

Recess for All! In Chicago

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At A Glance

A task force of low-income parents and families from the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) worked together with Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI), a community-based organization, to create awareness about the importance of having time for recess in elementary schools. As a result of their efforts, 236,450 students in all 474 Chicago public elementary schools now have 30 minutes of daily uninterrupted recess.

Public Health Challenge

Getting little or no physical activity each day is a key contributor to childhood obesity. Yet, for 82% of children in the CPS system, recess had been replaced with classroom time and was not a part of their curriculum. This increased the time children spent being sedentary and made it nearly impossible for kids to get the CDC-recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day for 5 or more days a week. When CPS system parents were asked about concerns related to their children's education, the overwhelming concern was that lack of recess. The parents believed that—in addition to reducing their children's obesity risk—recess broke up the school day and kept the children energized and focused.

Approach

CPS parents and students worked together with COFI to raise awareness about the importance of recess in the fight against childhood obesity and improved focus on academics. The Recess for All! is an educational campaign that recommends recess be implemented in public school settings that include 30 minutes of uninterrupted physical activity into daily school curricula.



Find Out More

If recess is not part of your children's school's daily activities, find out why, then work with other parents and school staff to see how you can get more physical activity into the school day. Working together, we can give our children the opportunity to be active and make positive changes in their lives. This project is supported by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) cooperative agreement.

Results

As of May, 2013, all 474 elementary schools in the CPS system provide students with a recess period of 30 minutes each day, reaching approximately 236,450 students. To help reinstate recess in Chicago area schools, COFI created a principal's guide. The Recess for All! educational campaign also gained media attention in the Chicago Sun-Times and the Chicago Tribune.

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We learned that in schools that had recess, behavior was better, academic performance was better, attention was better. Parents pulled together and we were determined to meet with everyone in CPS to express our concerns about not having recess.

- Parent, Chicago Public Schools

What's Next

COFI is continuing to work with parents and community stakeholders to provide education about the importance of providing recess for all elementary school children in Illinois. Should recess become a state curriculum requirement for all Illinois children, it would ensure that approximately 1,369,300 elementary and middle school students have at least 30 minutes per day of physical activity according to the Illinois State Board of Education.