

Some high schools across the country are implementing “big kid recess” as a response to student stress levels. Should playtime be mandatory for teens nationwide?



**YES**

“A break during the school day would benefit everyone.”

*Ryan Nguyen,  
a high school sophomore  
in Massachusetts*



We need a break! Ask a teen about their day, and they'll likely give you a long list of classes, extracurricular activities, and schoolwork.

I've witnessed so much anxiety related to these hectic schedules: students pulling the fire alarm during midyear exams, kids sobbing in class, and even a girl fainting during a test. With today's intense pressure to succeed, many teens are pushed to take on too many responsibilities at the expense of sleep, exercise, and free time.

Thanks to this unhealthy atmosphere, it's no wonder that more than 25 percent of teens ages 13 to 18 have a diagnosable anxiety disorder at some point, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. Even those who aren't struggling with a disorder often still have trouble getting through the painfully long school day. With only a few hurried minutes between classes, we get worn out, and it becomes increasingly hard to pay attention the longer we sit at our desks.

Recess is the best remedy for this unfortunate situation. Studies show that children who engage in physical activity reap the benefits of improved physical and mental health yet only 27 percent of high schoolers get the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity. That's probably because we have so much going on after school that it's hard to make room for exercise. If schools were to set aside even a short amount of time for us to move around, it could help relieve our stress and it also could make us more focused in class later on.

Recess has other positive aspects too. Even if students didn't want to run around, they'd still benefit from a mental break. That way, their brains could regroup for a bit, and they'd go back to class feeling refreshed and ready to learn again. Plus, recess would serve as an opportunity for social and emotional interactions that can't take place in the classroom, like meeting new friends.

Something as beneficial as recess shouldn't be just for little kids. We teens deserve a chance to blow off steam and recuperate from demanding classes. After all, taking care of our mental health is just as important as what we're learning in class.

Centennial Schools LEAP Hour

This high school added "LEAP hour" (aka "big-kid recess") to help students combat stress while focusing on non-school activities.

**NO**

“Setting aside time for recess would hurt my education.”

*Reagan Zuber,  
a high school junior  
in New York*

Recess would increase my stress, not take away from it. I want to focus on the subjects I'm interested in and develop skills that'll help me in the future.

If I'm forced to go to recess, that cuts back on the time allotted to my education and that'll only hurt me in the long run.

The idea of recess is well intentioned, but where would we fit another period in the school day? One option would be to shorten classes, giving teachers less time to teach important material. That means they wouldn't have time to cover everything, so we'd likely end up with more homework, which would add to our stress levels. The other option would be to lengthen the school day, leaving less time afterward for extracurricular activities and homework and that would just stress us out too. For many of us, those extracurricular activities are our recess!

High school is our chance to seize as many opportunities as possible so we can figure out what we want to do after graduation. That's why many students enroll in electives and AP courses we want to expand our horizons before entering the real world. A mandatory recess would take away precious time we could be spending exploring these topics. Besides, we'll have even more on our plates when we're adults, so figuring out how to cope with heavy workloads now will only help us later on.

In addition, mandatory free time could lead to increased trouble on campus if teens get bored and feel the need to "shake things up." And even if everyone is well behaved, I imagine plenty of teens would spend the period staring at their phones, rather than exercising or running around with friends.

Instead of forcing all students to participate in recess, we'd be better off encouraging everyone to develop individual methods of coping with stress, like adding a study hall to our schedules or sitting with friends at lunch. That way, we can all relax— without taking away from anyone's education.

\*\*SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics

Google encourages its staff to get creative with a Lego® station. Who knows how many brilliant ideas have been sparked while fiddling around in there?

**SECRET POWER:** Studies show that solving puzzles can improve your ability to think on your feet



## Do Teens Need Recess?

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The office gym at Clif Bar features a rock-climbing wall and free exercise classes, so workers can squeeze some physical activity into lunch breaks.

**SECRET POWER:** According to research, exercise may enhance both long-term and short-term memory.



Facebook employees in Silicon Valley can socialize and bond with their colleagues while competing in the company's video arcade. Game on!

**SECRET POWER:** People who play action video games may be able to make decisions 25 percent faster.



In Yelp's New York offices, employees can sing their hearts out on the company karaoke machine.

**SECRET POWER:** When you sing, your brain releases endorphins, the hormone that makes you feel happy.

SOURCES: 1. Nanyang Technological University; 2. The Journal of Neuroscience; 3. University of Rochester; 4. Evolutionary Psychology; PHOTO CREDIT: COURTESY OF GOOGLE (1); COURTESY OF CLIF BAR (2); COURTESY OF FACEBOOK (3); ZORAN MLADE NOVIC/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (4)