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guides all our practices with children

Dear Parent –

These days, amid the clamor for more “academics” and accountability, recess is too often seen as a frill. But here are seven contradictions to that belief:

1. People function better and produce more when they have a change of pace. Because young children don't process most information as effectively as older children, they especially benefit from breaks. Finland has put the research to use. Their schools provide the children with a 15-minute break after every 45 minutes of instruction – and their schools are doing so well that they attract educators from all over the world who want to learn from them.
2. It's not true that there's no time for recess. Dr. Olga Jarrett and her colleagues approached an urban school district with a policy against recess. They received permission for two fourth-grade classes to have recess once a week so they could determine the impact on the children's behavior both on recess and non-recess days. The result? 60% of the children worked more and/or fidgeted less on recess days. Dr. Jarrett's research demonstrated that a 15-minute recess resulted in the children being 5% more on task, which translated into 20 minutes saved during the day.
3. The outside light stimulates the pineal gland, the part of the brain that helps regulate our biological clock, is vital to the immune system, and simply makes us feel better. Outside light also triggers the synthesis of Vitamin D and increases productivity.
4. If you want to optimize your body's performance, you fuel it. It works the same way with the brain. Moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity delivers “food” to the brain in the form of water, oxygen, and glucose. This helps the brain perform optimally.
5. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends unstructured physical play as a developmentally appropriate way of reducing stress in children's lives. Because we know that stress has a negative impact on learning, as well as on health, we should be looking to any natural means of relieving it.
6. Children need to learn to be social creatures – to become part of a society – and recess may be the only time during the day when they have a chance to experience the socialization and authentic communication that will help them learn how.
7. Children burn the most calories outdoors. That's also the place for children to practice emerging physical skills and to experience the pure joy of movement, both of which increase the odds that they'll become lifelong movers – and healthy adults.

As you can see, there are many excellent reasons why recess shouldn't be considered optional. But don't forget: even with recess at school, you should make sure your child has plenty of opportunity for free play – preferably outdoors – after school!

With love --  
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*Why Recess Matters*