

Question:

You wanted to know about state recess policies.

Our Response:

Recess, or “regularly scheduled periods within the elementary school day for unstructured physical activity and play,” can be valuable to child development. According to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), recess provides the following:

- Cognitive/Academic Benefits.
- Social and Emotional Benefits.
- Physical Benefits.

Research has shown that state laws play an important role in ensuring that students are provided some physical activity during the school day. According to research from the [National Institute on Child Health and Human Development](#), schools with state laws requiring recess were significantly likely to have at least 20 minutes of recess daily. District policies were not correlated to recess time. Additionally, the research shows an inverse relationship between P.E. and recess time suggesting that one is substituted for the other rather than providing the recommended amount of P.E. and recess. This study suggests an area where state policy may act as a catalyst for promoting adequate levels of physical activity.

Most state boards of health and/or education have adopted some sort of policy requiring students to engage in physical activity during the school week; however, few states have formal laws. Within the group of states adopting legislation, the laws fall into two categories.

Recess Requirements

These states have passed legislation requiring recess (as opposed to unspecified “physical activity” or physical education) for elementary school children. States with this requirement are:

- [Connecticut](#) – Law mandates that elementary school students receive no less than 20 minutes of time devoted to physical activity.
- [Indiana](#) – State requires schools to provide daily physical activity that may include recess.
- [Missouri](#) – Requires that schools provide a minimum of one recess period of 20 minutes to elementary school students.
- [Virginia](#) – Elementary schools are required to provide students with a daily recess during the school year.

While not specifically referencing “recess,” a recently passed bill in Tennessee offers specific guidance on “non-structured” activity and takes the additional step of including reporting requirements.

- [Tennessee](#) – State requires LEAs to integrate “non-structured” physical activity for all students in K-12 schools. The type of activity and amount of time allocated varies by grade level. Additionally, schools are required to report annually on key metrics including the types of activities, any issues with implementation, and any data that links physical activity to academic achievement.

It is also worth noting that [New Jersey](#) passed legislation mandating elementary school recess, but the bill was [vetoed](#) by Governor Christie this year. Additionally, [Florida](#) considered mandatory recess legislation earlier this year. The legislation was killed in committee.

General Activity Requirement

States that have general activity requirement laws require schools to have students participate in physical activity outside the classroom for varying amounts of time each week. In some cases, time spent at recess, gym class, or extra-curricular sports would satisfy the requirement. States that have these types of laws are:

- [Arkansas](#) – Established guidelines for the amount of physical activity students enrolled in K-12 programs must engage in on a weekly basis. Allows for religious exemptions.
- [Colorado](#) – Defines physical activity and requires school districts to promulgate policies using a sliding scale mandating specific amounts of time be afforded for physical activity depending on the number of days a week a class meets. These requirements are limited to elementary school programs.
- [Iowa](#) – Requires all students take physical education classes. Students that do not wish to participate must meet specific requirements to secure a waiver.
- [Louisiana](#) – Requires K-8 public schools to provide at least 30 minutes a day for “moderate to vigorous physical activity.”
- [North Carolina](#) – State Board of Education policy requires schools to provide physical education to students. Additionally, Board policy requires at least 30 minutes of recess for K-8 students that cannot be taken away as a form of punishment.
- [South Carolina](#) – Requires elementary schools to provide 150 minutes of physical activity to students per week. Students may be exempt from physical activity requirements if they meet specific conditions.
- [Texas](#) – Physical education required as part of school curriculum.