

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

April 10, 2019

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education
From: Jack R. Smith, Superintendent of Schools
Subject: Elementary School Recess (03-12-19-02)

Question

During Public Comments, Ms. Silvestre requested information regarding the possibility of including more recess time in the new curriculum that was adopted by the Board.

Response

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) recognizes the importance of providing daily opportunities for students to engage in a variety of age-appropriate physical activities designed to achieve optimal health, wellness, fitness, and performance benefits, including kinesthetic or brain breaks and recess. Presently, periodic kinesthetic breaks occur in all elementary schools during recess, physical education classes, and classroom instruction in order to vary activities and lessons throughout the school day. MCPS Regulation JPG-RA, *Wellness: Physical and Nutritional Health*, specifies descriptors for the development of physical activities during the school day. These descriptors include:

- a) Age-appropriate instruction to develop movement skills and concepts, health-related fitness, and personal/social responsibility;
- b) Moderate to vigorous physical activity; and
- c) Development of knowledge, motor skills, concepts, and positive collaboration with others.

Currently, MCPS is exploring three avenues to increase recess time:

- Staff at 65 elementary and middle schools have collaborated to establish a Local School Wellness Council (LSWC) comprising staff, students, parents/guardians, and community members; the number continues to grow. LSWC work includes reflection on current practice and the development and implementation of an action plan to enhance and increase school health, including physical activity opportunities for students, nutrition education, and/or mental health mindfulness development.

- In addition, staff in the Office of School Support and Improvement (OSSI) and the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs (OCIP), including Health and Physical Education staff, have initiated work to examine ways elementary schools can increase recess time. During fall 2019, six elementary schools will participate in a pilot program to allow increased time for unstructured physical activity during the school day. This program will allow participating schools to arrange schedules with increased opportunities for kinesthetic breaks and/or extended recess. Participation in the pilot will be by school choice. Activities will be selected and led by teachers. Staff will engage in cross-office collaboration in spring 2019 to prepare schools for implementation.
- Staff also is benchmarking with districts that have increased recess time. For example, Montgomery County Schools, Virginia, was able to increase recess time; the Virginia Department of Education's Standards of Quality were changed, allowing recess to count as instructional time. As a result, the district schedules physical education classes for 30 minutes per day, 2 days per week. Teachers then have 10 to 20 minutes of additional activity/recess time on those dates. Dates without physical education classes scheduled provide teachers with the opportunity for 10 to 20 minutes of recess in the morning and afternoon. Teachers may choose to provide kinetic breaks, such as going outside for 10 minutes and again after another subject to stimulate students, instead of scheduling a morning and afternoon recess. The district is continuing to monitor the impact of the increased recess time on staff ability to ensure all curriculum is taught and overall student learning occurs.

The Maryland State Department of Education has not adopted the practice of allowing recess to count as instructional time. However, as staff in OSSI and OCIP collaborate on the implementation of the new curriculum and examine the impact of additional recess time, they will seek to identify intentional and purposeful means to increase kinetic and kinesthetic breaks that will have minimal impact on instructional time. The findings from the pilot program and examination of the work of LSWC will inform this work.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Kimberly A. Statham, deputy superintendent of school support and improvement, at 240-740-3100.

JRS:KAS:AML:kde

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