

RECESS AND PLAY

Recess is regulation. It is how a bodymind resets, and it is what makes the next hour possible. It is not a privilege, not a reward, and not a bargaining chip — and the child who has just lost it is almost always the child who most needed it.

RECESS IS NOT EARNED BY BEING EASY TO TEACH.

NOT FOR BEHAVIOUR · NOT FOR UNFINISHED WORK · NOT EVER

IT IS NOT A PRIVILEGE

The professional position names both doors it is usually taken through. The American Academy of Pediatrics holds that recess **should not be withheld for punitive or academic reasons**. Not for behaviour. Not for unfinished work.

IT IS THE RESET

In controlled experiments, children's attention to school tasks **decreased the longer they were deprived of a break**, and they were **significantly more attentive after recess than before**. Break time is not time away from the work. It is what the work runs on.

THE LOOP CLOSSES ON THE CHILD

Remove the reset, get a worse afternoon, then cite the worse afternoon as proof the child cannot be trusted with the reset. **The plan produces the behaviour it then measures** — and the child pays twice.

"Children should not have to earn recess, and they should not miss recess as a punishment."

LAURA HANBY HUDGENS · RECESS IS NOT A PRIVILEGE · HUFFPOST · 2015

SAY THIS IN THE ROOM

- ✓ a child who cannot get through the afternoon without moving is **not disqualified from moving**
- ✓ unfinished work is information about the task, the support or the pace — **not a debt paid in break time**
- ✓ "they can finish it at break" removes the one thing that makes the next hour possible
- ✓ solitary, repetitive and parallel play **are play**; a child at the edge of the yard is still at recess

ASK THIS IN THE ROOM

- **Ask for it in writing that recess is never withheld.** Not “rarely”. A policy with an exception is a policy that will be used.
- **Ask what the removal is meant to achieve**, and how anyone would know it worked. It is usually measured by whether the adult felt it was fair.
- **Ask for unfinished work to be handled another way.** Work not finished is information about the task, the support or the pace — not a debt paid in break time.
- **Ask what happens instead when a child is dysregulated.** If the answer is sitting quietly under supervision, that is the same intervention with a kinder name.
- **Ask for the numbers** — minutes, for which children, how often withheld. The disparity does not appear until somebody counts.

WHAT THIS SHEET IS NOT

- ✓ it is **not** a claim that nothing changes after an incident
- ✓ it is **not** a claim that recess fixes everything
- ✓ it is **not** an attack on teachers, who did not write the timetable
- ✓ it **is** a refusal to take regulation from a dysregulated child
- ✓ it **is** a demand that solitary, repetitive and parallel play count as play
- ✓ it **is** about the bulk cuts too, not only the withheld ten minutes

WHO LOSES IT IS NOT RANDOM

Withheld recess is a regulation issue. Cut recess is a justice issue, and it shows up in the numbers wherever anyone has looked.

- In Seattle Public Schools, **51% of Black elementary students** attended a low-recess school, against **13% of white students**.
- Most white kindergarteners in that district got **at least 45 minutes** a day.
- Nationally, Black students and students from low-income families are **more likely to be given no recess or minimal recess**.
- **It can be won back.** Seattle educators made recess a bargaining demand and took it to the brink of a strike. In September 2015 the district agreed to a minimum of **30 minutes in every elementary school**.

“Play is not a reward or break from doing learning, play IS learning.”

ABE MOORE · A PLAYGROUND SHOULD HAVE A PULSE · HUMAN RESTORATION PROJECT

Adapted from the *Recess and Play* Why Sheet at whysheet.press/sheets/recess-and-play, which carries the full detail and every source. **Anthony D. Pellegrini**, ‘The Recess Debate’, *American Journal of Play* 1, no. 2 (2008), pp. 181–183, for the deprivation experiments and the absence of evidence on the other side. **Laura Hanby Hudgens**, *HuffPost*, 2015, for the privilege framing and the American Academy of Pediatrics position. **Ann Dornfeld**, KUOW, 2019, for the Seattle figures; **Jesse Hagopian**, *The Progressive*, 2015, for how the 30 minutes were won. **Abe Moore** and *Play’s Power*, Human Restoration Project, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 – quoted with attribution, not relicensed. Quoted passages remain their authors’; this sheet’s own text is CC0.