

Students Stay Active During Recess

Laura Patrick

At A Glance

The Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities Coalition's "Active Recess" initiative in Ashland, Kentucky, has improved student well-being by increasing moderate to vigorous physical activity in 12 elementary schools by raising the school standard that all children must be active during recess. More than 3,500 children are receiving the recommended 150 minutes per week of physical activity. Teachers have noted less behavior issues in the classroom.

Public Health Challenge

Kentucky has a childhood obesity rate of 21%, 3rd highest in the nation. In Boyd and Greenup Counties, 588 students enrolled in after-school programs in eight elementary schools participated in Body Mass Index (BMI) and blood pressure screenings. The screenings showed 40% to 77% of children were overweight or obese and 3% had high blood pressure. In Boyd County's ten elementary schools, school nurses conducted BMI screenings on all students, and the results showed 28% of children were obese. After conducting a needs assessment, it was discovered that current standards established one day per week for physical education classes. Recess was taken away from students who misbehaved or needed to complete assignments. Students were also allowed to read or do other sedentary activities instead of being active during recess. The lack of daily physical education classes and poor quality of recess were determined to be contributing factors to obesity.

Approach

The Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities Coalition focused efforts around recess to get students more involved in moderate to vigorous physical activity. Schools had limited resources to increase physical education classes, so the most cost effective measure was focusing on recess. With a \$10,000 grant, the coalition worked with school principals to standardize an "active" recess. Schools that implemented an active recess received a recess equipment package, which included balls, hula-hoops, jump ropes, and other play items on a portable cart.



Find Out More

Childhood obesity is a growing epidemic in Kentucky. With limited funds to increase physical education classes, join the movement for healthy schools by implementing "active" recess in your school.

Results

As a result of this initiative, more than 3,500 children are now active during recess. Twelve out of 19 elementary schools in Boyd and Greenup Counties raised the school standard to institutionalize active recess. With the implementation of the active recess, students must be physically active during outdoor and indoor recess, and recess cannot be denied due to behavioral or academic reasons. Post implementation evaluation shows that there has been a positive impact on student behavior, with fewer students having discipline issues. Teachers report that students are focused on their school work after recess, and this is having a positive impact on their academic achievement. Two schools are currently in the process of building walking paths on their campus and have increased the activity level of students in the after-school programs.

Contact

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We are very pleased with the commitment of our schools to helping improve the health of children through active recess. This impacts children for years to come, and that is important.

- Regina Stout

What's Next

The Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities Coalition is working with licensed childcare providers and after-school programs to adopt organizational policies that require children to receive 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every three hours. Furthermore, the licensed childcare centers are reviewing a policy to limit screen time for children based on the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations. Childcare centers or after-school programs that implement these policies will be provided funds to purchase equipment or games that support physical activity.