check for student understanding during a lesson.

**When it comes to the benefits of recess the data couldn't be any clearer:
Children are worse off, on multiple levels, when recess is taken away from them.**

There are two sources of information when researching this topic:

- the medical community
- the educational community

Both communities are in complete agreement that recess is vital to student success and removing it from a child's day, for any reason, is detrimental to the development of the "whole child".¹ All educational literature that was researched for this article cited the research of the medical community as the foundation for their stance on recess.

Below is a closer look at views of the medical community:

THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL²

Benefits of Recess

Recess improves social and emotional development.
Recess improves memory, attention, & concentration.
Recess helps students stay on task in the classroom.
Recess reduces disruptive behavior in the classroom.

National Guidance for Recess

Minimum of 20 minutes a day for K-12 students.
Physical Education is not a replacement for recess.
Prohibit the exclusion of recess for disciplinary reasons or academic performance.
Provide staff who lead/supervise recess with professional development.

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICIANS³

Benefits of Recess

Recess provides an unstructured break in learning.
The lack of structure in a break between cognitive tasks is crucial for "optimal cognitive processing".
Play at recess teaches valuable social skills like: negotiation, cooperation, sharing, problem solving, as well as coping skills like perseverance and self control.

Recommendations

Recess should be considered a child's personal time and not be withheld for academic or punitive reasons.
Recess contributes to the recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per day. This is a standard strongly supported by the AAP.

Recess Subcommittee

Families presented questions to CSEPAC and to the Chelmsford Special Education Parent Support Group (PSG) on removing recess as punishment or to complete classwork. Questions were raised with regard to:

- The purpose and success rate of modifying behaviors by removing recess
- How missing recess is communicated with families
- Who is allowed to take away recess and with what parameters

The subcommittee had 3 duties: (1) Research the function and purpose of recess removal as punishment, (2) Review current policies and practices, (3) Determine if recommendation can be given that are within district policies & support children's needs.

4 families were represented on the subcommittee, with students from 6 schools across the district. All 4 families had reports of their own child missing recess and had spoken with other families who had similar experiences. 27 families raised concerns and/or questions about removal of recess to the PSG. It is important to note, that this is an extremely small sample size. This is only active parents in PAC that participated in a subcommittee meeting and parents that have actively participated in the PSG, which is a very small subset since it is an online community. It may be safe to assume that these numbers are representative of a larger group. No principals reported that they have had this issue brought to their attention as of May 2019.

Respecting the Needs of Teachers, Staff, and Students

CSEPAC recognizes that there are times when a student will miss recess due to happenstance. Missing part of the school day could happen at any time and teachers, staff, and students should have autonomy to use their time as needed. Our recommendations are not intended to restrict support for students or time for teachers to assist students. However, if a teacher or staff person needs to change a student's schedule for the day, it is important that it is communicated with the parents. Changes in behavior or the need for additional academic support can be indicative of issues that need to be formally addressed. In order for a child's team to be fully supporting their needs, everyone on the team needs to know what is going on.

CSEPAC supports professional development opportunities. In the event that removing recess as punishment were no longer an option, it is likely that some teachers and support staff will need additional training. Different classroom management systems or practices that are in line with PBIS may need to be developed. Alongside PBIS training, CPS could look into the following resources for training:

- COLLABORATIVE PROACTIVE SOLUTIONS (CPS), by Dr. Ross Greene, CPS
- It's A Jungle (Gym) Out There: Tips for Managing Behavior For School Helpers, by Donna Shae & Nadine Briggs from Social Success Central
- Responsive Classroom

Supporting & Responding to Behavior, by George Segay, is part of the PBIS standards. Recess should be paired with a behavior plan or classroom behavior system already in place, like a reflection sheet. This practice would be for what are defined as "minor" incidents, which are described in detail in the publication. "Major" incidents are also defined with explicit examples. The purpose intending to be negative reinforcement, removing something to increase a desired behavior. It was noted that schools are at various points in implementing PBIS and may already have plans to include this in their school specific policies and teacher training.

The Importance of Recess for Children with Special Needs

"Children with disabilities are far more likely than their classmates to be disciplined, removed from the classroom, suspended, and even expelled."⁶ Many children with special needs suffer from cognitive or sensory fatigue. Research of benefits of recess support many of the areas children with special needs have deficits in. Removing recess from their day is in direct contradiction to research and recommendations from CDC and AAP.

Additional Information to Consider

It's important to note that currently 5 states in the US (MO, FL, NH, RI, AZ) have legalized recess as a time in a child's day that can not be intruded on by schools. An additional 7 states (IA, NC, SC, LA, CT, TX, VA) have passed legislation that requires 20-30 minutes of physical activity per day. And CT has a bill in their legislature that proposes their time extend to 50 minutes per day.⁴ Additionally, two bills sit on Beacon Hill calling for mandatory recess time for elementary kids.⁷

Bill S.330 is an Act relative to physical and social recess in schools. At this point, recess is not considered part of learning time. However, if Bill S.330 passes, then it would be. Currently, both the State Senate and House have referred the bill to the Joint Committee on Education. It was one of the bills brought to hearing on September 4, 2019. It may benefit CPS to sit ahead of that curve and implement the policy as stated in the bill.

Alternative Intervention Recommendations

Through the leadership of the current and past Superintendent as well as current and past School Committees, the CPS faculty and staff have some fantastic resources available to them. Each of these sources are common practice amongst school districts and are considered "best practice" among national educational leadership.

DISTRICT CURRICULUM ACCOMMODATION PLAN (DCAP)⁷

The Chelmsford Public Schools DCAP offers a few different strategies that, at the very least should be exhausted prior to the consideration of the removal of a student's recess.

- Allow extra time for HW or other assignments.
- Offer an alternative setting (perhaps student is given the opportunity to complete school work at home or homework in school)
- Access to guidance counselor
- Use of PBIS reward system for positive behavior
- Provide strategic seating
- Allow for movement/sensory breaks

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS & SUPPORTS (PBIS)⁸

It's the understanding of the Chelmsford SEPAC that the Chelmsford Public Schools have adopted PBIS as its preferred intervention strategy for teachers. After extensive research, it became clear that the removal of recess is not a supported strategy of PBIS. We recommend that building principals continue to have autonomy to use appropriate PBIS based interventions for their school. Administrators, specialists, teachers, and support staff should collaborate standard responses to common scenarios so that there is consistency within each school. This includes protocol of communicating changes in schedule between teachers and staff and with parents/guardians.

Questions from the Subcommittee

- Is keeping a child inside and separated from peers during recess for a behavior no longer occurring considered an "exclusionary time out," "detention," or "time out?"
- Who is allowed to direct a child to a time out or restrict recess time?
- What are the current policies or recommendations for communication with parents with regard to discipline at school?
- What can be done when a teacher feels a child needs punishment? What supports can be put in place for the teacher, staff, or student?
- What breaks are available for high school students and how is that managed?
- How does "punishment" fit into the PBIS model?
- How would an aid or recess staff person know if a child had an accommodation to not have recess taken away?
- What options are available for students with anxiety or social deficits? Are there quiet or more structured activities available?
- How does a parent know if their child is receiving additional supports in the MTSS model or been brought up for discussion at an SST meeting?

- Do teachers, paras, and staff feel welcomed to CSEPAC workshops? What can CSEPAC do to support professional development?

Summary

All children need recess - no one more than the children Chelmsford SEPAC represents. Because of their disabilities, these students are more vulnerable to cognitive or sensory fatigue & thus more likely to act impulsively. This impulsivity is typically unexpected classroom behavior and, as such, that impulsivity can often lead to a punitive punishment of some sort - like the removal of recess. All children in CPS, but especially the children CSEPAC represents, need their elected officials to understand the holistic value of recess by supporting the elimination of "recess detention" as an option for punitive punishment.⁵

**"If kids do well when they can,
what do we (the adults) do when a child is clearly struggling to do well?"**

- Dr. Ross Greene

Recommendations

- Eliminate recess detention as punitive punishment
- Develop communication protocol between CPS and parents if recess time is reduced
- Continue development and implementation of PBIS standards as they relate to recess

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