

National Position Statement: ***The importance of school recess for active play***



NPS_4 V2 [2024-2026]

ACHPER Australia

National Position Statement

The importance of school recess for active play

Principle Positions

- ACHPER asserts that all young people in Australia are entitled to experience play opportunities during recess recreational periods which are inclusive, supportive, healthy and meaningful.
- ACHPER states that the purpose of providing at least one hour of recess recreational time with quality active play opportunities can holistically support students' cognitive, social and physical wellbeing.

ACHPER asserts that it is necessary for schools to provide multiple (minimum of two) recess recreational periods each day.

- ACHPER supports the provision of a wide range of resources for use during recess recreational periods each day (especially loose parts equipment and access to natural features).
- ACHPER supports the provision of a variety of outdoor spaces during recess recreational periods where students can freely select a range of activities, and encouraging students to having a diversity of choice during play opportunities to meet the activity needs and interests of all students.
- ACHPER advocates that recess recreational periods should not be withheld for any reason or to replace play experiences with more sedentary activities (e.g. electronic screen time).
- ACHPER advocates for high quality, well-resourced professional development opportunities for teachers to recognise and encourage quality play opportunities and positively respond to students during recess recreational periods.

-
- ACHPER states that all teachers are responsible for supervising recess recreational periods and need to ensure that students can experience opportunities to maximise their learning and wellbeing.
 - ACHPER recognises the need to further enhance and develop teacher preparation in the University sector in relation to identifying and encouraging positive play opportunities beyond the early years which align with the HPE curriculum content F-10.
 - ACHPER supports students being involved in the planning, decision-making and leadership processes associated with recess recreational periods to enhance a sense of responsibility within their school communities, encourage collaboration and understand others' perspectives.
 - ACHPER supports future evidence-based projects to enhance the play opportunities available to both Australian students and teachers.

Rationale

ACHPER is the leading professional association in Australia representing the HPE and Recreation (R) learning areas in Australian schools. This Position Statement has been developed for the purpose of stating ACHPER's position toward the recreational opportunities associated with encouraging students' play during recess periods. ACHPER presents this position for the benefit of its members as well as for productive and ongoing future partnerships with HPE learning area stakeholders. ACHPER's position is based on the knowledge that an educated nation, comprising of active and healthy young people, is a strong investment in the future of the Australian population. ACHPER recognises that the school is a significant setting to support children's intellectual, physical, social and emotional development with specific opportunities to strengthen the health and wellbeing of young people. The assertions of this position statement have strong foundations in research related to children and adolescents and also in current curriculum.

Definition

School recess (including lunchtime recess periods) are regularly scheduled periods within the school day for physical activity and play that are monitored by staff or volunteers, encourages students to engage in activities of their choice and is offered at all grade levels from primary school through to senior high school (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). The main characteristics of play include being self-chosen, self-directed, have elements of imagination, and be transformative without a pre-determined set of outcomes to work towards.

Background

ACHPER supports decades of research indicating that providing quality active play opportunities during school recess, holistically supports students' cognitive, social and physical wellbeing (Hyndman & Wyver, 2020). Play during school hours recognised as a basic human right by the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UN Article 31 states "the right to...leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child" (United Nations, 1989).

ACHPER recognises that play opportunities for students beyond school recess recreation are becoming more limited due to increased urbanisation (Mustapa et al., 2015), parental fears and increasingly busy family schedules. ACHPER reinforces the need for schools to provide positive, supportive recess recreational opportunities for students to meet their fundamental rights of play and leisure.

ACHPER recognises that outdoor, active play (Hyndman et al., 2016) is highly beneficial to children and that the international literature is immersed in examples of research and experiments that show the benefits of what play offers to a student. A comprehensive summary (Ginsberg, 2007; Ramstetter & Murray, 2017) of the benefits

of play include: cognitive development, social and emotional health, physical health, improvements to attention, coping, memory, perspective-taking, cooperating, negotiating, helping, sharing, solving problems, dealing with trauma, planning skills, decision-making skills, motivation to learn, building friendships, school readiness, social skills and attitudes on sharing, turn-taking, self-restraint, working in groups and getting along with others, creativity and divergent thinking (generating multiple approaches to solving problems), healthy brain development, emotional stability and resiliency, empathy, feelings of well-being, motor skills, early literacy and language development, self-regulation, child-parent attachment, science and math learning, and improvements in executive function. Play is skill-building and linked to learning (Jarrett, 2015) and the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (Hyndman et al., 2017).

ACHPER asserts that all students need access to regular and sustained periods of recreational recess time to break up prolonged periods of sitting in a classroom, loaded timetabling and regulations (McNamara et al., 2020). ACHPER believes that students require their own recreational spaces and time to think for themselves for their development.

ACHPER recognises students need to experience sufficient time to freely choose, explore, experiment and use their imaginations during recess recreational periods to build important cognitive, social and physical connections for the future (Hyndman & Wyver, 2020). ACHPER supports students receiving opportunities to freely explore new variables during recess (places to think, feel, see, relate and do) that are less imposed or structured (Bundy et al., 2009). Students report that many are less likely to misbehave, experience bullying or simply lash out and cause an injury if they are engaged and interested (Hyndman et al., 2015).

ACHPER recognises that regular break times make a positive difference to students' focus in the classroom (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005) and that providing sufficient recess

recreational time with positive play provisions are especially important to establish habits in primary school. ACHPER asserts positive recreational habits are important to help counter challenges in secondary school with Australian teenagers' activity levels being among the lowest in the world (Guthold et al., 2019).

ACHPER recognises that schools should look to provide students with opportunities to connect with a range of natural features where possible. When these natural spaces are available, they are valued by children for the unstructured play opportunities. ACHPER asserts that teachers (Aminpour et al., 2020) should avoid perceiving natural features as problematic or designate these spaces as out-of-bounds during recess recreational periods.

ACHPER recognises that the provision of loose parts equipment (e.g. sports equipment such as ball, bats, hoops) is also important during school recess recreational periods. Research on loose parts play in Australia continues to find that students are able to use their imagination, problem solve and negotiate, as well as a lot of physical effort to create their play environment (Wyver et al., 2020).

ACHPER recognises that providing students with access to unstructured play variables (e.g. loose equipment and natural features) can allow students to discover new ideas and solve problems by constructing, observing, designing and learning from each other. ACHPER asserts that unstructured play provisions can ensure students can experience moderate levels risk for students to self-calculate and then overcome in order to problem solve, build confidence and resilience.

ACHPER states that providing a wide diversity of sizes, shapes, locations and textures can allow students to explore, invent and discover new games, ideas and designs. Creating more options for students to play with outdoors will help students to be engaged, challenged and find opportunities to discover new methods to do things.

ACHPER recognises students can use loose parts for social benefits to collaborate in different team roles to negotiate, plan, design, observe and learn from other children to solve problems (Mahony et al., 2018). ACHPER asserts that recess recreational periods can be a strong complement to class-based learning through inquiry based teaching models.

ACHPER emphasises that more prioritisation is required in Australian teacher training courses of learning about the benefits of play beyond early childhood years to align with designated key learning areas. ACHPER recognises that all teachers in Australia are required to undertake recess supervision and students can be playing during upwards of 4,000 recess breaks (Hyndman, 2017). ACHPER asserts that teachers should continue to consider how play during school recess recreation periods can align with the curriculum, and ensure it does not become less prioritised.

ACHPER recognises that other education professionals who may be available to the school, such as school counsellors, can consider professional learning for encouraging play as part of their professional training (Chancellor & Hyndman, 2017). If adults see that students are bored, being messy with equipment, or engaging in what they think are disruptive behaviours, they are then able to base their decisions upon training they have received. ACHPER encourages professional learning and training for recess recreational periods, to ensure positive play decisions and priorities will be selected and maintained.

ACHPER recommends a minimum of one hour provision of unstructured, active play for recess recreation time, with multiple recess periods provided. While ACHPER acknowledges that challenges will always exist in meeting this one hour goal, as demands on schools and parents ever increase, this allocation needs to be prioritised. Students can have input into play decisions during school recess recreation periods (Massey et al., 2019). With the multitude of physical, social and cognitive benefits of recess, ACHPER advises to not withhold recess recreational opportunities as punishment for any reason.

ACHPER states that students require access, feel safe and included, and are able to experience meaningful connections during the school day.

This statement is intended to be considered when there are no COVID-19 or other pandemic restrictions occurring for school communities. For guidelines on how to manage school play during incidences and restrictions with COVID-19, ACHPER recommends referring to the guidance provided by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) and Global Recess Alliance.

Australian Curriculum Links

Participate in games with and without equipment (ACPMP009)

Participate in play that promotes engagement with outdoor settings and the natural environment (ACPPS007)

Cooperate with others when participating in physical activities (ACPMP012) Test possible solutions to movement challenges through trial and error (ACPMP013) Identify and explore natural and built environments in the local community where physical activity can take place (ACPPS023)

Perform fundamental movement skills in a variety of movement sequences and situations (ACPMP025)

Create and participate in games with and without equipment (ACPMP027) Incorporate elements of effort, space, time, objects and people in performing simple movement sequences (ACPMP029)

Use strategies to work in group situations when participating in physical activities (ACPMP030)

Propose a range of alternatives and test their effectiveness when solving movement challenges (ACPMP031)

Identify rules and fair play when participating in physical activities (ACPMP032) Describe strategies to make the classroom and playground healthy, safe and active spaces (ACPPS040)

Participate in outdoor games and activities to examine how participation promotes a connection between the community, natural and built environments, and health and wellbeing (ACPPS041)

Practise and apply movement concepts and strategies with and without equipment (ACPMP045)

Examine the benefits of physical activity to health and wellbeing (ACPMP046) Adopt inclusive practices when participating in physical activities (ACPMP048)

Apply innovative and creative thinking in solving movement challenges (ACPMP049)

Australian Curriculum – Outdoor Learning Curricular Connection “The outdoor learning connection provides a framework for students to experience guided, integrated learning across the curriculum in natural environments (ACARA, 2020).

References

Aminpour, F., Bishop, K., & Corkery, L. (2020). The hidden value of in-between spaces for children's self-directed play within outdoor school environments. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 194, 103683.

Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority. (2020). *Australian Curriculum – Health and Physical Education*, Sydney, Australia.

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f10-curriculum/health-and-physical-education/>

Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority. (2014). *Australian Curriculum – Outdoor Learning Curricular Connection*. Sydney, Australia.

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/curriculumconnections/portfolios/outdoor-learning/>

Chancellor, B., & Hyndman, B. (2017). The rush to judgement: Mapping moral geographies of the primary school playground. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 7(1), 38-50.

Ginsburg, K. R. (2007). The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. *Pediatrics*, 119(1), 182-191.

Guthold, R., Stevens, G. A., Riley, L. M., & Bull, F. C. (2020). Global trends in insufficient physical activity among adolescents: a pooled analysis of 298 populationbased surveys with 1· 6 million participants. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 4(1), 23-35.

Hyndman, B. P., & Wyver, S. (2020). *Outdoor Recreation within the School Setting: A Physiological and Psychological Exploration*. In *Outdoor Recreation-Physiological and Psychological Effects on Health*. IntechOpen; London.

Hyndman, B., Mahony, L., Te Ava, A., Smith, S., & Nutton, G. (2017). Complementing the Australian primary school Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum: exploring children's HPE learning experiences within varying school ground equipment contexts. *Education 3-13*, 45(5), 613-628.

Hyndman, B. P., Benson, A., & Telford, A. (2016). Active play: exploring the influences on children's school playground activities. *American Journal of Play*, 8(3), 325.

Jarrett, O. S. (2015). Recess and Learning. *The Handbook of the Study of Play*, 2, 299-318.

Mahony, L., Hyndman, B., Nutton, G., Smith, S., & Te Ava, A. (2017). Monkey bars, noodles and hay bales: a comparative analysis of social interaction in two school ground contexts. *International Journal of Play*, 6(2), 166-176.

Massey, W., Neilson, L., & Salas, J. (2019). A critical examination of school-based recess: what do the children think?. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 1-15.

McNamara, L., London, R., Ramstetter, C., Baines, E., Beresin, A., Claasson, J., Doyle, W., Hyndman, B., Jarrett, O., Massey, W., & Rhea, D. (2020). School reopening? Make sure children have time for daily recess. *Global Recess Alliance; USA*.

Mustapa, N. D., Maliki, N. Z., & Hamzah, A. (2015). Repositioning children's developmental needs in space planning: A review of connection to nature. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 170, 330-339.

Pellegrini, A. D., & Bohn, C. M. (2005). The role of recess in children's cognitive performance and school adjustment. *Educational researcher*, 34(1), 13-19.

Ramstetter, C., & Murray, R. (2017). Time to Play: Recognizing the Benefits of Recess. *American Educator*, 41(1), 17.

United Nations General Assembly. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child, Resolution 25, session 44, (November 20)*. Geneva; Switzerland.

Wyver, S., Bundy, A., Engelen, L., Naughton, G., & Niehues, A. N. (2020). Loose Parts on the school Playground. *Health and Wellbeing in Childhood*, 172.

To Cite:

ACHPER. (2024). *National Position Statement: The Importance of School Recess for Active Play. Version 2 [2024=2026]*. Co-developed with A/Prof Brendon Hyndman of ACHPER's Academic Advisory Committee. ACHPER [www.achper.org.au].

Photo by [Annie Spratt](#) on [Unsplash](#)