

ISBE PLAY TIME GUIDANCE AND RESOURCES FEBRUARY 2022



Background Information

Often, play time is one part of the day in which most students are eager to engage. It's an opportunity for students to be physically active, socialize with friends, and use their imaginations through creative play. According to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), play serves as a natural tool for children to develop resiliency as they learn to cooperate, overcome challenges, and negotiate with others. [The Genius of Play](#) highlights [6 Benefits of Play](#):

1. [Physical](#) - Active play helps children develop their coordination, balance, gross-motor skills (large movements like crawling and walking) and fine-motor skills (smaller movements like picking objects up).
2. [Emotional](#) - Through play, kids learn to cope with their emotions as they act out fear, frustration, anger and aggression in a situation they control. It's also a chance for them to practice empathy and understanding.
3. [Social](#) - Cooperative play helps kids improve their social skills as they figure out how to negotiate group dynamics.
4. [Cognitive](#) - Self-directed play gives kids the opportunity to hone their decision-making skills.
5. [Creative](#) - Play gives kids a chance to truly let their imaginations run wild and create worlds of their own that they have control over.
6. [Communication](#) - By playing with others, children learn the art of communication. They come to recognize facial expressions and body language.

Studies have shown that play supports the social and cognitive development of children. Additionally, research has proven that active children learn better. The overall physical and developmental health benefits of play time explain why including designated play time during the school day is important for children's wellbeing.

Illinois Play Time Requirement in Elementary Schools

The state of Illinois has enacted [Public Act 102-0357](#) in support of play time in Illinois schools. This Public Act, which became effective August 13, 2021, requires that **all public schools provide daily time for supervised, unstructured, child-directed play for all students in kindergarten through fifth grade**. Other known terms for play time are recess, informal physical activity, free-play recess, unstructured free-play recess, and undirected play. The Illinois State Board of Education has developed this guidance to support the implementation of [Public Act 102-0357](#). This guidance includes frequently asked questions related to the Public Act and resources for implementing best practices for play time.

Public Act 102-0357 Frequently Asked Questions

1. What must play time include?

Play time must allow for **unstructured, child-directed play** and may include organized games. Play time does not include the use of computers, tablets, phones, or videos.

2. Where can play time be held?

Schools are encouraged to provide play time outdoors, but it may be held indoors. If play time is held indoors, schools are encouraged to provide it in a space that promotes physical activity.

3. Does play time count towards Physical Education class?

No. Play time does not count as a course of physical education that fulfills the requirements of [Section 27-6 of the School Code](#). In addition, time spent in a course of physical education does not count towards the daily time for play.

4. How is play time counted for daily attendance?

Play time may be divided into play periods of at least 15 consecutive minutes in length. For any school day 5 clock hours or longer in length, the total time allotted for play for students in kindergarten through grade 5 must be at least 30 minutes. For any school day less than 5 clock hours in length, the total time allotted for play each school day must be at least one-tenth of a day of attendance for the student pursuant to [Section 10-19.05 of the School Code](#).

Time spent dressing or undressing for outdoor play time does not count towards the daily time for play. In addition, lunch time minutes do not count towards the daily time for play.

5. What play time considerations must be made for students with disabilities?

Play time for students with disabilities shall comply with the student's applicable individualized education program (IEP) or federal [Section 504](#) plan.

6. What are the guidelines for withholding play time as a disciplinary action?

All public schools shall prohibit the withholding of play time as a disciplinary or punitive action, except when a student's participation in play time poses an immediate threat to the safety of the student or others. School officials shall make all reasonable efforts to resolve such threats and minimize the use of exclusion from play to the greatest extent practicable and in accordance with a student's IEP when applicable.

National Guidance for Recess

- Provide all students K–12 with at least 20 minutes of recess daily. *
- Prohibit the replacement of physical education with recess.
- Provide schools and students with adequate spaces, facilities, equipment, and supplies for recess.
- Ensure that spaces and facilities for recess meet or exceed recommended safety standards.
- Prohibit the exclusion of students from recess for disciplinary reasons or academic performance in the classroom.
- Prohibit the use of physical activity during recess as punishment.
- Provide recess before lunch.
- Provide staff members who lead or supervise recess with ongoing professional development.

* At least 30 minutes for grades K-5 in Illinois.

Resources for Implementing Play Time Best Practices

[Action for Healthy Kids](#)

- [Active Indoor Recess](#) Here are strategies to get students moving during indoor recess.
- [Active Outdoor Recess](#) View simple tips to incorporate active recess at your school.
- [Alternatives to Withholding Recess as Punishment](#) Ensure that your school is offering healthy alternative consequences to withholding recess.
- [Recess Before Lunch](#) Here are steps to get started with implementing recess before lunch.

[Alliance for a Healthier Generation](#)

- [Alternative Options to Withholding Recess and Physical Activity](#)
- Create a free account with Alliance for a Healthier Generation to view [on-demand trainings on strategies for implementing recess](#).

[National Safety Council](#)

- The National Safety Council provides tips for [Staying Safe on Playgrounds](#).

[SHAPE America](#)

- [Communicate and Enforce Behavioral and Safety](#) Using rules, protocols, and expectations during recess helps ensure that students behave better, know how to deal with conflict, and are safe during recess. Establishing safety and behavioral expectations that everyone understands will create a safe environment for all students.
- [Recess Planning in Schools: A Guide to Putting Strategies for Recess into Practice](#) is designed to help schools develop a recess plan.
- Shape America provides [considerations for recess](#) during in-school instruction with physical distancing.
- [Strategies for Recess in Schools](#) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and SHAPE America have developed new guidance documents that provide schools with 19 evidence-based strategies for recess, as well as a planning guide and template to help develop a written recess plan that integrates these strategies.

Resources for Supporting Students with Special Needs

- [Recess Guardians: How to Increase Inclusion At Recess](#)

For questions on play time in Illinois, contact ISBE's Wellness Department at (217) 782-5270.