
Division of Schools

Guidelines for Outside Recess, Outdoor Eating,
Physical Education, and Other Outdoor Activities

To: All Staff

From: Jennifer A. Robinson
Chief Schools Officer

As stated in Policy 9090-Wellness Through Nutrition and Physical Activity, “The Board of Education of Howard County recognizes the connection between health and wellness and student achievement and that students need sufficient nourishing foods and physical activity in order to grow, learn, and thrive.”

While elementary schools are required to provide students with 30 minutes of supervised recess daily, preferably outdoors, middle schools are strongly encouraged to offer recess. The administrator may make exceptions for circumstances such as shortened days, special events, and altered schedules.

Staff members will not deny participation in recess, outdoor eating, physical education, or other physical activity opportunities as a form of discipline or punishment unless the safety or well-being of students is in question.

If conditions preclude full recess time, even a five (5) minute break can revitalize students and prepare them to continue with their academic learning. All staff are encouraged to incorporate physical activity, whenever possible, into classroom instruction.

Children are expected to wear warm clothing to protect them during cold weather when participating in recess or outside activities.

The decision to go outside or stay inside for recess, outdoor eating, physical education, or any other outdoor activity is the decision of the administrator at individual schools. The following criteria are to be considered in the decision:

- Temperature and humidity
- Wind chill
- Heat index and air quality
- Age of students
- Length of time outdoors
- Adequacy of the children’s clothing
- Condition of the playground
- Falling precipitation (more than a sprinkle or mist)
- Thunder and lightning

Generally, it is assumed that students will be outside for recess, outdoor eating, physical education, or any other outdoor activity when the temperature combined with the wind chill is not less than 20 degrees Fahrenheit or the heat index reading is less than 95.

Important:

Children with certain health conditions may need special accommodations during extremely hot or cold weather. Parents of those children are to provide medical documentation and/or be consulted to determine if other arrangements are necessary. During hot weather, teachers should provide a water break before and after recess for students. Additionally, any student who shows signs of heat exhaustion or overheating should be allowed a water break during the recess period.

JR/kl