

Name: _____

Class: _____

Do Teens Need Recess?

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?

By Scholastic Choices
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Recess is a regularly scheduled period within the school day for physical activity and play. Traditionally, elementary schools offer recess for students. However, having this break in the day is not common for students in middle and high school. In this text, high school students Ryan Nguyen and Reagan Zuber explain their arguments for whether or not teens need recess.

As you read, identify the evidence each student uses to support their claim.

YES

- [1] "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.



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Thanks to this unhealthy atmosphere, it's no wonder that more than 25 percent of teens ages 13 to 18 have a diagnosable¹ 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

1. able to be identified, usually by a doctor; having a cause which can be determined

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.

- [5] 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 beneficial² as recess shouldn't be just for little kids. We teens deserve a chance to blow off steam and recuperate³ from demanding classes. After all, taking care of our mental health is just as important as what we're learning in class.

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.

- [10] If I'm forced to go to recess, that cuts back on the time allotted⁴ 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!

2. **Beneficial** (*adjective*) helpful or useful

3. to become healthy again after an illness or injury

4. **Allot** (*verb*) to give someone a particular amount of something

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 mandatory⁵ 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 cope⁶ 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. Approximately 6.5 hours is the average length of an American school day. Is there really room for recess?

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5. required by laws or rules; something that must be done
 6. **Cope (verb)** to deal successfully with a difficult situation

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which statement best expresses the central idea of the text?
 - A. The number of mental health issues for teens is growing quickly, and school administrators need to develop a plan that will address this crisis.
 - B. High school schedules should include time for recess because it would improve the quality of life for students struggling with stress and anxiety.
 - C. While most students say they could benefit from a recess period, providing extra time for extracurriculars and career development would be a more beneficial use of school day hours.
 - D. Recess may improve teens' mental health by providing a movement break during the school day, but it could also cause students to experience stress because it takes away academic time.

2. Which evidence from the article best supports Reagan Zuber's central claim about recess?
 - A. "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." (Paragraph 4)
 - B. "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." (Paragraph 10)
 - C. "That's why many students enroll in electives and AP courses — we want to expand our horizons before entering the real world." (Paragraph 12)
 - D. "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." (Paragraph 13)

3. How does paragraph 4 develop the idea that recess would benefit students?
 - A. It describes school classrooms as very uncomfortable for students.
 - B. It provides facts about the mental health struggles many students face.
 - C. It gives details about the different experiences students have at school.
 - D. It explains that most students believe recess would improve their health.

4. What does the phrase "blow off steam" in paragraph 6 mean?
 - A. to experience intense anger
 - B. to feel pressure in decision making
 - C. to release unwanted stress or anger
 - D. to have a poor response to an upsetting situation

5. How does Ryan Ngyuen support their claim that recess would be helpful for older students?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In your opinion, should teens have recess during the school day? What evidence or reasoning supports your answer? Do you have recess or a break during your school day? If so, do you think this time is helpful or hurtful? Why? If not, do you think it would be helpful or hurtful? Why?
2. In addition to the information in the article, what are the possible benefits of teens having recess? What problems might recess cause?
3. Consider the claims that both Ryan and Reagan make in this text. Would it be possible to develop a plan that both students would agree to? Based on their arguments, what adjustments to the school day might work best for teens?