

Why should schools consider integrating painted play spaces to increase physical activity during recess?

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [the daily recommendation for children age 6-17 is at least 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity \(MVPA\) to achieve health benefits](#). Schools play a vital role in ensuring students receive sufficient daily physical activity, with recess an opportune time for MVPA. Recess provides [mental and academic benefits](#), which include reduced anxiety and stress, increased time on task and improved attention and memory.

The information in this document was developed to provide flexible, evidence-based guidance for districts as they plan and implement strategies to increase student engagement in physical activity at recess.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

According to the CDC, schools can create an environment supportive of physical activity during recess by adding markings to playgrounds or physical activity areas. This strategy can address student disengagement and boredom at recess, especially when a variety of recreational activities (e.g., four square, hopscotch, bullseye, grid, etc.) are incorporated which may interest some students more than traditional sports. Providing student choice and modifications allows all skill and ability levels to be successful, while routinely adapting games can keep activities feeling fresh and new.

In 2020, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) received a grant from the CDC to create a pilot program called Painted

Play Spaces (PPS). Painted play spaces enhance play environments at school by using colorful paint and stencils to establish an array of recess games on existing hardscapes. In addition to increasing students' physical activity, the project's secondary goals include developing communication and social skills and decreasing student-to-student conflicts. A [video](#) created by the OSDE shows how an Edmond school implemented painted play spaces.

The [CDC's Strategies for Recess in Schools](#) includes a number of additional strategies to increase student engagement and physical activity during recess.

KEY INSIGHTS

- Adding markings or paint to school playgrounds or physical activity areas can increase student engagement and increase physical activity.
- Recess can help students achieve the benefits of being physically active (e.g., reduce anxiety, stress, depression and disruptive behavior; increase time on task; improve attention and memory).
- Include a variety of recreational activities at recess to engage students who may not be interested in traditional sports.
- Remove or minimize barriers for access in the play spaces or physical activity.
- Utilize [resources developed by the OSDE](#) to plan, design and implement painted play spaces projects.

SEE ALSO

- [How can social and emotional learning and mental health supports be incorporated into summer learning?](#)
- [How can schools and families encourage physical activity over the summer?](#)
- [How can schools support mental health literacy?](#)

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Schools should provide enough equipment to support a variety of activities and student choices. To ensure students of all ability levels can access play spaces, it may be necessary to remove physical barriers to ensure mobility devices can move to and from activities. Modifications can be made to many games to enable all students to participate.

Schools should choose equipment that meets the developmental needs of students (e.g., assorted sizes of balls and manipulative equipment) and include equipment that students with varying abilities, including those with disabilities, can use.

Recess should never be used as punishment, and schools should ensure their policies do not allow excluding students from recess for disciplinary reasons or as punishment for low academic performance.

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

- Designate a project leader from the school staff to assess and design the play space with the OSDE's [Painted Play Spaces: Playground Assessment and Planning Toolkit](#).
- Consult the Timeline to Organize the Painting Event (available on pages 13-15 of the Painted Play Spaces: Playground Assessment and Planning Toolkit linked above) to ensure the necessary materials are attained and the project runs smoothly.
- Borrow stencils from the OSDE, if needed, by contacting [Shana Classen](#).
- Ask school staff and volunteers to paint playground surfaces to create a variety of recreational games (Rock-Paper-Scissor Showdown, hopscotch, etc.) or traditional sports activities (Around the World, wall soccer, etc.).
- Encourage school staff to watch the OSDE's [Painted Play Spaces demonstration videos](#) and refer to [Painted Play Spaces: Playbook of Recess Games](#) to learn the rules of the games used in the school's play space.
- Teach students the rules of play space games during recess, physical education or afterschool programs. When all students play by the same rules, they will be more engaged while having fewer student-to-student conflicts.