**Recess Policy Implementation:**
**Beliefs and Perceptions of Site-Based Decisions-Makers**

by

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Abstract

This elicitation study examined the beliefs and perceptions of site-based decisions-makers regarding recess policy implementation. This study was conducted at a public elementary school located in a district in Northeast Georgia. This site was chosen due to their policy defining recess as a daily unstructured break and mandating a minimum of 30 minutes for students in grades kindergarten through fifth. Further, it states that it cannot be reduced or eliminated for instructional needs and only as a behavioral consequence as an administrative decision. But as policies are often created without the input of teachers and administrators, and therefore, seen as arbitrary (Chin & Asera, 2005), policy does not ensure implementation (Amis et al., 2012; Jarrett, 2013; Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2013).

Using the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) as a theoretical framework, this study examined what administrators and teachers communicated as to their salient behavioral beliefs (attitude), normative beliefs (subjective norms) and control beliefs (perceived behavioral control) relative to implementation of the district's written recess policy.

These site-based decision-makers reported advantages to implementing this policy such as providing students a mental break and an unstructured time for play and socialization. Further, the data analysis determined that site-based decision-makers reported disadvantages such as the policy being too rigid and that teachers desired the authority to use recess deprivation as a consequence for negative behavior or a time for instruction/remediation.

For subjective norms, the participants in this study reported a perceived approval from parents, teachers and administrators when implementing the policy. However, they also reported that some teachers would not approve and that those who felt that recess should be reduced or denied to students as a behavioral consequence would not approve of the policy being implemented as written.

Demographic factors such as years of experience and area of certification were found to be associated with beliefs about implementing recess policy. This study acknowledges that these results cannot be generalized but may be used in conducting future studies which can assist in creating interventions that will support the implementation of written recess policies and therefore support the whole child.

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List of Abbreviations

AAP        American Association of Pediatrics

ACSD       Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

CDC        Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

DAP        Developmentally Appropriate Practice

ECE        Early Childhood Education

ESEA       Elementary & Secondary Education Act

ESSA       Every Student Succeeds Act

IRB        Institutional Review Board

NAECS      National Association of Early Childhood Specialists

NAEYC      National Association for the Education of Young Children

NASBE      National Association of State Boards of Education

NASPE      National Association for Sport and Physical Education

NCEF       National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

NCLB       No Child Left Behind

PBIS       Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

SHAPE      Society of Health and Physical Educators

TPB        Theory of Planned Behavior

WSCC       Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

*"Recess is the best part of school.*

*I play with my friends, and I get energy, and the teacher doesn't tell us much to do."*

(H. L. Peace, personal communication, October 3, 2017).

Play is an important part of childhood and a topic that I discussed with my granddaughter, Harper, then age 5, several years ago. On a trip to the park, I asked the typical questions that we often ask of children: "What did you learn today?", "Who are your friends?", "What's your favorite subject?". Unprompted by this play researcher, she quipped the above quote which I immediately documented as part of this qualitative study. These are her words and serve as a solid introduction to my research as a quote from an ardent advocate of play.

The following sections in this chapter will lay the groundwork for this study by more fully outlining the background and context, as well as the research problem, purpose statement and research questions. Further, other components of the study will be explained such as the theoretical framework, assumption, and delimitations. The chapter is completed by detailing the significance of the study and the definitions of important terms as all a part of the organization of the study.

## Background and Context

Play serves an essential function in development from infancy throughout childhood (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Ginsburg, 2007) and is critical to the child's process of making sense of the world (Langford, 2010; Tayler, 2015). "Free play assures

that new learning will build upon past knowledge" (Forman & Kuschner, 1997, p. 123) and the benefits of play have been documented across domains such as physical health (Levine & Ducharme, 2013); social skills and self-regulation (Ramani & Eason, 2015; Cavanaugh et al., 2017); language (Cohen & Emmons, 2017; Stagnitti et al., 2016); and math and science (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2014) Gray writes that "children are designed, by natural selection, to play" (2011, p. 443). Yet, despite the scientific veracity of this statement, children's self-directed activity has experienced a dramatic and continuous decline in the past half-century (Gray, 2011).

Appreciating the function of play in children's learning has long been a struggle in the field of early education. Although most agree that children learn through play, many classrooms are not environments known for providing extensive play opportunities. Historically, however, schools have reserved time for children to play outdoors (Miller & Almon, 2009). When asked to recall childhood memories of play, 75% of adults remembered stimulating sensory experiences, freedom from restrictions, and the excitement and risk that accompanied outdoor play (Henninger, 1994). In schools, recess has provided the setting for these types of memorable childhood experiences.

Researchers agree that recess is beneficial to young children – physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally (Ramstetter et al., 2010; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE], 2006; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009). Physical exercise during recess lowers the risk of obesity (NASPE, 2008; Burriss & Burriss, 2011) and contributes to healthy muscle and bone development (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2018).

Recess promotes improved academic performance (Castelli et al., 2007; Tomporowski et al., 2008; Trost, 2007; Trudeau & Shephard, 2010) and helps children better focus in the classroom (Jarrett, 2002; Barros et al., 2009; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005; Bjorklund & Brown, 1998; NASPE, 2004). Peer interactions on the playground promote social skill acquisition (Pellegrini & Smith, 1993; Ramstetter et al., 2010) and contribute to improved mental health (Peluso & Guerra de Andrade, 2005; Strong et al., 2005; Hallal et al., 2006; Biddle & Asare, 2011). Murray and Ramstetter (2013) assert that this "period of interruption" from the tasks of school is one of the most important components of a student's day.

Unfortunately, consistent with the overall decline in children's play, schools have gradually decreased time for recess. Many schools have eliminated recess, depriving children of this valuable context for growth and development across domains (McKenzie & Kahan, 2008; Jarrett 2013; Burriss & Burriss, 2011; Pellegrini, 2005; Zygmunk-Fillwalk & Bilello, 2005). According to Pellegrini (2005), practice should follow the data.

Thus, in response to these misguided practices and lack of accountability, schools, school districts, and state departments of education have established policies that require sites to provide recess each day. These policies typically require scheduled periods for physical activity and/or specifications for unstructured time periods. Some policies prohibit the denial of recess as a disciplinary action (The National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], n.d.).

Even with policies in place, decisions to limit or exclude children's access to recess persist. Amis et al. (2012) highlighted the need to examine the barriers that impact

the degree to which policies are implemented successfully. At the school level, it remains unclear how teachers and administrators make decisions about recess even with the existence of governing policies. Of interest is how the beliefs and intentions of these decision-makers impact the implementation of recess policy.

**Research Problem**

Despite the known benefits of recess, the literature indicates that it is frequently reduced and has been eliminated in some elementary schools. Various reasons for depriving children of this beneficial portion of the school day include securing more time for academics (Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Bilello, 2005; McKenzie & Kahan, 2008), reducing possibilities of playground bullying incidents (Leff et al., 2003), and punishing children for classroom misbehavior (Turner et al., 2013; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; Lee et al., 2007).

Establishing policies that support increased physical activity and wellness is an important step in supporting students in matters of public health (Schmid et al., 2006). Due to current trends that have reduced physical activity and wellness, policies and laws have been established in some geographic areas to protect the practice of recess. Currently, six states have a state law that protects the practice of daily recess: Connecticut, Florida, Missouri, Rhode Island, Virginia, and West Virginia. Though they have laws protecting recess, they contain differing language and safeguard various aspects of the practice of recess (NASBE, n.d.).

Georgia does not have a state law covering this topic, yet a specified K-12 district located in Northeast Georgia, does have a written policy (see Appendix 1) protecting the practice of recess. This policy defines recess as a daily unstructured break and has a

required minimum of thirty minutes for students in grades kindergarten through fifth. But as policies are often created without the input of teachers and administrators, and therefore, seen as arbitrary (Chin & Asera, 2005), policy does not ensure implementation (Amis et al., 2012; Jarrett, 2013; Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2013).

Though state or district leadership may create a law or policy, principals, assistant principals, and teachers are responsible for policy implementation at the site-level. Studies have examined the beliefs of administrators and teachers regarding the practice of recess, but little is known about the perspectives of these site-based decision-makers and what factors impact adherence when a written policy exists. Studying a stakeholders' beliefs can assist in identifying barriers and facilitators to policy implementation (Ajzen, 1991).

In summary, recess as an unstructured break time is a valuable part of a student's academic experience and has a positive impact on the whole child. Published position statements support the practice of recess and the literature indicates that both administrators and teachers believe that the practice of recess is beneficial and should not be denied. Further, policies have been established in many states and districts to protect children's access to recess. Yet, despite these policies, the literature suggests that recess is still often reduced or eliminated for individual students or classes as a whole. Little information exists as to why site-based decision-makers such as administrators and teachers, make decisions to circumvent policy to reduce or eliminate recess for elementary students.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to elicit the beliefs and practices of elementary administrators and teachers regarding how they implement recess policy at a public elementary school located in a district in Northeast Georgia. This study used the constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to identify factors that influence the decisions of administrators and teachers when deciding to implement or not implement the district's written recess policy (Ajzen, 1991). Understanding the perceived barriers and enablers can provide much-needed insight for policymakers and educational leaders when creating interventions that will increase recess policy implementation and, therefore, support students more effectively. This data may be used for conducting further TPB studies employing closed-ended surveys to further understand the behavior(s) of site-based decision-makers.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What salient behavioral beliefs do administrators and teachers report relative to their attitudes regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy?

2. What salient normative beliefs do administrators and teachers report relative to their subjective norms regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy?

3. What salient control beliefs do administrators and teachers report relative to their perceived behavioral control regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy?

4. What demographic factors are associated with beliefs about implementing recess policy?

**Theoretical Framework**

This research used the theoretical framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as part of an elicitation study (Ajzen, 1991). This theoretical lens is frequently used in predicting human behavior and has been used extensively in the fields of health and health behaviors (Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2008). An elicitation study seeks to identify and analyze the beliefs and perceptions of a group and can be applied to the field of education in the same manner as those seeking answers on teacher's decisions regarding the use of technology (Lee et al., 2010; Sugar et al., 2004).

For example, Chen (2007) conducted a study using TPB to understand the beliefs of in-service kindergarten teachers with regard to their behavioral intent with regards to enrolling in a graduate level program. This study was conducted in Taiwan with kindergarten teachers and employed the three constructs of TPB: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2006), This quantitative study found that these three constructs were the independent variables while the dependent variable was behavioral intent. However, in this study, subjective norms were considered to be the strongest predictor of behavioral intent (Chen & Yang, 2007).

While quantitative studies employ TPB (see Figure 1) more often than qualitative studies, qualitative methods are recommended for eliciting beliefs. Therefore, elicitation studies are recommended when using the TPB to establish the cognitive foundation of salient beliefs (Ajzen, 2002).

Elicitation studies are seen as the initial piece of TPB studies when a topic has not been extensively researched (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This type of study can be used as the initial piece to elicit the beliefs and perceptions of a group of stakeholders on a specific area of intended behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Downs & Hausenblas, 2005). The results of this study can assist in gaining a deeper understanding of site-based decision-makers and their behavioral intent relative to implementation of the district's written recess policy. This study was designed to determine these participants' salient beliefs through open-ended questions which may lead to a closed-ended version in further TPB studies at this site. This type of initial inquiry lends credibility to TPB studies (Downs & Hausenblas, 2005).

**Figure 1**

**Theory of Planned Behavior**
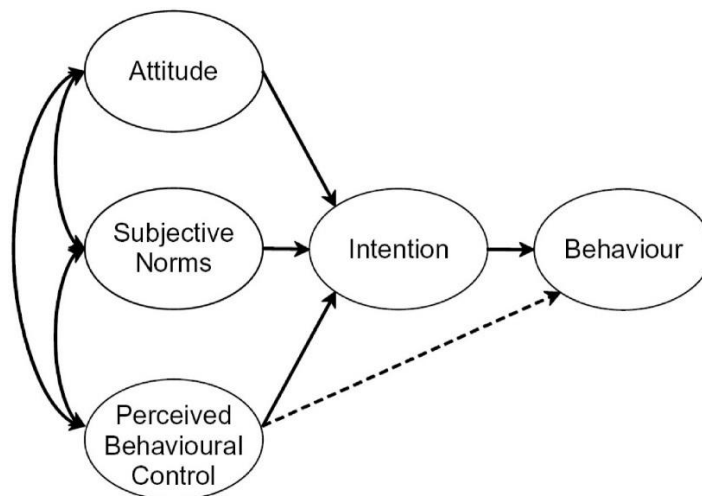


(Ajzen, 1991, pp. 82)

This method asks participants to identify their salient beliefs about a behavior(s). Salient beliefs are those opinions and ideas which come first to a participant's mind when

asked a question on a topic such as recess policy implementation (Ajzen, 1991). Examining these responses assisted the researcher in identifying the perceptions and beliefs that principals, assistant principals, and teachers have regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy. As site-based decision-makers, these stakeholders are uniquely qualified to speak on the topic of recess policy implementation.

The Theory of Planned Behavior [see Figure 1] centers on three constructs: behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs. Behavioral beliefs are the participants' attitudes toward the behavior. This can be explained as the extent that he/she has a favorable, or unfavorable, assessment of the behavior. In this study, behavioral beliefs applied to participants' attitudes concerning the district's written recess policy.

Normative beliefs are subjective norms and refer to perceived social pressure to either display this behavior or to refrain from displaying this behavior. In this study, normative beliefs applied to participants' perceptions of peer pressure in the area of implementing or not implementing the district's written recess policy.

Control beliefs refer to perceived behavioral control. Perceived behavioral control is the extent to which the participants perceive that performing the behavior will be easy or challenging. Further, perceived behavioral control is dependent on self-efficacy as well as controllability. Therefore, this construct is impacted by the experience of the participant and any anticipated challenges to performing the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, perceived behavioral control applied to the perception of the participants regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy as easy or challenging concerning both internal and external factors.

**Assumptions**

There are several assumptions relative to the participants and the survey instrument used to collect the data. First, an assumption was made that the professional opinions of these stakeholders was reflected in their responses. Second, the participants answered the survey questions truthfully. Third, that the data collected from the surveys with these administrators and teachers reflected their salient beliefs regarding implementation of the district's written recess policy.

**Delimitations**

This study has the following delimitations:

1. This study was conducted in January 2021. Those who completed questionnaires in this study included principals, assistant principals, and teachers (certified faculty) at an elementary school which is one site included in a specified K-12 district located in Northeast Georgia. This district is unique in having a written recess policy with guidelines which support national recommendations. One site was chosen for this elicitation study as a sample size of 25 administrators and teachers is appropriate for an elicitation study (Francis et al., 2004; Godin & Kok, 1996). Prior experience with recess policy implementation may impact perspectives and attitudes.

2. Data was collected from administrators and teachers responsibly. The study did not include support staff; however, it is important to acknowledge that members of support staff do play a role in the implementation of recess policy.

3. All information received by the researcher is assumed to be an accurate reflection of the situations of which these participants are reporting.

4. The conclusions drawn from this research may or may not apply to other campus settings. Further studies are needed to add additional knowledge on the topic of recess policy implementation, as this study attempts to do.

**Significance of the Study**

The Institute of Medicine [IOM] is a nonprofit organization that provides evidence-based research and makes recommendations impacting public health policy. In 2013 they published their findings in the areas of physical activity, physical education, and educational policies. Among recommendations to adopt and strengthen policies that align to national minimums, IOM further stated that future studies should assess the specific behavioral and policy-related barriers to increasing physical activities in the school environment (IOM, 2013). Also, Turner et al. (2013) recommended examining teacher preferences to determine how they impact the implementation of recess policies.

This study addressed both areas by asking administrators and teachers for their salient beliefs in the areas of their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral controls regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy. In seeking the beliefs and perceptions of these stakeholders in this area, the study assessed the specific behavioral and policy-related barriers to increasing physical activities in the school environment through recess policy implementation.

In summary, while there are many studies centering on the benefits and presumed barriers to recess, no studies could be found which examine the intentions of site-based decision-makers regarding the implementation of a written recess policy. This study was designed to address that gap in the literature. By gaining a deeper understanding of the salient beliefs of these site-based administrators and teachers, interventions can be

designed to increase the implementation of recess policy in this elementary environment.

An increase in the effective implementation of recess policy has the potential to benefit

young children both in and out of the classroom.

**Definition of Terms**

*Behavioral Beliefs:* Behavioral beliefs are the participants' attitudes toward the

behavior. This can be explained as the extent that he/she has a favorable or unfavorable

assessment of the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, behavioral beliefs applied to

participants' perceptions and evaluations of implementing the district's written recess

policy.

*Control Beliefs:* Control beliefs refer to perceived behavioral control. This is the

extent that the participants perceive that performing the behavior will be easy or

challenging. Further, this construct is impacted by the experience of the participant and

any anticipated challenges to performing the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In this study,

perceived behavioral control applied to the perception of participants regarding the

implementation of the district's written recess policy as easy or challenging regarding

both internal and external factors.

*Normative Beliefs:* Normative beliefs are subjective norms and refer to perceived

social pressure to display this behavior or to refrain from displaying this behavior (Ajzen,

1991). In this study, normative beliefs applied to participants' perceptions of peer

pressure in the area of implementing recess policy.

*Physical Activity:* Physical activity is informal bodily movement and occurs in a

variety of ways at recess. This might occur when playing freeze tag or walking and

talking with a friend. Physical activity does not provide the instruction associated with

physical education and should not be substituted as both are important for healthy development (Society of Health and Physical Educators [SHAPE], 2016).

*Physical Education:* Physical education is a planned, sequential K-12 standards-based program with written curricula and appropriate instruction designed to develop the motor skills, knowledge, and behaviors of active living, physical fitness, sportsmanship, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence. An essential part of the total educational curriculum, these formalized courses are taught by certified/licensed physical educators and focus on the skills and knowledge needed to establish and sustain an active lifestyle. Physical activity is neither an equivalent to nor a substitute for physical education as both contribute meaningfully to the development of healthy, active children. (SHAPE, 2016).

*Recess:* "The term recess refers to a break during the day set aside to allow children the time for active, free play. Schools vary in the number of recess periods given children each day, the length of the periods, and the environments available. Typically, recess occurs outdoors and in a designated play area. During inclement weather, schools may have recess periods in a game room, gymnasium, or inside the classroom" (National Association of Early Childhood Specialists [NAECS], 2001, pp. 1). More simply stated, recess is a time for play that is generally held outdoors and is a break from the day's routine (Jarrett, 2002).

*Salient Beliefs:* Salient beliefs are those opinions and ideas which come to mind first for the participant when asked a question on a topic (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, salient beliefs would be those beliefs that come to mind first when asked about the topic of implementing the district's written recess policy.

**Organization of the study**

Chapter 1 is provided as an introduction and overview of this study: Recess policy implementation: Beliefs and perceptions of site-based decision-makers. This chapter includes a rationale for the study as well as defining key terms.

Chapter 2 provides a review of current literature centering on what is known about the practice of recess. This includes the elements of recess, the benefits of the practice, and other elements therein. The information cited in this section examines policy from a variety of public health/wellness policy positions as well as national, state, and local policies impacting recess as an unstructured outdoor break.

Chapter 3 details the chosen methodology and procedures for this research. A qualitative process was employed for an elicitation study employing a questionnaire that surveyed members of administration and classroom teachers. This was framed through a theoretical lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Chapter 4 examines the data reported by site-based decision-makers. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings, conclusions drawn from the study, and recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

*"Recess is that period of time during the day that allows children the*

*opportunity to interact with peers in ways usually not possible in*

*the typical classroom."*

(National Association of Early Childhood Specialists [NAECS], 2001)

Over the years, school recess has gradually decreased and in some cases has disappeared from many elementary schools. Play advocates have sought solutions to this problem through advancing public policy. However, policy alone does not ensure policy implementation because principals, assistant principals, and teachers make daily decisions based upon an array of factors – including their personal beliefs and values. Research is needed to better understand how the beliefs and perceptions of administrators and teachers impact how they make decisions for students and the practice of recess.

The following review of the literature is divided into two major categories: The Elements of Recess and The Regulation of Recess. The first category, Elements of Recess, is further divided into subcategories: An Unstructured Break, Benefits of Recess, Barriers to Recess. The second category, The Regulation of Recess, is further divided into subcategories: The Process of Policy, Federal Acts, State & District Policies, Policies: Physical Activity & Recess**.** The literature review concludes with a summary of how the proposed study contributes to extant scholarship on the topic.

As mentioned previously in this study, TPB will be the theoretical lens through which this research will be conducted. Using an elicitation study is seen as an important

first step in a TPB study when a topic has not been extensively researched (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This type of study can be used as the initial piece to elicit the beliefs and perceptions of a group of stakeholders on a specific area of intended behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Downs & Hausenblas, 2005).

**Elements of Recess**

The following section will define recess as an unstructured break and further discuss both the benefits of this unstructured break as well as barriers to the practice.

*An Unstructured Break*

Recess has historically been an element of the school day eagerly anticipated by children. First, recess serves as a break from academic tasks (Stegelin et al., 2015). It is a time associated with physical activity, free play, and social interaction (Pellegrini et al., 1995; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; Jarrett, 2013; IOM, 2013). Stapp and Karr (2018) describe it as a time for physical exertion but also a time to socialize with peers and create games.

It is important to note that programs such as Playworks© structure recess by incorporating full-time coaches on campuses in low-income communities to organize outdoor activities and engage students (London et al., 2010). This initiative has garnered favorable results when measuring increased levels of physical activity in students (James-Burdumy et al., 2013; Fortson et al., 2013). Further, Fortson et al. (2013) reported a positive effect of a structured recess in improved behavior and a decrease in reports of bullying. Structured recess programs, such as Playworks©, are believed to be effective since young children may be viewed as needing this additional level of structure to support increased physical engagement and more positive social outcomes (Robert Wood

Johnson Foundation & National Association of Elementary School Principals [RWJF & NAESP], 2010).

However, there is a large body of research indicating advantages for children when recess is unstructured. When offered to students as discretionary time, improvement has been noted in activity levels (Stapp & Karr, 2018), concentration (Pellegrini et al., 1995; Michael et al., 2015), and levels of personal satisfaction (Jarrett, 2002). In the same way, interrupting concentrated instruction with unstructured breaks is beneficial for cognitive functions (Ramstetter et al., 2010). Further, according to Stapp and Karr (2018), the unstructured break is the most critical element of recess as all humans need such an interruption throughout the day.

Although there is evidence supporting both structured and unstructured approaches, Barros et al. (2009) state that the unstructured element has far-reaching positive impacts on various elements of the classroom. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS] states that even unstructured play can result in children being naturally active through intermittent movement (HHS, 2018). Similarly, The American Academy of Pediatrics supports an unstructured break, noting that those who choose to create a structured option remove the child's ability to make a personal choice (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013).

Although the topic warrants further research to explore the impact of recess deprivation on classroom behaviors and academic acquisition (Barros et al., 2009), a structured recess may not be the most effective option when supporting the whole child. The literature strongly supports the benefits of unstructured recess for elementary students (Jarrett, 2013; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005; Sibley &

Etnier, 2003). As a play researcher in support of an unstructured approach, the unstructured approach was the focus of this study as this is also the approach included in the chosen research site's written recess policy (see Appendix 1).

*Benefits of Recess*

The empirical evidence supports recess as essential for young children (Jarret, 2013; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; NAECS, 2001). The following sections detail how this unstructured break benefits children physically, academically, and socio-emotionally.

**Physical Benefits.** Obesity is a growing concern in the United States. In 1996, the Surgeon General released a report ([HHS, 1996) on health and the concern for childhood obesity, among other growing health concerns (IOM, 2013; Schmid et al., 2006). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] was established that year and physical activity guidelines followed thereafter (IOM, 2013).

Obesity rates in elementary-aged children (ages 6-11) are rising in the United States (IOM, 2013; World Health Organization [WHO], 2019). In 1974 this was 4% but has steadily increased and rose to 18.4% as of 2015-2016 (CDC, 2016; Fryar et al., 2018). Due to this trend, childhood obesity is considered a serious public health challenge (WHO, 2019; De Onis et al., 2010; Fryar et al., 2018).

The health costs associated with this rising issue are considerable (Finkelstein & Trogdon, 2008). Childhood obesity has been linked to issues of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes (Fryar et al., 2018; Daniels et al., 2009; Han et al., 2010). The literature also demonstrates that childhood obesity is associated with higher rates of obesity as an adult (Freedman et al., 2005) and premature death later in life (Reilly & Kelly, 2011).

Childhood obesity is associated with sedentary behaviors (IOM, 2013; CDC, 2013) and the school can exacerbate this inactivity by not providing adequate opportunities for movement throughout the day. As of 2008, students spent an average of 6.64 hours per day or 40% of their waking day (Gao et al., 2015) in the school environment. On many campuses nationwide much of that time allotment promotes sedentary behaviors (Burns et al., 2015; Matthews et al., 2008) and this does not improve as a student moves to the higher grades (McMurray et al., 2003; Matthews et al., 2008).

Due to busy work schedules, home schedules may not support and encourage outdoor play opportunities. Realizing that sedentary parents may influence children to be inactive (Sothern & Gordon, 2003), school day opportunities such as physical education and recess may be a young child's best opportunities for physical activity. Dale et al. (2000) found a correlation between restricted school-day physical activity and low levels of afterschool physical activity versus increased school day opportunities and greater levels of physical activity after the school day ends. Further, increased physical activity in childhood can impact lifelong habits that encourage a lifestyle of being physically fit and therefore reduce risk factors contributing to obesity and other health-related issues as an adult (Malina, 2001; CDC, 2006; Piercy et al., 2018).

Physical education classes are part of an academic discipline (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013) and the most important way that schools address the need for active movement (HHS, 2018). National organizations recommend a minimum of 150 minutes weekly for physical education (CDC & SHAPE, 2013; HHS, 2018) and most states have state laws protecting this instructional setting (Chriqui et al., 2019) however, reported minutes may be different than actual minutes in class due to assemblies and other

scheduling issues (McCullick et al., 2012). Also, 150 minutes on the schedule does not mean that students are active for the entire class (IOM, 2013).

Murray & Ramstetter (2013) assert that both physical education and recess promote healthy lifestyles, but they function independently and should not circumvent each other in scheduling. When schools replace recess with a structured instructional setting of an additional physical education course, students are denied the opportunity to play creatively. However, when a structured recess is used to replace the school's physical education requirement the student may miss instruction on specific skills, rules for sports, etc. (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; NASPE, 2006; NASPE, 2008). In short, recess is a complement for physical education and should not be viewed as a replacement (CDC & SHAPE, 2013; Slater et al., 2012; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; IOM, 2013).

To support increased physical movement, national organizations recommend that elementary students participate in 60 minutes of physical activity daily (IOM, 2013; HHS, 2018; CDC & SHAPE, 2013; ASCD & CDC, 2014). The school day offers three opportunities: physical education, recess, and classroom physical activity (Slater et al., 2012). Cooper et al. (2016) note that active transport (walking or biking) to/from school and after-school activities, such as sports, add other campus-based physical activity opportunities. Therefore, school is an effective solution in order to provide increased physical activity for young children (IOM, 2013).

In 2016, an estimated 50 million students were enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools (NCES, n.d.) and that number has now grown to an estimated 50.8 million for the 2019-2020 school year (NCES, n.d.). This number represents a diverse group both in ethnicity and in socio-economic status (Snyder et al., 2019).

Lounsbery et al. (2013) and Story et al. (2009) stated that the large and diverse population that converges in public school settings coupled with the large quantities of time that students spend in the environment make school an effective location for students to receive the recommended amounts of physical activity daily (IOM, 2013). Yet, as of the 2017-2018 school year, only 12% of states in the U.S. had a formal state-level policy requiring daily recess (Chriqui et al., 2019).

Young children spend a large portion of their day in educational settings, and therefore schools are uniquely suited to address the need for increased physical activity (Slater et al., 2012). However, it should be noted that in a 2010 study (Power et al., 2010) parents and other stakeholders voiced that school was not the most effective place for students to gain the added levels of physical activity.

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans [HHS, 2018] recommend that children and adolescents, ages 6-17, participate in a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. While prior guidelines simply gave this time allotment, the 2018 version added guidelines for aerobic, muscle strengthening, and bone strengthening physical activities. Further, they stress the importance of providing students opportunities for age-appropriate and enjoyable physical activities and experiences, as well as the encouragement to participate (HHS, 2018).

The recommended minimums can be attained by providing recess as even unstructured breaks can provide opportunities for intermittent movement (HHS, 2018). Recess has been estimated to be more than 40% of a typical student's physical activity for the day (RWJF, 2007; Ridgers et al., 2006). Further, several studies have demonstrated that students are active for an average of more than 1,000 steps during a

typical recess (Tran et al., 2013; Erwin et al., 2012) therefore any amount contributed towards the goal is beneficial for the student (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; HHS, 2018).

In summary, increasing school-based physical activity could provide many health benefits for young children, including lowering the risk of obesity (CDC, 2013; Burriss & Burriss, 2011), Further, students may accumulate up to 40% of their recommended daily physical activity time during scheduled recess breaks (RJWF, 2007; Ridgers et al., 2006). Therefore, activity breaks such as recess are one of the most effective ways to increase physical activity levels among young students (Salmon et al., 2007).

Though physical activity is the most researched outcome associated with recess (Massey et al., 2018), recess supports young children in other domains (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; Jarrett, 2013; IOM, 2013). The following sections will address these other critical areas where this unstructured break supports child development.

**Cognitive Benefits.** A growing body of research is focused on the connection between recess and improved academic performance among students (Barros et al., 2009; CDC, 2010, Rasberry et al., 2011; Foran et al., 2017). This section will address recess as a much-needed intermission, the impact of that break on classroom behaviors, and specific academic outcomes associated with the practice, also.

Today's elementary classroom is intense and often highly structured. The unstructured nature of recess affords young children with a change of scenery. The practice of recess can assist in reducing stress and decreasing restlessness in the classroom (NAECS, 2001). Just as adults require recovery time from highly structured activities and routines, children do, also (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005).

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Cognitive Immaturity Hypothesis implies that optimal cognitive processing in a child requires a period of interruption following a period of concentrated instruction (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005; Barros et al., 2009). The AAP position states that unstructured recess allows for a "period of interruption" and is one of the most critical aspects of a student's day (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013). This period of interruption is not merely transitioning from one academic activity to another academic task. Only unstructured free time provides this needed cognitive break (Jarrett, 2002; Barros et al., 2009; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005; Bjorklund & Brown. 1998; NASPE, 2004). This distributed effort (Pellegrini & Bjorklund, 1997) assists young children in completing academic tasks more effectively.

Though young children are immature compared to adults, this should not be misinterpreted as an obstacle to overcome with additional practice or with an added intervention. Instead, developmentally appropriate instructional tasks should be employed so as not to cause the interference which occurs when students are asked to repeat highly structured tasks without an unstructured break (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005) and as with any free choice time, it may appear different from child to child.

Some students might run or exert energy on the playground equipment to gain this cognitive break while others might choose to sit quietly and talk with one or several friends. The choice of both the activity and the desired level of peer interaction is important. This mental decompression allows students to recover and return to class assignments with renewed focus (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). This cycle between structured and unstructured tasks proves beneficial to students in cognitive and academic

ways. This daily break can improve classroom behaviors which can, in turn, improve classroom instruction (CDC, 2010; Rasberry et al., 2011; RWJF & NAESP, 2010).

In a 2017 study, teachers stated that students were more focused after participating in sessions of physical activity (Foran et al., 2017). And children who are more active in recess are more focused and display better classroom behaviors (CDC, 2010; Van Dusen et al., 2011). Overall, studies show that post recess, individual and group behaviors are less fidgety and that students more frequently displayed on-task behaviors (Stapp & Karr, 2018; Jarrett et al., 1998, Pellegrini et al., 1995; Barros et al., 2009).

Though better focus has been shown to support improved academic performance, studies also show more direct associations between recess and academic success (CDC, 2010; Rasberry et al., 2011). In a 2017 study, increased physical activity was associated with improved math and reading scores (Alvarez-Bueno et al., 2017). And in a 2010 study, children who were sedentary for 30 minutes before an assessment performed below those who were physically active for the same time period (Ellemberg & St-Louis-Deschênes, 2010). A child's physical health is indicative of healthy development and that has been shown to be predictive of success academically (Roberts et al., 2010).

In summary, both the unstructured nature of recess and any amount of physical activity in these sessions can support young children cognitively. Mental breaks and the opportunity for physical activity are important pieces of the practice of recess. Further, the literature shows that reducing or eliminating recess might be counterproductive to children in the area of academic achievement (Basch, 2011; Jarrett, 2013; Sibley & Etnier, 2003; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005).

**Social-Emotional Benefits.** The empirical evidence demonstrates that recess has various documented benefits for students both physically and academically, as noted above, but many benefits are to be gained in the area of social-emotional learning, also. According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM, 2013), assisting young children in the development of social and emotional skills is the primary focus of an unstructured recess. An unstructured recess provides young children an opportunity to acquire social skills which the structured classroom environment does not accommodate (Ramstetter et al., 2010; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013). The open setting of being allowed to withdraw from an activity and join other play situations facilitates abundant social experiences for the child (Jarrett, 2002). Further, McNamara and Walker (2018) contend that recess is a critically important social connection for children.

Peer interactions occur during recess and can assist young children in acquiring skills such as negotiation, cooperation, and problem-solving which are needed for lifelong interactions (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; Fortson et al., 2013). Leff et al. (2004) state that children participating in organized games during recess is associated with higher-level cooperative play. The practice of recess can also contribute to improved mental health as increased physical activity has been shown to impact children positively in this area (Peluso & Guerra de Andrade, 2005; Strong et al., 2005; Hallal et al., 2006; Biddle & Asare, 2011). And just as the positive physical impact can be lifelong, the positive mental health benefits can be, as well (Hallal et al., 2006).

The recess environment is where students struggling in academic areas may find that they excel in non-curricular areas such as running faster or being the most adept at jump rope. Children praising them for such accomplishments provides affirmation they

might not receive in the classroom. Students build character traits such as perseverance and self-discipline, and they adapt to being leaders and/or followers in forming friendships with peers when given unstructured recess opportunities (Burriss & Burriss, 2011). In these social interactions, children learn to use language effectively as they manage social cues and learn to recognize the perspectives of others (NAECS, 2001).

In summary, there is agreement in the empirical evidence that recess is a non-negotiable for the development of the whole child (Ramstetter et al., 2010; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; NASPE, 2006; NAEYC, 2009). This is especially important for students exhibiting differing needs both academically and behaviorally (CDC, 2010; Ridgway et al., 2003). Further, the AAP policy reflects their support of even minor movement during recess as it offsets the sedentary time at both school and home (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013). Overall, children find enjoyment in recess and physical activity has a positive connection to a child's physical, academic, and social-emotional growth (Hillman et al., 2008; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008; Rasberry et al., 2011). Yet, with these known benefits, there are barriers to the practice of recess.

### Barriers to the Practice of Recess

With all the documented benefits for young children in the scheduling of this unstructured break, many schools and school districts are still reducing or eliminating recess (Stapp and Karr, 2018; Turner et al., 2013; McKenzie & Kahan, 2008; Pellegrini, 2005; McNamara, 2013; Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Bilello, 2005). And though as of 2017 it was estimated that more than 65% of public-school districts in the U.S. scheduled recess for their elementary students (CDC, 2016), these statistics may not reflect practice. Sites may report that they have recess even if scheduling is at the bare minimum (Barros et al.,

2009). Reductions of recess occur for various reasons which will be discussed in the following sections.

**Scheduling.** How much time is currently being scheduled for recess and is it enough? The American Association of Pediatrics recommends a minimum of 20 minutes of unstructured recess daily (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013), but scheduling varies widely throughout the U.S. According to the School Health Policies and Practices Study (CDC, 2016), 65% of public-school districts in the U.S. schedule 20 minutes or more for recess for their elementary students. However, as will be covered in a later section, low-income students and students of color are significantly less likely to receive this time allotment (Slater et al., 2012).

In a commercial study of 500 teachers throughout the U.S. (International Play Equipment Manufacturers Association [IPEMA], 2018), only 9% responded that their students had access to an unstructured recess experience at all times. This survey found that an additional 40% of these educators reported that their students had access to an unstructured recess experience only sometimes. This left the remaining 51% of these educators reporting that their students had no unstructured break opportunities in the school day schedule (IPEMA, 2018).

**Space & Equipment.** Outdoor areas are preferred for recess and generally take the form of green spaces or a playground area with slides and swings (NAECS, 2001). National recommendations are that schools provide students with adequate spaces and facilities. Further, the literature supports a need for schools to provide adequate equipment and supplies (IOM, 2013; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; CDC & SHAPE, 2013).

While recess is typically scheduled outdoors, an unstructured break may be held indoors when inclement weather is present. Classrooms and gymnasiums may be used as areas for free choice activities (NAECS, 2001). The practice of recess should still be viewed as beneficial and viable even in an indoor setting (NASPE, 2004; RWJF, 2007; Ginsburg, 2007). Students should not be deprived of an unstructured break due to inclement weather and scheduling should be followed as usual in these cases.

If playground equipment is too costly or felt to be litigious, sites may choose to add playground markings such as areas devoted to hopscotch, four-square, etc. The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities [NCEF] makes the case for allowing this open-endedness in designing outdoor spaces for children (Wagner, 2000). Providing these playground markings may also result in increased levels of student participation, therefore, increasing physical activity levels (Ridgers et al., 2007; McKenzie & Kahan, 2008; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005; Huberty et al., 2012).

**Instruction & Assessment.** Recess is often reduced due to a real or perceived need for additional time for instruction. Though the concept is not new, the trend does not seem to be diminishing (Stapp & Karr, 2018). This was cited as a reason by Chmelynski (1998), highlighted during and after the advent of No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005; Center on Education Policy [CEP], 2008; Burriss & Burriss, 2011), and is still a point for discussion in the current conversation (Stapp & Karr, 2018).

In 2008, the Center for Education Policy reviewed the impact of No Child Left Behind on instructional schedules and determined that 20% of school districts nationwide had decreased recess schedules an average of fifty (50) minutes a week (CEP, 2008).

Further, in 2010, RWJF & NAESP (2010) reported that approximately 40% of school sites nationwide had either reduced or eliminated the practice to allow more time for instruction.

In 2011, Burriss and Burriss (2011) surveyed 173 district leaders throughout the United States and 32.3% agreed that a decrease in the time scheduled for outdoor play had occurred. Reductions such as these are made to allow more time for tested subjects such as English and math (Brusseau & Hannon, 2015; Stapp & Karr, 2018). And some in the field believe that increases in instructional time are necessary for improving student achievement (Pennsylvania State Education Association [PSEA], 2010).

However, reducing the practice of recess may be counterproductive to academic achievement since a growing body of evidence in the literature supports participation in recess as a factor in improving cognitive performance (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; Castelli et al., 2007; Tomporowski et al., 2008; Trost, 2007). To back up this information, in a study of 11,000 third-graders, students receiving little or no daily recess were compared with students that had 15 minutes or more of recess per day. The conclusion was that children who have more time at recess behave better in the classroom and perform better academically (Barros et al., 2009).

**Safety & Supervision.** Safety is the top priority for all issues impacting students in the school environment therefore, recess reductions have occurred in some districts due to the fear of lawsuits from recess injuries and issues regarding intruders in the open outdoor environment (Burriss & Burriss, 2011). National recommendations are that schools provide spaces and facilities that meet or exceed safety standards (IOM, 2013; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; CDC & SHAPE, 2013). This can be accomplished by

referencing publications such as the Public Playground Safety Handbook published by the Consumer Product Safety Commission [CPSC] (2015). Equipment safety is just one piece of this though as social conflict must be managed, as well.

In a 2010 study, school administrators reported that 89% of school behavioral incidents occurred at unstructured times such as lunch or recess (RWJF & NAESP, 2010). And teachers who have difficulty managing social conflict and behavioral issues in this unstructured outdoor environment are more likely to forgo recess for indoor structured activities (Snyder et al., 2010).

Unstructured outdoor recess is where bullying is most prevalent (Glew et al., 2005; Leff et al., 2003; Nansel et al., 2001) and may include both physical and emotional aggression. In a Canadian study, McNamara (2013) reported that 55% of teachers indicated that social conflict, such as arguments or teasing, was the biggest problem with unstructured recess. And in this same study, 70% of students reported feeling safe at recess, but the remaining 30% reported not feeling safe, in part, due to issues such as bullying.

These findings were similar to the results of a 2018 commercial survey (IPEMA, 2018). In this survey of 500 teachers throughout the U.S., 55% of the teachers responded that they observed bullying incidents during the recess time period; however, 64% of these respondents stated that they agreed, to some extent, that the practice of recess had the potential to reduce bullying incidents (IPEMA, 2018). The CPSC (2015) includes guidelines for teaching conflict resolution and for establishing a school-wide policy to prevent bullying and/or aggressive behavior. Further, the establishment of an anti-

bullying policy that is explicit and enforced is another measure that is recommended (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013).

Behaviors at recess can be aggressive and make students feel unsafe (Anderson et al., 2003). One way to decrease these issues is by banning games, such as dodgeball, which are considered unsafe (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; CDC & SHAPE, 2017a), but recess should not be reduced or eliminated due to such issues. Instead, the presence of well-trained supervisors is critical (Burriss & Burriss, 2011) as they are capable of circumventing danger as students learn the necessary skill of self-negotiation.

Increased staff for supervision and increased training for those staff members are viewed as critical means by members of school administration in order to address the safety and security concerns that accompany unstructured recess (RWJF & NAESP, 2010). Providing well-trained and adequately staffed supervisors is an example of taking appropriate measures due to concerns for child safety in this environment (NASPE, 2004; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013). National recommendations are that schools provide professional development which specifically targets support for supervision strategies (IOM, 2013; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; CDC & SHAPE, 2013). These supervisors should be trained to intervene in the event a child is in harm's way whether physically or emotionally (CPSC, 2015).

With supervision actively provided, aggressive acts decrease, and prosocial behaviors and cooperative activities increase (Leff et al., 2003). Whether unstructured or structured, schools have a responsibility to ensure that all students are safe at recess and supervision is a critical piece of that planning process (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013).

These actions by stakeholders can provide high-quality recess environments which offer opportunities for children to be more active (McNamara, 2013).

**Punitive Actions.** Historically, allowing or removing recess has proved to be a form of currency for educators when negotiating with non-compliant students and the current trend is the same (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; Turner et al., 2013). Recess is one of the few unstructured times offered to young students in a school day yet, 77% of principals state that they have used this as a punishment (RJWF, 2010) and even in schools where recess is encouraged, recess deprivation occurs (Jarrett, 2013).

National recommendations include prohibiting the exclusion of students from recess as a punitive measure (IOM, 2013; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013, CDC & SHAPE, 2013). For example, students should not be denied participation in this unstructured break due to a behavioral infraction or excluded to complete classwork. The literature also supports prohibiting the use of additional physical activity as a punitive measure. For example, a requirement of running laps at recess instead of having a choice of activities due to talking during instruction. Further, deliberate play deprivation can be compared to child abuse (Frost et al., 2008) and should be avoided. So, while the literature is clear that withholding recess for punitive reasons is not recommended (Jarrett, 2013; Pellegrini, 2005; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013), it is also counterproductive to the intended outcomes and may have unintended consequences in relation to a child's acquisition of important life skills (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; IOM, 2013).

**Poverty & Diversity**. Though the above barriers may impact all students in the U.S., children who are from low-income homes and/or those who represent diversity in race and ethnicity are less likely to have recess. This is due, in part, to high percentages

of students who qualify for free or reduced school food programs attending larger and/or urban campuses. These sites, which often educate minority populations, are also shown to be less likely to have opportunities for recess (IOM, 2013; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; Jarrett, 2013).

The obesity issues that were discussed earlier in this study are even more of a concern with minority populations in the U.S. In 2015-2016, the results from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey estimated that 14.6% (male) and 13.5% (female) Caucasian children and adolescents (ages 2-19) were obese. However, obesity rates for African American children in this range were estimated at 19% (male) and 25.1% (female) while Hispanic children were estimated at 28% (male) and 23.6% (female) (Fryar et al., 2018). These statistics show persistent health inequities that must be addressed (Warren et al., 2019).

As stated earlier, low-income students and students of color are significantly less likely to receive the nationally recommended minimums in scheduling recess time allotments (Slater et al., 2012) and these populations are less likely to have safe afterschool options for physical activity (White & Stoecklin, 1998). Even when recess is scheduled, low-income students, students of color, and those who attend urban sites are often deprived of this break time due to behavioral infractions (Jarrett, 2013; IOM, 2013; Parsad & Lewis, 2006). So, for students already at risk, the benefits of an unstructured break may not be readily available and this deprivation for these underserved populations can be viewed as a social justice issue (RWJF, 2007; Roth et al., 2003).

In summary, the practice of recess is a necessary break in the day for optimizing a child's physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. Thus, recess should be

considered a child's personal time and should not be used as classroom currency (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; IOM, 2013; Pellegrini, 2005). Disciplinary measures, other than using recess deprivation, should be employed to allow students the freedom to move (Jarrett, 2013; Huberty et al., 2012; IOM, 2013). The empirical literature supports many benefits of recess as an unstructured break. There is also evidence of many barriers to the practice of recess. The following section will cover the topic of the regulation of recess and discuss the impact of policies on practices related to recess as an unstructured break for elementary students.

**The Regulation of Recess**

As discussed earlier in this study, obesity has been a growing concern in the United States. In 1996, the Surgeon General released a report (HHS, 1996) on the concern for childhood obesity, among other pediatric health concerns (IOM, 2013; Schmid et al., 2006). The CDC was established that year and physical activity guidelines followed (IOM, 2013). Young children benefit from physical activity recess and the school day offers distinctive opportunities to achieve the recommended minimums (Buscemi et al., 2014; Huberty et al., 2012; IOM, 2013). By mandating recess, policymakers can increase school-based physical activity (Slater et al., 2012; IOM, 2013; Cooper et al., 2016).

*The Process of Policy*

Policies tend to be broad statements created at either the state, district or local level that are meant to guide the actions of stakeholders and determine the what, why and who of procedures (Bogden, 2000). The remaining sections of this study address the role of policy in providing recess for elementary school populations. The first section, Policy,

will address the components of policy and the process of monitoring and implementation. The second section, Federal Acts, will cover federal acts in both education and health which have had major impacts on recess in the past two decades. The third section, State Law and District Policy will address studies on state and district policies and their impact on school-level practices. The fourth section, School Level Applications will review studies of how state and district policies impact school level practices.

Policy is a process of development, adoption, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The guidelines provided by national organizations are important foundations for developing policy (Cooper et al., 2016) as is obtaining buy-in from stakeholders (Bogden et al., 2012). Collaboration is needed as a policy is developed and adopted (Cooper et al., 2016; Bogden et al., 2012; Burriss & Burriss, 2011).

Creating policy is only the first piece of this as implementation is not certain (IOM, 2013; Cooper et al., 2016). Successful implementation depends on naming who is responsible for implementing the policy (Hardee et al., 2012; Bogden et al., 2012), ensuring that these participants have the capacity and resources to carry out the process (Hardee et al., 2012; IOM, 2013), and ensuring that collaboration among participants is possible (Hardee et al., 2012; Bogden et al., 2012). Other critical factors are a strong statement of goals, required reporting, and administrative support (Bogden et al., 2012).

According to Bhuyan et al. (2010), policy is not always implemented with fidelity. Policy implementation barriers may be internal or external (Amis et al., 2012), but Morgan and Hanson (2008) classify barriers as either teacher-related (behavioral) or institutional (beyond the teacher's control). Policy implementation barriers exist within any organization and must be continually assessed and addressed (Bhuyan et al., 2010;

Cooper et al., 2016; Collins & Koplan, 2009) to create an ongoing feedback loop to measure the effects of the policy's implementation (Cooper et al., 2016).

Assessments such as this can be completed with ongoing monitoring and evaluation (Amis et al., 2012). The monitoring of state and district laws and policies in the area of physical education, physical activity, and other health-related behaviors has been conducted through reports such as the following:

- **The School Health Policies and Practices Study** (CDC) – This report provides relevant policy details on state laws that are collected by the National Association of State Boards of Education's (NASBE) State School Health Policy Database. The report also gathers details on district policies and school practices which are collected by self-report surveys. The most recent version used for this study was for the school year 2015-2016 (CDC, 2016).

- **Bridging the Gap** (funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation) – This report compiles state laws (collected by census) and applies a scoring system (no policy, weak policy, strong policy) to compare these against national recommendations. Further, this report provides an evaluation of congressionally mandated wellness policies by school district. The most recent version used for this study was for the school year 2013-2014 (Piekarz et al., 2016).

- **Shape of the Nation** – This report provides provide current statistics on physical education and physical activity in all 50 states (and the District of Columbia). This information is collected by surveying state physical education coordinators (collected by self-report surveys). The most recent version used for this study was for the school year 2015-2016 (SHAPE, 2016).

The data reported on these sites contain some gathered by census and some through self-report surveys. It should be noted that a disadvantage of self-reported data is that they are subject to error due to the possibility of respondent bias, the misinterpretation of survey questions (IOM, 2013), or social desirability bias (Lounsbery et al., 2013). Issues such as this can create inflated school data that fails to accurately portray school practices (IOM, 2013).

These data sources demonstrate that all students in the elementary environment do not have access to a similar time allotment in recess and/or adequate levels of physical activity. These variations create inequities for young children as the policies intended to promote healthy schools are made up of a complex and disconnected series of mandates with no clear and shared goal (Chriqui et al., 2019; RWJF, 2008). A unified comprehensive national policy is needed to define quality standards for policies impacting school-based physical activity (IOM, 2013). This could create more uniform recess practices for the benefit of our young children.

*Federal Acts*

The following federal acts affect schools by impacting education and/or health initiatives.

**Education**. There have been two major initiatives in the last two decades that impacted education: No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) and The Every Student Succeeds Act pf 2015 (The Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015). Both brought new goals for public school populations.

*No Child Left Behind.* In 2001, the federal government updated the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (Elementary and Secondary Act [ESEA], 1965). By creating

NCLB (2002), proponents hoped to close the achievement gap for children of poverty and/or representing minority populations. As a new law, NCLB increased accountability in core academic subjects and connected funding to the accountability measures attached to high-stakes testing (McKenzie & Lounsberry, 2009; Arce et al., 2005).

As mentioned earlier in this study, NCLB had unintended consequences. One such outcome of NCLB was that non-academic areas were not prioritized in school schedules (Siedentop, 2009). The literature demonstrates that approximately 40 % of U.S. schools reduced recess in the following years (Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Bilello, 2005; McKenzie & Kahan, 2008; RWJF & NAESP, 2010; Basch, 2011).

*Every Student Succeeds Act.* In 2015, congress replaced NCLB by reauthorizing the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965) which was enacted in 1965. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) created major change in education. This legislation shifted the focus from solely core academic subject areas and instead, ESSA emphasized schools providing a well-rounded education. In this vein, the authors included physical education and health education as elements of that more comprehensive framework (Cooper et al., 2016).

Though The Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA] of 2015 includes a requirement that elements such as nutrition and regular physical activity be included as part of a student's educational experience, it does not include mandated minimums for recess or outdoor play. This lack of directive leaves the issue open-ended with a lack of consistent application throughout the U.S. (Stapp & Karr, 2018)

**Health**. There have been two major health initiatives in the last two decades which impacted education. Both the Child Nutrition and Women, Infants, and Children

Reauthorization Act of 2004 (Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act [WIC], 2004) and the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFK, 2010) brought new goals for health and wellness in public school populations.

*The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004.* Recognizing a need to address health issues in our student population, this act required U.S. public school districts to create written wellness policies (WIC, 2004). These newly created policies were required to include goals for health education and school-based physical activity however, though recess was mentioned in this legislation, no required minimums were specified in the guidelines. This gave local educational agencies leeway to implement wellness policies in ways that would meet their site's needs by the 2006-2007 school term. This variance in policy created a variance in the quantity and quality of recess and other forms of physical activity opportunities in the school setting (IOM, 2013; Story et al., 2009).

*Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.* Legislation was updated to strengthen policies on public involvement, transparency, implementation, and further added a requirement of evaluation (HHFK, 2010). This evaluation piece requires local educational agencies to review their wellness policy a minimum of every three years for compliance with a requirement for public reporting. Under the new legislation, specific requirements of duration and frequency of recess and other forms of physical activity were still not present. And though this is not included in those guidelines, in 2015-2016, the School Health Policies and Practices Study stated that 97% of school districts nationwide reported that they require or recommend regularly scheduled recess. However, only 50% of elementary schools were required to report this information, and

only 65% of those sites reporting required or recommended the nationally recommended minimum of 20 minutes daily (CDC, 2016). Further, this did not account for structured or unstructured recess breaks. With this information, young children are not having equitable opportunities for high-quality recess experiences.

*State & District Policy*

Though there are various state, district, and school-level policies protecting physical activity, there are no federal requirements in this area (IOM, 2013). While the research demonstrates that policy is needed in this area, the empirical evidence is that existing policies regarding physical activity, and specifically recess, are poorly defined and in need of further development (McGinnis et al., 2002; Mensah et al., 2004).

**State Policy.** State policies can be statutory or administrative. Statutory refers to a state law or codified law while administrative acts would be a rule enacted by a state entity, such as the department of education (Perna et al., 2012; IOM, 2013).

As stated previously in this work, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 includes a requirement that Health and Physical Education be included as part of a student's educational experience, yet it does not include mandated minimums for recess or outdoor play. Due to the ambiguity of federal guidelines, policy and practice vary considerably from state to state and even from school to school throughout the United States (Cooper et al., 2016).

NASBE (n.d.) reported that only 20 states nationwide had policies that included physical education and physical activity. Of those, only six had laws requiring recess, but the terms and conditions of these varied widely. Five of these six stated a minimum time period ranging from twenty minutes to thirty minutes for the practice of recess. Of these

five states (CT, FL, MO, RI, VA, and WV), only Florida and Rhode Island specify that the recess period should be an unstructured/free playtime. And further, only Rhode Island specified in this legal documentation that the removal of recess was not acceptable as a punitive measure.

Due to the context of my chosen setting for this research, Georgia's policies for physical activity and recess were examined. The CDC, in partnership with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, developed the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child [WSCC] framework that looks at the various components making up a healthy school and community effectively serving the whole child. In these ten areas, Georgia was rated as having a broad policy that addressed many of these. However, in the areas impacting physical education, physical activity, and recess, the state scored 42% which was slightly below the national average of 44%. In the area of physical education standards, the state's laws recognize the national standards published by SHAPE America. The concepts of professional learning for physical education, levels of physical activity during the school day, and the practice of recess were not addressed by Georgia state laws during the 2017-2018 school year (Chriqui et al., 2019).

It should be noted that in the spring of 2019 Georgia lawmakers approved a bi-partisan state bill entitled HB-83 which would have required K-5 students to be provided a mandatory, daily, supervised, and unstructured recess of a minimum of thirty minutes that would preferably be held outdoors. Opponents cited concern for additional mandatory events while trying to meet academic goals. Gov. Brian Kemp vetoed that bill on Friday, May 10, 2019, citing that local control is needed for an issue such as this

(Bluestein, 2019, May 10). This lack of state policy in the area of the practice of recess leaves the decision to individual districts throughout the state of Georgia. However, is state policy alone enough for implementation?

**District Policy.** In a study published by Burriss and Burriss (2011), the authors focused on the congruency between policy and practice in recess and outdoor play. For this quantitative study, 500 small, medium, and large districts, according to population, were randomly chosen. Surveys were mailed to members of leadership at these district offices with 173 respondents. These participants were members of leadership from these district offices and questions were in reference to policy and practice as related to recess, outdoor play, outdoor curricular studies, playground materials, ADA accessibility, and administrative support for the practice of recess.

This study notes three national trends: a rise in childhood obesity, more sites limiting the practice of recess, and a devaluation of children's outdoor time. Surveys focused on the possible devaluing of the practice of recess and involved measuring if these were explicit or implicit decisions and if these decisions were coming from superintendents or other district representatives. This survey also asked respondents if they perceived that building-level leadership were supportive of or resistant to the practice of recess, Further, they asked if these participants believed that teacher knowledge and implementation were the key issues in recess reduction (Burriss & Burriss, 2011).

The authors noted that 40% of these nationwide respondents stated that their district has a policy on outdoor play however, 32% reported that time for recess has recently decreased to some degree. And even with 62% reporting no decrease in this

scheduled activity, these percentages combine for a total of 94% that have either stayed the same or decreased. It should be noted that these figures may vary in these studies, depending upon who is being surveyed and whether questions involve recess policy or recess practice. Overall, more school districts reported decreasing time spent in the practice of recess than those that reported increasing children's time outside in the daily schedule. Further, there were no significant differences in the results between the three school districts represented. The findings represented in this study are consistent with other empirical studies and indicate that decreasing children's recess time is a national trend (Burriss & Burriss, 2011).

Efforts to improve childhood health, as well as the body of research demonstrating benefits otherwise, may provide renewed opportunities to examine and revise/improve existing policies and create policies where none exists. Due to this, the authors concluded that explicit written district policies regarding the practice of recess were needed. Further, they stated that this document should define the role of outdoor learning and outdoor play to ensure opportunities for all students district wide. They maintain that the establishment of this type of policy communicates that recess has value and is not negotiable (Burriss & Burriss 2011).

In a study focused on policy, Slater et al. (2012) examined the impact of state and school district-level policies with regards to physical education (PE) and recess. This study was the first of its kind and covered 1,761 U.S. public elementary schools representing 690 districts in 47 states. Surveys were used to gather data from school administrators regarding state laws and district-level policies pertaining to PE and recess.

The quantitative findings in this study showed that some states require as much as 150 minutes a week of PE and 20 minutes or more a day of recess, but this was more likely in states with existing laws in these areas. Further, the authors found that the existence of a district-level policy was not a significant indicator of school-level recess implementation. The findings suggested that students are not receiving the recommended time in both areas as many sites substitute one physical activity for the other. The authors recommend mandating physical activity in the form of physical education and/or recess to increase these opportunities for students (Slater et al., 2012).

The following research conducted by Kelder et al. (2009) addresses these acknowledged inconsistencies between policy and practice. The Texas legislature adopted SB19 in 2001. This created a requirement that all public elementary schools in the state participate in a minimum of 135 minutes of physical activity weekly including physical education and recess. This bill further required schools to implement a coordinated school health program (Kelder et al., 2009).

In this mixed-method cross-sectional design, the authors focused on assessing stakeholders' knowledge of SB19 as well as levels of implementation. A variety of methods were used: structured interviews, direct observations, time logs, surveys, and student health data such as height, weight, and BMI. Data were gathered from 171 elementary schools throughout the state (Kelder et al., 2009).

The findings suggest the importance of monitoring the implementation of such laws and policies to ensure compliance. The authors suggest that this can be accomplished by adding requirements or by increasing the accountability of schools under such a mandate. In short, scheduled time for physical activity may increase if a

state law is created, however, implementation still varies even with such a provision in place (Kelder et al., 2009).

In an additional study, Turner et al. (2013) focused on district policies and their association with practices on campuses within these districts. Specifically, this larger study examined nationally representative samples in the following areas: recess deprivation for behavior management, recess deprivation for academic reasons, and using required physical activity as a punitive measure for behavior management. Paper surveys were collected by mail for this quantitative study of U.S. public elementary schools. There were 1,919 administrators who responded which accounted for a 61.2 percent response rate over a three-year period (2008-2009 thru 2010-2011). Data were collected annually and analyzed as cross-sectional samples.

The findings in this study reflected strong district policy being associated with lower rates of recess deprivation and weaker policies were not associated with strong implementation. The researchers noted that weaker policies are often not enforced and therefore communicated as recommendations only. Barriers noted to implementation were a lack of awareness regarding policy by site-based decision-makers as well as a need for additional classroom management strategies to empower teachers and provide alternatives to recess deprivation (Turner et al., 2013)

*Policies: Physical Activity & Recess*

Policy research in the area of physical activity involves a framework of identifying existing policies, examining the factors of these policies, studying their implementation, and evaluating the outcomes. This should be an ongoing process and it allows for gaps to be identified and a more effective process of policy development and

implementation (Schmid et al., 2006). An essential element to policy adoption and implementation is following the recommendations provided by national organizations. And while adopting physical activity policy impacts opportunities for increased physical activity for young children, adoption does not ensure implementation (Cooper et al., 2016) though even partial implementation is still associated with approximately 36 minutes of additional physical activity weekly (Lounsbery et al., 2013). Further, policies for physical activity and recess can impact the amount of time that students are afforded for recess, increase opportunities for faculty to participate in professional development, and create safer environments for young children (Cooper et al., 2016). When these policies are implemented with fidelity, young children are the beneficiaries (Woods & Mutrie, 2012; WHO, 2010).

**Implementation of Physical Activity and Recess Policy.** Policies that impact elementary schools in the area of physical activity and recess can be framed as state laws, district policies, or school and site-specific policies. They may cover broad topics such as wellness or be more narrowly focused on physical activity or recess specifically (IOM, 2013). Further, policies may be considered strong or weak depending on the language included or if measurable factors, such as minimum minutes offered daily, are included (Schwartz et al., 2009).

State policies in the area of school-based physical activity were studied by Carlson et al. (2013) to investigate both the adoption and implementation of these policies. Sixteen states had an existing policy regarding measurable amounts of school-based physical activity. These represented a total of 19 policies that were chosen for this study due to existing policy mentioning measurable amounts of school-based physical

activity. Further, interviews with these state-level physical education coordinators were conducted. Respondents were asked about the implementation, monitoring, and enforcement of these specified state-level policies.

Policies were coded as either weak (+), moderate (++), or strong (+++) depending on verbiage included in the policy (Schwartz et al., 2009). Weak policies were said to contain vague language framed as a recommendation. Moderate policies were those that specified that moderate to vigorous physical activity as well as more direct terms such as shall, will, or must. Strong policies were classified as those which included the elements of moderate policies but further communicated verbiage to reflect that implementation and monitoring would occur as these are the factors that create successful implementation (Brownson et al., 2017).

In this research, none of the sixteen states were found to have a strong policy in the area of physical activity for students. Only five of the states were determined to have moderate policies with the remaining 11 states having weak policies due to one or more missing elements Further, though schools self-reported that policies were being implemented, state-level monitoring was not in evidence. The authors recommended that comprehensive policies be created using clear language and with a written plan for accountability so that students may have adequate opportunities for school-based physical activity (Carlson et al., 2013).

In a 2012 study, Slater et al. (2012) were the first to study the impact of state laws and district-level wellness policies on the prevalence of physical education and recess in a nationally representative sample of U.S. public elementary schools. In this stacked cross-sectional analysis,

the authors surveyed 1,761 site-based administrators representing 690 school districts in 47 states over three consecutive school years (2006-2009). State laws and district-level wellness policies were compiled and studied. State laws were considered strong if they required daily recess for elementary students and weak if recess was recommended daily. District wellness policies were coded accordingly. These were not coded based on measurability, but instead, they were coded on language only. Using these guidelines, words such as shall and must are representative of requirements while language framed as suggestions denote recommendations. (Slater et al., 2012).

In this analysis, they compared the state laws and district-level wellness policies of these entities regarding both physical education and recess to the results of mail-back surveys gathered from principals at these elementary school sites. The data demonstrates that the existence of a state policy mandating physical activity is associated with increased time scheduled for physical activity though, agreeing with prior studies of this nature, the data revealed that implementation of state policy may differ across various districts (Evenson et al., 2009; Kelder et al., 2009; Barroso et al., 2009). Further, though only 17% of states had a daily recess law, they found that this increased the probability of schools within these states participating in the recommended 20 minutes daily for this unstructured break, however, they did not find an association between district policies and scheduled recess at the school level (Slater et al., 2012).

Realizing that recess is often used as currency to obtain behavioral and academic goals, Turner et al. (2013) examined district-level policies to determine if there was an association between policies focusing on using recess as a punitive measure and school-level practices. District policies were examined and coded as either strong, weak, or no

policy in place. Strong policies were those which prohibited students from being withheld from recess, either as a behavioral or academic consequence, and also prohibited added physical activity as a punishment. Policies were coded as weak policies if they discouraged at least one of these practices. If withholding recess or using it as a punitive measure was not addressed, then the district was considered to have no policy in place.

Data was gathered from 2008-2011 at the school, district, and state level in this cross-sectional study. The site surveys asked if recess was reduced or eliminated due to behavioral infractions, if it was reduced or eliminated to complete academic assignments, and if additional physical activity (ex. running laps at recess) was used as a punitive measure. Further, these surveys asked respondents to categorize their answers as "no, it does not occur", or "yes, it does occur". If they answered yes, they were further asked to designate if it was allowed but discouraged or if it was completely at the teacher's discretion (Turner et al., 2013).

The findings in this study demonstrated that district policies prohibiting these practices in elementary schools had increased from 15% in 2006 to 21% in 2008 and that strong district policy is associated with matching school practices. Further, the data showed that though using added physical activity was rare, as many as three-fourths of these sites reported that withholding recess for either behavioral or academic reasons was allowed, even if discouraged. Regionally, the South did not withhold recess as frequently as other regions in the United States, but the authors suggested this is because students in this region already receive fewer scheduled recess minutes than other regions (Turner et al., 2013).

As of 2017, only 6 states required a daily recess of 20 minutes for elementary students: Connecticut, Florida, Missouri, Rhode Island, Virginia, and West Virginia (Chriqui et al., 2019). Currently, only four of these six states require a 20-minute daily recess with West Virginia going above that and requiring a 30-minute recess while Virginia does not specify a minimum. Of these 6 states, only Rhode Island mentions prohibiting the use of recess as a punitive measure and that is stated as only an effort of good faith and not a mandate (NASBE, n.d.).

As for district-level wellness policies, as of 2015, 65% of districts nationwide reported that their policies require a daily scheduled recess for their elementary populations with an additional 19% reporting that they recommend this practice (CDC, 2016). Of those reporting that they do require or recommend this daily unstructured break, 65% reported requiring 20 minutes or more daily (CDC, 2016). However, policies alone do not ensure implementation, and barriers and facilitators are the focus of the following section.

**Barriers to and Enablers for Policy Implementation.** The empirical evidence is that there are barriers to and enablers for policy implementation therefore these should be considered during policy development and adoption. Stakeholder buy-in is critical in the development of policies (Bogden, 2000; IOM, 2013). Further, Cooper et al. (2016) cite the need for members of leadership to develop effective implementation strategies during the policy adoption stage.

*Policy Itself*. As mentioned earlier in this study, weaker policies may be barriers to implementation as they may be viewed as recommendations only. Strongly worded

policies and those which have report features can be enablers for effective policy implementation (Turner et al., 2013).

*Resources*. A barrier often cited for policy implementation is a lack of resources (Scwhartz et al., 2012; Cooper et al., 2016). Specifically, Scwhartz et al. (2012) states that resources might be involve tangible areas such as a lack of equipment, materials, personnel, etc., but may also be a lack of resources for training.

Training, in the form of professional development, can communicate clear policy objectives, as well as establish connections between research and practice (Cooper et al., 2016). Specifically, targeted professional development can reinforce the positive relationship between physical activity and academic achievement for both teachers and administrators (Roberts et al., 2010; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008; Strong et al., 2005). Kelly et al. (2019) found that targeted professional development was a significant enabler for policy implementation in the area of increasing physical activity at the school level. Specifically, Turner et al. (2013) found that classroom management strategies in a professional learning format could facilitate policy implementation.

*Time*. Another cited barrier is competing time demands (Evenson et al., 2009; Slater et al., 2012). This may be demonstrated when schools forgo the practice of recess to meet academic demands or when schools substitute physical education for recess or recess for physical education. Due to these substitutions, both should be prioritized as they meet differing needs. Policies that mandate both as essential are effective enablers for physical activity policy implementation (Slater et al., 2012).

*Communication*. Communication between stakeholders can be a barrier to policy implementation as those making site-based decisions may sense a lack of support

(Scwhartz et al., 2012; Cooper et al., 2016). Turner et al. (2013) found that a lack of awareness of existing policies was a barrier to implementation. However, research conducted by Cooper et al. (2016) demonstrated that policy development and implementation require experience that these teachers and administrators may not have.

Increased communication can be an enabler for policy implementation. Cooper et al. (2016) found that using technology to disseminate information was an effective way to increase policy implementation. Further, they found that using social media to share examples of success was an enabler. High levels of collaboration between the state department of education and their sites as well as using self-report methods such as questionnaires were found to be effective, also (Carlson et al., 2013).

*Poverty and Diversity.* Additionally, poverty and diversity are issues in this arena. Students attending larger, more diverse, and less affluent schools are more likely to not have recess policy implemented effectively. This gap is critical as the research demonstrated benefits to the whole child and these students need these advantages in physical areas as well as the academic and socio-emotional, also (Slater et al., 2012).

*Lack of Motivation*. An additional barrier identified in the literature was that of a lack of motivation to implement the policy (Cooper et al., 2016). This is important as Turner et al. (2013) identified teacher preferences in recess policy as an area for future study.

**Summary**

As stated earlier in this study, The Institute of Medicine [IOM] is a nonprofit organization that provides evidence-based research and makes recommendations impacting public health policy. In 2013 they published their findings in the area of

physical activity, physical education, and educational policies. Among recommendations to adopt and strengthen policies that align to national minimums, IOM further stated that future studies should assess the specific behavioral and policy-related barriers to increasing physical activities in the school environment (IOM, 2013). Also, Turner et al. (2013) recommended examining teacher preferences to determine how they impact the implementation of recess policies.

This study addressed both of these areas by asking administrators and teachers for their salient beliefs in the areas of their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral controls regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy. In seeking the beliefs and perceptions of these stakeholders in this area, this study assessed the specific behavioral barriers to increasing physical activities in the school environment in the area of recess policy implementation.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was chosen for this study because it is an effective wany to determine the behavioral intent of stakeholders by seeking their salient beliefs in three areas: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The purpose of this elicitation study is to explore the beliefs and perceptions of school decision-makers regarding implementation of the district's written recess policy. Little is known about school administrators' and teachers' beliefs and perceptions of recess policy and how they implement those policies at the school level. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to examine the socially constructed nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and is well suited to this study as it explored an area that needs to be understood but has not been studied extensively (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In summary, while there are many studies centering on the benefits and presumed barriers to recess, and various studies focus on recess policy, no studies could be found which examine the behavioral intentions of site-based decision-makers regarding the implementation of recess policy. This study is designed to address that gap in the literature. By gaining a deeper understanding of the salient beliefs of these site-based administrators and teachers, interventions can be designed to increase the implementation of recess policy in this elementary environment. An increase in the effective implementation of recess policy has the potential to benefit young children both in and out of the classroom.

The following chapter details the chosen methodology and procedures for this research. It will detail the qualitative process which was employed for this elicitation study. Further, it will describe the survey instrument and how the theoretical lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was used in conducting this elicitation study.

# CHAPTER 3. METHODS

This chapter describes the research methods for this study. It begins with a description of and rationale for the research design, the research questions, an explanation of the role of the researcher, and a description of the participants and sample. The instruments and methods used to gather and analyze the data are provided. Assumptions and delimitations were previously addressed in Chapter 1.

## Research Design

The purpose of this elicitation study was to explore the salient beliefs of elementary administrators and teachers regarding recess policy implementation at a public elementary school in a district of Northeast Georgia. For this research, a qualitative approach was chosen to investigate and explain the beliefs and practices of site-based decision-makers with regards to implementation of the district's written recess policy. This study used the constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) to identify factors that influence the decisions of administrators and teachers when implementing or not implementing the district's written recess policy. Understanding the perceived barriers and enablers can assist policymakers and educational leaders in creating interventions that will increase recess policy implementation and, therefore, support students more effectively. This data may be used for conducting further TPB studies employing closed-ended surveys to further predict the behavior of site-based decision-makers (Downs & Hausenblas, 2005).

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What salient behavioral beliefs do administrators and teachers report relative to their attitudes regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy?

2. What salient normative beliefs do administrators and teachers report relative to their subjective norms regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy?

3. What salient control beliefs do administrators and teachers report relative to their perceived behavioral control regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy?

4. What demographic factors are associated with beliefs about implementing recess policy?

**The Researcher's Role**

I have been in the field as both a teacher and an administrator. As a practitioner in the field, I have been assigned to districts that had a written recess policy and those that did not. As an Early Childhood educator, I have believed and acted upon the belief that children need an unstructured break. I have observed the benefits that the practice of recess affords students. As an administrator, I became aware that all educators did not share this pedagogical view regarding the practice of recess and often observed that recess was reduced or eliminated by both teachers and administrators. Further, even when a written recess policy existed, I observed various misinterpretations of the policy. For example, a student might be assigned to a timeout bench during recess due to non-compliant behavior earlier in the day even with an explicit written policy stating that

recess may not be removed as a punitive measure. These experiences led me to question

the beliefs and perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding recess and recess

policy implementation. These questions and experiences led me to this study.

Further, I was employed at the chosen site in a district located in Northeast

Georgia and am familiar with the specific school's climate and faculty. I have not been

employed there for the past twenty months, and there has been staff turnover in that

timeframe. Also, I was not a supervisor for faculty at this site. These factors lessen the

potential for coercion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Revealing the personal background and

biases of the researcher is referred to as reflexivity. This is an important piece of

qualitative research as it may shape interpretations formed during a study (Creswell,

2014). This accommodated my personal experiences in the profession as well as an

acknowledgment of my familiarity with the research site and participants.

My role in this study was to examine the salient beliefs of site-based decision-

makers concerning the implementation of recess policy. As the researcher, I have

identified my personal background, experiences, and biases regarding recess policy

implementation. Throughout the process, I consulted with peers and professionals and

will continue to do so as part of an ongoing reflection process. I will protect the privacy

of all participants to maintain confidentiality in the data collection and analysis process.

**Participants and Sample**

While creating policy to protect the practice of recess is projected as an answer to

protecting the practice of recess (Bohn-Gettler & Pellegrini, 2014), Gov. Brian Kemp, of

Georgia, vetoed a bill in the spring of 2019 that would have done just that. He cited that

local control is needed for an issue such as this (Bluestein, 2019, May 10). Yet, even if this bill had passed, would the policy protecting the practice of recess be protected?

According to Bhuyan et al. (2010), policy is not always implemented with fidelity, therefore creating policy is only the first piece of this as implementation is not certain (IOM, 2013; Cooper et al., 2016). Site-based decision-makers such as principals, assistant principals, and teachers make these daily decisions based upon an array of factors – including their personal beliefs and values. Research is needed to better understand how the beliefs and perceptions of administrators and teachers impact how they make decisions for students and the practice of recess when a written policy is in place.

The general population of educators would not be suitable for this study and therefore must be refined to a target population that matches the context of the study (Asiamah et al., 2017; Bartlett et al., 2001; Creswell, 2003). According to Hatch (2002), the primary consideration in choosing a research setting is that the setting was able to provide data to answer the specified research questions. Further, this type of study relies on a subset of the population (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) to elicit beliefs that match the context. Having access to the site is important and is best gained through the gatekeeper (Hatch, 2002). While the State of Georgia does not have a policy regarding recess, the site chosen for this study is uniquely qualified in that it is housed in a district with a written recess policy that follows published national recommendations. The district's policy exceeds the State of Georgia's recommendation of 20 minutes for recess policy guidelines (Georgia Department of Public Health, n.d.).

Upon approval of the research proposal, International Review Board [IRB] approval was sought and granted through Auburn University. The specified public elementary school located in a K-12 district in Northeast Georgia had indicated a willingness to participate in the study. A letter confirming their participation was submitted with the IRB application. The school's current administrator gave preliminary written approval for data collection on this campus once IRB approval had been received. I have a copy of both the district approval and school level approval in hand. I also have the IRB approval documentation in hand.

After receiving IRB approval, an invitation was distributed electronically to the administrators and certified faculty of the specified public elementary school located in a district in Northeast Georgia. While quantitative research employs random or probability sampling, qualitative research focuses on non-probability or purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007). These participants were recruited using purposeful sampling. Criterion sampling, a purposive sampling technique, was chosen for this study. Criterion sampling is a technique by which participants meet select criteria. This method allows for the targeted selection of both sites and participants who understand and have experience with the area being studied (Creswell, 2002). This was an effective match for this study as all participants in this criterion sampling process were teachers and members of site-based leadership at a chosen site who share the experience of making site-based decisions on the implementation of recess policy. The criteria were as follows:

1. Principals, Assistant Principals, or Certified Teachers currently employed at specified public elementary school located in a K-12 district in Northeast Georgia.

2. Principals, Assistant Principals, or Certified Teachers who have the authority to implement/not implement the district's written recess policy.

3. Principals, Assistant Principals, or Certified Teachers willing to participate in the study.

Thus, the participant sample for this study was administrators and teachers employed at a specified public elementary school located in a K-12 district in Northeast Georgia that does have a district-wide policy in place. And while I was employed at this site for one year, participation in this study was voluntary. According to Drew et al. (2007). "Voluntariness in consent ensures each participant's ability to exercise the power of free choice without the intervention of force, fraud, deceit, duress, or other forms of coercion" (Drew et al., 2007, p. 79).

Compensation may be offered to acknowledge the time the volunteers provide in studies and is considered an encouragement for participation. However, the appropriateness for the compensation for the culture should be considered and the amount or value should not be the main consideration for participation (University of Toronto, n.d.). In this study, there was an offer of a prepaid Visa card valued at $10 for participants who completed the online instrument.

According to Dillman (2007), reward, trust, and costs are the three prevalent factors that affect the likelihood of participation in surveys. In this study, compensation was offered, and costs were not incurred for participation. Further, trust was established by asking few identifying demographic questions and assured participants that all information would be collected ethically and maintained confidentially.

Though quantitative studies depend on statistical techniques to estimate appropriate sample sizes, qualitative studies instead depend upon choosing the correct number of participants to reach a point where no new concepts are being elicited. This is known as saturation and is the goal in qualitative data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While Montaño and Kasprzy (2008) state that fifteen to twenty participants are the minimum for an elicitation study, Francis et al. (2004) and Godin & Kok (1996) state that a sample size of approximately 25 administrators and teachers is deemed appropriate for an elicitation study. According to Godin and Kok (1996), saturation is achieved at this number in an elicitation study. Further, Denzin & Lincoln (2005) maintained that a sample size of 30 to 50 participants was adequate for a small study while Patton (1990) maintained that there should be no set minimum.

Specifically, Holdsworth et al. (2015) employed an elicitation study using TPB to study procedures in the intensive care of medical facilities. This study targeted a sample size of 20 to 25 participants with an actual sample size of 22 completed surveys. They determined that the sample size was adequate for an elicitation study (Francis et al., 2004; Holdsworth et al., 2015)

For this study, participants were recruited using an emailed invitation. This invite was extended to fifty-one administrators and teachers at this site. Thirty-nine participants completed the survey for this study yet, two of the respondents were paraprofessionals and therefore their data were excluded. This accounted for a 72.55% response rate. These thirty-seven participants submitted 289 responses on the nine open-ended TPB-based questions for the data collection process thereby reaching saturation.

Since I was studying an area that has not been extensively researched, I trusted that the number of my potential participants was limited yet, adequate (Renzi, & Klobas, 2008). However, I examined this more fully by seeking out a measurable and evidence-based option. Turner-Bowker et al. (2018) conducted a study concerning evidence-based recommendations for determining sample sizes that effectively reach saturation. In this study, they compared 26 elicitation studies and measured at what point they obtained saturation. These studies ranged from a sample size of 10 to 43 (m=21). Their analysis determined that nearly 95% of all elicited themes were gathered once the 20th respondent participated. Further, they concluded that past the 25th respondent the increases were exceedingly small (Turner-Bowker et al., 2018).

Following the example of Turner-Bowker et al. (2018)., I divided my sample size (n=37) into quartiles. Next, I examined the data to determine how many unique themes the first 25% of the participants reported. Then, reexamined to determine how many new themes the next quartile added, and so on. With my sample size (n=37), at 50% I had reached 69% saturation, and this rose to 91% once 75% of my site-based decision-makers had completed the online survey. At 83% of my sample (the 31st participant), I reached 99.11% saturation. This process gave me confidence that though a small sample size was used for this study, saturation was reached by use of the following TPB survey tool.

**Instrumentation**

The questionnaire/survey was designed using *A Manual for Health Service Researchers* (Francis et al., 2004) and employed nine open-ended questions based on the three constructs of TPB: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. This elicitation study employed the TPB as a theoretical lens to report participants'

beliefs and perceptions regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is used in elicitation studies to determine the salient beliefs and perceptions of a population (Downs & Hausenblas, 2005). My chosen population is a site housed in a district that has a written recess policy which follows national recommendations for the practice of recess. These teachers and administrators are site-based decision-makers who are asked to implement the policy daily. Therefore, these stakeholders are the appropriate target population for this study.

According to Francis et al. (2004), this behavior of interest should be defined carefully and can be identified by using the Target, Action, Context, and Time (TACT) elements (Ajzen, 2006). The behavior of interest is defined using these four elements and is used when constructing effective TPB surveys (Oluka et al., 2014). In this study, the behavior of interest was the implementation of the district's written recess policy. Target referred to the district's written recess policy. Action signified the implementation of the policy. The context was the practice of recess and the time was implicitly recognized as during scheduled recess periods on this campus.

An elicitation study can be conducted using focus groups, individual interviews, or a questionnaire (Francis et al., 2004). For this study, a questionnaire/survey was employed targeting behavioral intentions in the area of implementing the district's written recess policy. The questionnaire was constructed using the prescribed format provided by Ajzen (2006) and Francis et al. (2004). Open-ended questions were utilized so that stakeholders could share their beliefs and perceptions without suggestion (Ajzen, 1991). This instrument format has been found to provide reliability in TPB studies (Francis et al., 2004). In this study, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral

control were the independent variables while behavioral intent was the dependent variable.

The result of this process was a survey instrument consisting of nine questions, broken into three sections, that address attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as related to the implementation of recess policy. The following section contains a summary of the district's written recess policy (see Appendix 1) and questions that address the three constructs of the TPB (Francis et al., 2004).

Demographic questions are needed in surveys to provide an accurate description of the research sample (Hughes, et al., 2016). And Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) stated that demographic variables should be included "if factors of this kind can further our understanding of the behaviour by providing insight into the origins of underlying beliefs" (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005, p. 200). However, they further state that these demographic factors will have only indirect effects on the behavioral intention (see Figure 2).

Demographic variables may be correlated with behaviors but have only an indirect influence and were considered to be distal variables (Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2008). Therefore, these distal variables were considered for this section of the survey to answer the 4th research question in this study: What demographic factors are associated with beliefs about implementing recess policy? This section asked stakeholders for information which included the years of experience in education as a whole and the years of experience in the specified K-12 district located in Northeast Georgia. Also, this section asked the grades that each participant has taught. These three questions were

multiple choice in format. The final two questions centered on the degrees obtained and the certifications held by these participants and were open-ended in nature.

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**Figure 2**

**Theory of Planned Behavior with Distal Variables**
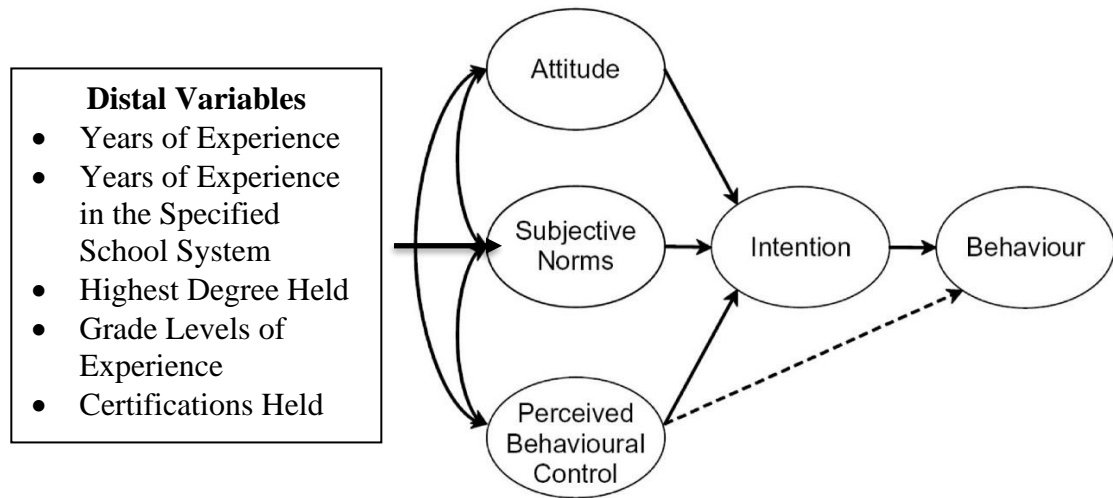


<div align="right">(Ajzen et al., 2007, pp. 6)</div>

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**Survey Instrument:**

**Part 1**

**[K-12 District located in Northeast Georgia] School System Recess Policy –**

Understanding that the <u>confidential</u> School System has a written recess policy, the following areas are stipulated:  recess is defined as an unstructured break of at least thirty minutes, cannot be denied to a student for academic reasons, and it can only be denied to a student for behavioral reasons under the direction of an administrator and must follow the guidelines of any existing IEP, 504 plan, etc.

**Behavioral Beliefs –**

Concerning the district's written recess policy, there might be advantages or disadvantages of implementing the policy.

1. What do you see as the ADVANTAGES of you implementing the district's written recess policy?

2. What do you see as the DISADVANTAGES of you implementing the district's written recess policy?

3. What else comes to mind when you think about implementing the district's written recess policy?

   **Normative Beliefs –**

   Concerning the district's written recess policy, there might be individuals or groups who would think you should or should not implement the policy.

4. Within or outside of your organization, who are the individuals, if any, who would APPROVE of you implementing the district's written recess policy?

5. Within or outside of your organization, who are the individuals, if any, who would DISAPPROVE of you implementing the district's written recess policy?

6. Is there anything else you associate with other people's views about implementing the district's written recess policy?

   **Control Beliefs –**

   Concerning the district's written recess policy, there might be circumstances that would make it easy or difficult to implement the policy.

7. What factors would make it EASY for you to implement the district's written recess policy?

8. What factors would make it DIFFICULT for you to implement the district's written recess policy?

**9.** What other issues, if any, come to mind when thinking about implementing the district's written recess policy?

**Part 2**

**Demographic Info**

Select ONLY ONE answer for each of the following questions.

1. How many years of experience do you have in education?

   ☐ ≤ 5

   ☐ 6-10

   ☐ 11-15

   ☐ 16-20

   ☐ ≥ 21

2. How many years of experience do you have in <u>confidential</u> School System?

   ☐ ≤ 5

   ☐ 6-10

   ☐ 11-15

   ☐ 16-20

   ☐ ≥ 21

3. What grades have you taught? (Mark all that apply.)

   ☐ Preschool

   ☐ Kindergarten

   ☐ Grade 1

☐ Grade 2

☐ Grade 3

☐ Grade 4

☐ Grade 5

☐ Other

4. What degree(s) and endorsement(s) do you hold?

_____

5. In what areas are you certified?

_____

**Data Collection**

This qualitative study centered on the online questionnaire employing Qualtrics as a primary data collection tool. Data collection began as participants completed the online survey. This study was conducted to more deeply understand teachers' behavioral, normative, and control beliefs and to gain insight into how these beliefs might influence their intentions regarding recess policy implementation. All data was collected ethically and will be maintained confidentially. The data will be handled ethically using AU Box and will be stored for a period of 18 months and then destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

This elicitation study was developed based on the constructs of the TPB to understand the salient beliefs of administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of recess policy. This study elicited open-ended responses to nine questions that centered on three constructs: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2006).

When the survey window closed, I downloaded the data from Qualtrics to Excel and created multiple spreadsheets of the banked data. An initial reading of the collected responses allowed me to have an overview of the participants' viewpoints. After a thorough review of the data, content analysis was conducted using a four-step process (Elo & Kyngas, 2008) by myself and a peer to ensure validity (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

These responses were coded using both open and axial coding. According to Charmaz (2006), coding is the essential link between the collected data and the meaning within these pieces. As the primary researcher, I chose to read through the data multiple times before deciding on a method of coding (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007). After doing so, descriptive coding was chosen as the open coding method. Descriptive coding is the process of summarizing the topic or theme of a passage into a concise phrase and then formulating to a categorized inventory (Saldaña, 2016). Next, these codes were studied again to identify subcodes or axial codes. Axial codes detail additional elements to further analyze the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This second round or third round assists in analyzing and interpreting the data more thoroughly (Wolcott, 1994).

The data collected was analyzed using qualitative methods. Elicitation studies employ qualitative methods to gather words that describe the actions, behaviors, and interactions of individuals (Roberts, 2010). The data collected was contained to each of the nine questions and coded by recurring words and phrases. These were then ranked from most cited to least commonly cited. The purpose of this elicitation study was to explore the causal relationships among the TPB constructs (Ajzen, 1991) regarding implementation of the district's written recess policy. Little is known about school

administrators' and teachers' beliefs and perceptions of recess policy and how they implement those policies at the school level. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to examine the socially constructed nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and is well suited to this study as it explored an area that needs to be understood but has not been studied extensively (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

First, both a peer reviewer and I individually examined the data. The data was carefully read line by line, with special attention to recurring words and phrases which may be interpreted as significant (Silverman, 2006). Using these prevalent codes, prominent categories were established under all nine questions in the TPB framework. Next, I compared my list of codes to those of my peer reviewer. Some codes were then expanded while others collapsed. Then, coding definition frames were constructed for each of the nine questions. This type of frame or table consists of a list of categories and the researcher's definition of each category (Smith, 2000). Last, the peer reviewer and I tabulated these separately and met to discuss and compare the tabulated results. Once agreement was met, significant themes were evident. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the data under each of the three variables. The tabulated responses were ranked from most frequently expressed to least frequently expressed (Ajzen 2006; Francis et al. 2004).

The process of creating a set of categories, and then calculating the frequency of coded words and phrases under each category is the summation of content analysis (Silverman, 2006). These most frequently cited codes will be further examined in the following chapter as the data is analyzed to determine barriers and enablers for effective recess policy implementation.

Next, the data was reanalyzed to answer the 4th research question:  What demographic factors are associated with beliefs about implementing recess policy?  For this step in the data analysis, the data was recoded as positive or negative beliefs from the respondents and data displays were created to create visual representations of the results.

While used more often in quantitative studies, data displays are an important piece of qualitative data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Slone, 2009; Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013) and part of the iterative process in drawing conclusions (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). According to Miles et al. (2014), data displays are an effective way for the researcher to organize the data coherently and also allows the reader to more fully visualize the processes that was followed to complete the data analysis. Further, displaying qualitative findings visually can demonstrate patterns and generate new questions (Sandelowski, 2000).

The following chapter presents the results of the beliefs and perceptions reported by site-based decision-makers in this study. By analyzing their responses, we can gain insight into their attitudes, perceived social pressure and perceived behavioral control that these site-based decision-makers report relative to how they implement the district's written recess policy.

# CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The purpose of this elicitation study was to elicit the beliefs and practices of elementary administrators and teachers regarding how they implement recess policy at a public elementary school located at a district located in Northeast Georgia. Qualitative methods were employed to answer the following four research questions centered on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991):

1. What salient behavioral beliefs do administrators and teachers report relative to their attitudes regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy?

2. What salient normative beliefs do administrators and teachers report relative to their subjective norms regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy?

3. What salient control beliefs do administrators and teachers report relative to their perceived behavioral control regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy?

4. What demographic factors are associated with beliefs about implementing recess policy?

Participant responses to the survey questions centered around the constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior and allowed me to gain an understanding of teachers' beliefs and perceptions when making decisions on implementing the district's written recess policy. This study is important because little research exists regarding the perspectives of

site-based decision-makers and what factors impact adherence when a written policy exists. This chapter will examine the data collected in this online survey.

**Demographics**

The sample for this elicitation study was a group of educators at an elementary school in a school district located in Northeast Georgia. They were current educators for the 2020-21 school term. All the invited participants were administrators or certified faculty who make site-based decisions on implementing the district's written recess policy. According to Hatch (2002), the primary consideration in choosing a setting for research is that the setting will be able to provide data to answer the specified research questions. While the State of Georgia does not have a policy regarding recess, the site chosen for this study is uniquely qualified in that it is housed in a district with a written recess policy.

Choosing an appropriate research site was a concern. This was due to the lack of priority which recess is given in our current K-5 environments. The Georgia Department of Public Health (n.d.). has a published model recess school document to help in guiding school districts in formulating policies for recess. This document includes recommendations from both The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans and NASPE. As mentioned earlier in this study, The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans [HHS, 2018] recommend that children and adolescents, ages 6-17, participate in a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. Further, this document cites NASPE's recommendation that elementary students receive 20 minutes of daily recess and 150 minutes of PE per week at the elementary level. However, finding

school districts which model their policies after the Georgia Department of Public Health guidance document research-based best practices was difficult.

In my research, I found only a few other districts in Georgia which had some version of a recess policy. Examples of these districts were as follows: Clarke, Fayette, Dougherty and Burke. However, these policies vary widely and did not meet the criteria for this research. For example, the policy for Clarke County School District states that students will be provided 15 minutes for recess but, they incorporate Playworks© and therefore this is a structured recess. Further, their policy discourages withholding recess as a behavioral consequence, but does not prohibit this as a punitive measure (Clarke County School District, 2017, January 12).

The Fayette County Board of Education policy (2016, March 23) includes recess as an option for physical activity on their wellness policy with no further guidelines. The wellness policy for Dougherty County School System (2012, May 30) only states that recess cannot be denied to make-up for instructional activities. And the policy for Burke County Public Schools (2014, June 10) states that recess will be made available daily with no other set guidelines. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, these districts were not considered.

**Responses**

The study had 37 participants who responded to all or part of the survey questions on the Qualtrics platform. All participants who began the survey completed it. As Table 1 demonstrates, all 37 respondents answered 6 of the 9 questions. Two questions regarding expanded views received 15 or 16 responses. There were 289 responses captured for these 9 survey questions (see Table 1).

The demographic section requested information about each respondent's years of experience in the field of education, years of experience within the current district, grades taught, degree and endorsements held, and areas of certification. Gender, race and other identifying data were not collected. These questions were not included in order for the participants to feel that their responses would remain anonymous. Also, this type of demographic data was not relevant to the purpose of the study.

Table 1

*Number of Participants per Question*

| Question | TPB | # |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Advantages | 37 |
| 2 | Disadvantages | 37 |
| 3 | Other issues associated with your view | 36 |
| 4 | Approve | 37 |
| 5 | Disapprove | 37 |
| 6 | Associated with others' views | 15 |
| 7 | Easy | 37 |
| 8 | Difficult | 37 |
| 9 | Other issues | 16 |
| | Total | 289 |

The first demographic question was in reference to a participant's total years of experience in education. The was a wide breadth of experience in evidence within this group of respondents from $\leq 5$ to $\geq 21$. Respondents reporting 6-10 years of total experience in education represented 30% of the data collection which was the largest group represented. One observation is that the participants were almost evenly split between $\leq$ 5-10 years of experience (49%) and 11-$\geq$ 21 (51%) (see Table 2).

**Table** *2*

*Years of Respondents' Experience in Education*

| Years of Experience | N | Percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ≤ 5 | 7 | 19% |
| 6-10 | 11 | 30% |
| 11-15 | 7 | 19% |
| 16-20 | 6 | 16% |
| ≥ 21 | 6 | 16% |

The next demographic question was in reference to a participant's total years of experience in the specified school district located in Northeast Georgia. Educators with five or less years of experience represented 46% of the data collection and that combined with respondents reporting 6-10 years of experience in the district (24%) account for 70% of the respondents in this study (see Table 3). This demonstrates that the majority are new to the specific school system and therefore new to this unique policy protecting the practice of recess.

*Table 3*

*Years of Respondents' Experience in this Specific School System*

| Years of Experience | N | Percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ≤ 5 | 17 | 46% |
| 6-10 | 9 | 24% |
| 11-15 | 7 | 19% |
| 16-20 | 1 | 3% |
| ≥ 21 | 3 | 8% |

Bar graphs were employed for data displays for the data analysis of the remaining demographic questions (see Figures 3-9). As discussed in the chapter on methods, data displays are an important visual tool in qualitative studies. Displaying qualitative findings

can visually demonstrate patterns and generate new questions (Sandelowski, 2000). The following figures are bar graphs which assisted with a deeper analysis of what demographic factors are associated with beliefs about implementing recess policy.

**Figure 3**

*Grade Levels of Respondents' Experience in Education*



| Preschool | Kindergarten | Grade 1 | Grade 2 | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | Grade 5 | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | 19 | 19 | 22 | 15 | 20 | 17 | 8 |
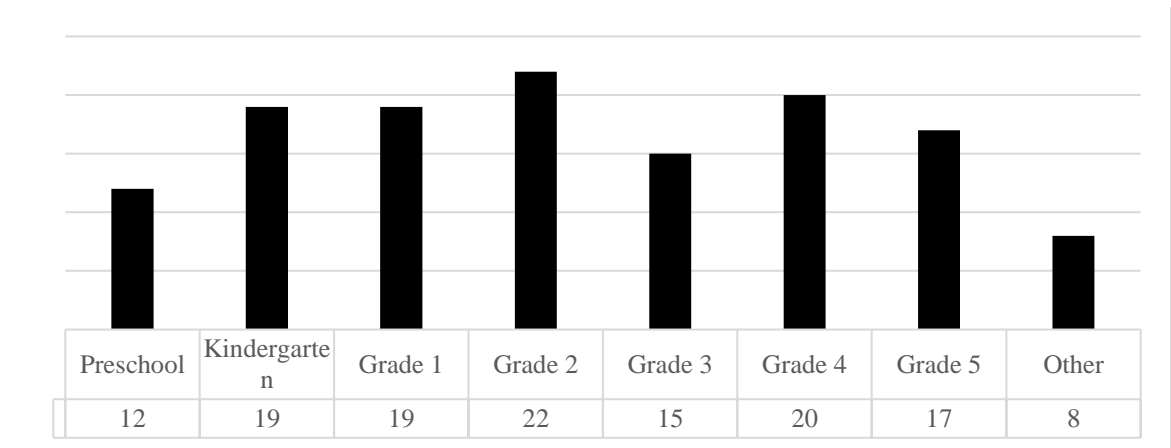
The question regarding the respondents' classroom experiences demonstrated these participants have had a wide array of grade level experiences. Only 8 respondents stated that they had classroom experience in grades above grade 5. Of the six grades represented at the research site (pre-k through grade 5), the responses ranged from the lowest number 12 (pre-k) to the highest number 22 (grade 2) however, the numbers were relatively even from kindergarten through grade 5 (see Figure 3).

Of the 37 respondents, 15 (40.54%) communicated that their highest earned degree was a bachelor's degree. There were 19 (51.35%) with a master's degree, 2 (5.41%) with a specialist degree and 1 (2.70%) with a doctoral degree (see Figure 4). One

respondent with a master's degree noted that a specialist degree was underway and would be competed soon.

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**Figure 4**

*Highest Degree Held by Respondents*

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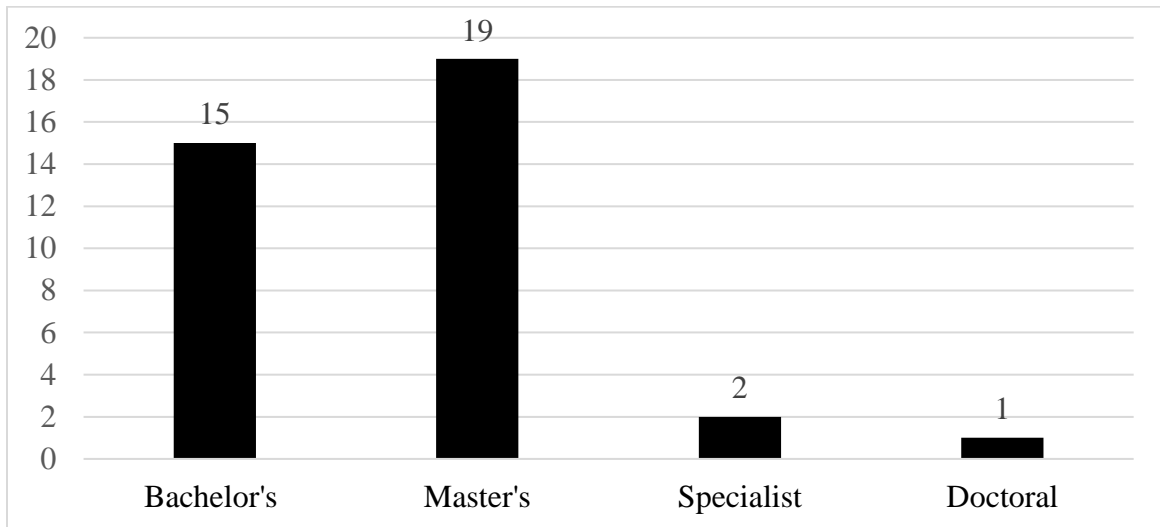


Figure 5 visually illustrates the many areas of certification represented at the research site. The thirty-seven respondents reported a total of 90 different areas of certifications. Early childhood education was the highest at 19 (51.35%) with elementary education just behind with 15 (40.54%). Twelve (32.43%) of these participants are certified in varying areas of special education. Though some districts include gifted education programs in their special education numbers, 8 (21.62%) respondents designated this endorsement separately from special education and thus were counted accordingly (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5**
**Areas of Certification Held by Respondents**
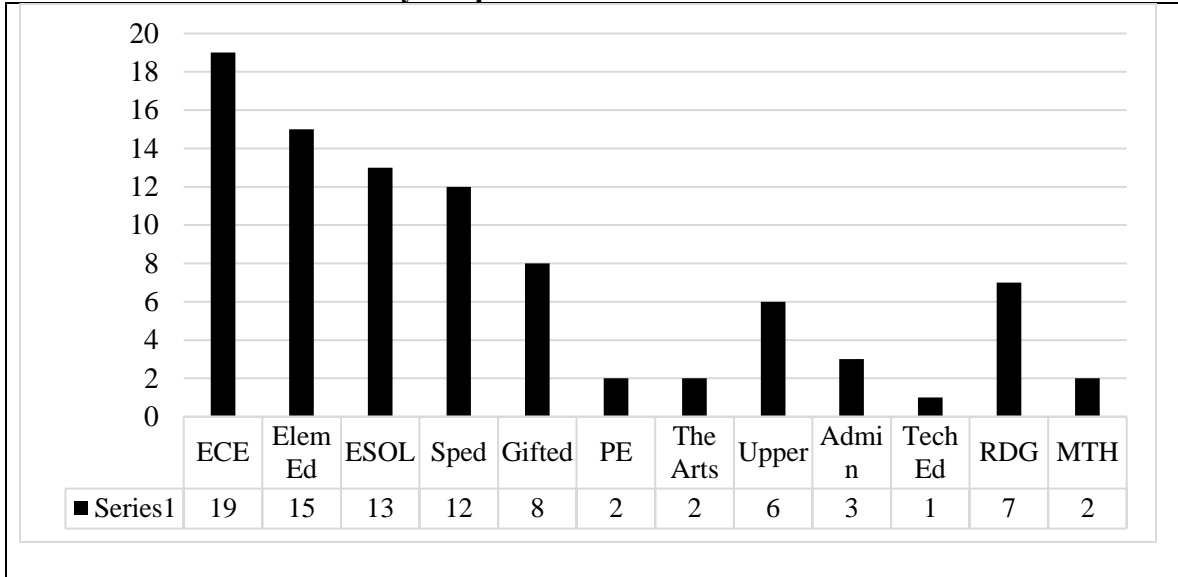


| Abbreviation | Area of Certification |
|---|---|
| ECE | Early Childhood Education |
| Elem Ed | Elementary Education |
| ESOL | English as a Second Language (K-12) |
| Sped | Special Education |
| Gifted | Gifted Education |
| PE | Physical Education |
| The Arts | Visual Arts and Music (K-12) |
| Upper | Middle Grades and Secondary |
| Admin | Administration (K-12) |
| Tech Ed | Technology Education (K-12) |
| RDG | Reading (K-12) |
| MTH | Math (K-12) |

Thirteen (35.14%) of these stakeholders reported an endorsement for English as a Second Language (ESOL) (see Figure 5). I found this to be of interest as the current school population is 750 students with 98 ESOL students. This site is allocated 2.5 teaching units for English as a Second Language (ESOL) instruction.

The data revealed that the participants were almost evenly divided for less/more experienced in the field while also revealing that 70.27% of the participants are new to

the school district and therefore new to the policy protecting the practice of recess. Other demographic questions demonstrated that the faculty is experienced in many grades represented at this site and hold a wide variety of certifications and endorsements (see Figures 3 and 5).

**Theory of Planned Behavior Questionnaire**

As previously noted, thirty-seven teachers and administrators provided 289 responses to the 9 open-ended questions used in TPB studies (see Table 1). The TPB was designed to both predict and describe human behavior in certain situations (Ajzen, 1991). This study was constructed upon three variables: behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs. The study's aim was to survey site-based decision-makers to gain an understanding of personal attitudes towards implementing the district's written recess policy, perceived social pressure towards implementing the district's written recess policy, and perceived behavioral control towards implementing the district's written recess policy. A qualitative analysis was conducted on the survey results.

The coded data was placed in a categorized inventory and grouped by theme for each individual question. These themes were then ranked from most frequently cited to the least frequently cited for each of the nine questions. Next, they were compiled to create nine separate tables for the nine matching survey questions. Definition tables were also created for each so as to explain the descriptive coding employed for this study. The following sections break down the data derived from each of the TPB questions.

Consistent with the procedures for an elicitation study, codable phrases were counted as individual pieces of data captured within the responses of submitted passages answering questions on the survey tool. While 37 participants submitted 289 responses,

these were coded and sub coded for a total of 572 individual pieces of data, Table 4

demonstrates the descriptive statistics for responses (beliefs) elicited by the nine open-

ended questions. This data table demonstrates a range of 18 codable responses on

question #6 to 124 codable responses on question #1 (see Table 4). In the number of

mean responses to these questions, the data demonstrates that 1.05 responses were the

average given for question #6 while the average number of codable responses for

question #1 was 3.35 (see Table 4). Further, the data table demonstrates that some

respondents listed five or more responses. This implies that respondents were not

constrained by the survey format (Sutton et al., 2004).

*Table 4*

*Descriptive Statistics for Responses (Beliefs) Elicited by the Nine Open-Ended Questions*

| Q | TPB | Total Responses | Mean Responses per Person | # of Respondents who Shared 5 or More Beliefs | % of Respondents who Shared 5 or More Beliefs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Advantages | 124 | 3.35 | 13 | 35.14% |
| 2 | Disadvantages | 78 | 2.11 | 0 | 0% |
| 3 | Other associated with | 76 | 2.11 | 2 | 5.56% |
| 4 | Approve | 77 | 2.08 | 3 | 8.11% |
| 5 | Disapprove | 61 | 1.69 | 0 | 0% |
| 6 | Other associated with | 18 | 1.05 | 0 | 0% |
| 7 | Easy | 60 | 1.62 | 1 | 2.70% |
| 8 | Difficult | 55 | 1.49 | 0 | 0% |
| 9 | Other issues that come to | 34 | 2.27 | 3 | 20% |

Note: Shaded boxes represent those with the most/least responses.

Silverman (2006) stated that qualitative research is conducted to hear the

participant's voice and Montaño and Kasprzyk (2008) stated that the goal is to capture

the language of the participants. As part of an elicitation study, my goal was to elicit the

salient responses of these participants concerning their beliefs and perceptions regarding the implementation of recess policy. In collecting the data for this study, I discovered rich and illustrative quotes from many respondents. Including authentic quotes lends to the credibility of the data analysis (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Examples will be included in the following sections. These are interjected to demonstrate that though a small study, the data is valuable in determining the behavioral intent of these site-based decision-makers.

**Attitudes**

The first section of the survey focused on three questions designed to elicit the salient beliefs of the participants with regards to their attitude towards implementing the district's written recess policy. An individual's attitudes on a topic are determined by their salient beliefs on that topic (Ajzen, 1991). There were 278 pieces of data gathered in this first section covering the following three questions:

1. What do you see as the ADVANTAGES of you implementing the district's written recess policy?

2. What do you see as the DISADVANTAGES of you implementing the district's written recess policy?

3. What else comes to mind when you think about implementing the district's written recess policy?

The following three sections will cover advantages (see Tables 5 and 6), disadvantages (see Tables 7 and 8) and other views related to attitude (see Tables 9 and 10).

*Advantages*

In Table 5, 17 codes were assigned to 124 responses. Table 6 provides definitions of all codes listed on Table 5. Participant responses show a total of 62.16% expressed a salient belief that implementing the district's recess policy is advantageous because it "provides a mental break". One respondent stated, "the recess policy designates time for students to have a break from academics." Another participant stated, "I believe that children need the time during the day to have an unstructured break-they are working so hard during the day, much of it sitting down, and they need to play."

Participants also indicated that the policy making the practice of recess a "non-negotiable" (54.05%) was an advantage. One participant stated, "There is no margin for error. It cannot be subjective for teachers to do as they please and create their own policies.". Another respondent stated, "It holds people accountable – it requires that the schools make time in their schedules for every class to have a minimum amount of time spent on recess. And it requires that teachers also make time in their days for their students to spend on recess."

The third most frequently coded response was "socialization" (40.54%). Examples from respondents include:

- "Children need a break and some socialization."

- "Students have the opportunity to interact with each other to build social skills."

**Table 5**

*Coding Frame for "Advantages" [Q1]*
*Behavioral Beliefs – Attitude*

| Item Codes/Advantages | Response Count | Response Percent |
|---|---|---|
| a mental break | 23 | 62.16% |
| non-negotiable | 20 | 54.05% |
| socialization | 15 | 40.54% |
| burn extra energy | 12 | 32.43% |
| unstructured time | 11 | 29.73% |
| exercise | 10 | 27.03% |
| play | 6 | 16.22% |
| fresh air/sunshine/get outdoors | 6 | 16.22% |
| post recess more productive | 5 | 13.51% |
| look forward to/motivator | 3 | 8.11% |
| be kids | 2 | 5.41% |
| focus | 2 | 5.41% |
| imagination/creativity | 2 | 5.41% |
| no outdoor opportunity at home | 2 | 5.41% |
| reduces behavioral issues | 2 | 5.41% |
| emotional benefits | 2 | 5.41% |
| benefits teachers | 1 | 2.70% |

The next most frequently coded response was "burn extra energy" (32.43%) and

provided overlap with the prior mentioned "socialization" in the following response:

"Students in elementary grades need a break to burn energy and learn social cues and

develop relationships."

"Unstructured time" (29.73%) was cited as an advantage to differentiate from the

practice of structured recess events while the premise that recess offers students

opportunities for "exercise" (27.03%) were also highly ranked advantages for these

stakeholders. Ranking as less important to these respondents were codes such as "post

recess more productive" (13.51%), students "having no outdoor opportunities at home"

(5.41%) and the "emotional" benefits for students (5.41%).

**Table 6**

*Definition of Coding Frame for "Advantages" [Q1]*
*Behavioral Beliefs – Attitude*

| Item Codes/Advantages | Definition |
|---|---|
| a mental break | Recess is needed as a mental break. |
| Non-negotiable | Policy makes recess non-negotiable. |
| Socialization | Recess is needed as time for socialization. |
| Burn extra energy | Recess is needed as time to burn extra energy. |
| Unstructured time | The unstructured break is discretionary for students. |
| Exercise | Recess is needed as time for exercise. |
| Play | Recess is needed as time to play. |
| Fresh air/sunshine/get outdoors | Recess is needed for access to outdoor play, fresh air and/or sunshine. |
| Post recess more productive | Post-recess students are more productive on assigned tasks. |
| Look forward to/motivator | Students anticipate recess. |
| Be kids | Recess is needed as time to be a kid. |
| Focus | Recess improves focus. |
| Imagination/creativity | Recess promotes imagination/creativity. |
| No outdoor opportunity at home | Students may have limited/no access to outdoor play at home. |
| Reduces behavioral issues | Recess reduces behavioral issues in classroom. |
| Emotional benefits | Recess supports emotional regulation. |
| Benefits teachers | Teachers benefit from the break of recess, also. |

*Disadvantages*

In Table 7, 9 codes were assigned to 78 responses. Table 8 provides definitions of

all codes listed on Table 7. Participant responses demonstrate that the majority of these

respondents believe that it is a disadvantage that the policy is too rigid. The following

codes reflect the subcodes of that belief: "negative behavior" (67.57%), "teachers want

authority" (56.76%), "unfinished classwork" (45.95%), "time for

instruction/remediation" (10.81%), "increase for positive motivation" (8.11%), and

"punitive measure" (5.41%) (see Table 7).

**Table 7**

*Coding Frame for "Disadvantages" [Q2]*
*Behavioral Beliefs – Attitude*

| Item Codes/Disadvantages | Response Count | Response Percent |
|---|---|---|
| negative behavior | 25 | 67.57% |
| teachers want authority | 21 | 56.76% |
| unfinished classwork | 17 | 45.95% |
| time for instruction/remediation | 4 | 10.81% |
| no disadvantage | 4 | 10.81% |
| increase for positive motivation | 3 | 8.11% |
| punitive measure | 2 | 5.41% |
| injuries | 1 | 2.70% |
| bullying | 1 | 2.70% |
| Note: Policy too rigid | | |

Participants stated that the policy was too rigid with regards to students displaying

negative behaviors. Responses to the question of the DISADVANTAGES of

implementing the district's written recess policy include:

- "Not being able to use recess time as a consequence if students are using class

  time as recess."

- "Students that chose to play during instructional time would have to make up

  that in school play time for outside play time."

Many of the responses stated that the teachers would prefer to have this authority

rather than it being an administrative decision. Examples of these responses include:

- "Teachers do not have any way of using recess as a source to discipline

  students. Students do have 30 minutes, which is much longer than other

places, so in my opinion, teachers should be allowed to take the students age as time they could miss from recess. For example, if a student is 5 and is struggling to behave in the classroom, they can lose 5 minutes of recess."

- "With the current BCSS recess policy, this is not an option for the classroom teacher to use. Only admin has the authority to use recess as a consequence, thus taking away part of the classroom teacher's power."

- "I think that one disadvantage is that only administration can take away recess. It would be helpful for classroom teachers to be able to have losing recess as a consequence for undesirable behavior."

- "Because it is not allowed in our district, we find ourselves in a predicament with constant behavior problems in the classroom with no consequences and no follow through on the part of many."

- "Putting mandates on schedules that are written from a district wide standpoint does not allow flexibility or individuality that should both be pillars in all classrooms."

- "Students look forward to recess. One disadvantage would be that if we are unable to take time away from recess, there are not many other options for reinforcing behavior expectations in the classroom."

- "Teachers literally have nothing to grab onto for consequences for students."

Further on behavior, respondents stated that the belief that recess should be able to be used a "punitive measure" for negative behaviors. Examples included:

- "Having students walk a lap on the sidewalk can be a motivating factor."

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- "Five minutes can be walking the track."

Other than behavior issues, respondents stated that implementing the recess policy was a disadvantage when it came to "unfinished classwork" and additional needed "time for instruction/remediation". Some respondents stated the following:

- "Work sent home to be completed rarely comes back. With the fast pace of instruction, we have little time to get students to finish incomplete work during the school day."

- "It also requires students to stop something they may really be into in the classroom – like maybe a meaningful classroom debate that came up in social studies or reading, or an experiment in science that is taking longer than expected because the students developed extra hypothesis to test."

While the above codes reflect that the policy is believed to be disadvantageous due to the need for reductions in recess for the reasons cited, 8.11% stated that the policy is too rigid due to the inability to "increase for positive motivation". Though the current policy states that recess will be scheduled for at least 30 minutes (see Appendix 1), currently extensions of that time allotment are not being exercised. This could be due to expectations communicated from site-based administration due to logistical issues such as restricted outdoor space and/or equipment. Or this could be due to a lack of communication district-wide on extension options at either teacher or administrative level.

Of the remaining responses, other disadvantages noted were concern for injuries and/or bullying issues. And only 10.81% stated that there was "no disadvantage" to implementing the district's written recess policy.

**Table 8**

*Definition of Coding Frame for "Disadvantages" [Q2]*
*Behavioral Beliefs – Attitude*

| Item Codes/Disadvantages | Definition |
|---|---|
| negative behavior | Recess should be reduced for negative behavior. |
| Teachers want authority | Teachers want the authority to make decisions on recess. |
| Unfinished classwork | Recess should be reduced for unfinished classwork. |
| Time for instruction/remediation | Recess should be reduced for instruction/remediation. |
| No disadvantage | No disadvantages to the policy. |
| Increase for positive motivation | Teachers aren't able to increase recess for positive behavior. |
| Punitive measure | Recess time should be used for punitive measure (ex. running laps for behavior infractions). |
| Injuries | Injuries occur at recess. |
| Bullying | Bullying occurs at recess. |
| Note: Policy too rigid | |

*Other Views Related to Attitude*

In Table 9, 26 codes were assigned to 76 responses. Table 10 provides definitions of all codes listed on Table 9. This question asked respondents for their salient beliefs in the broader area of other views related to their attitudes regarding implementing the district's recess policy. There were areas which overlapped for both advantages and disadvantages (see Tables 9 and 10). There were also other beliefs which were stated that did not fit into either category.

Areas which overlapped with advantages to implementing the recess policy were "break" (16.67%), "unstructured" (11.11%), "socialization" (11.11%), "play/creativity" (8.33%), "outdoors" (2.78%), and "assists students with behavior issues" (2.78%). Areas which overlapped with disadvantages were "teachers want authority" (19.44%),

"negative behavior" (16.67%), "increase for positive motivation" (8.33%), "unfinished classwork" (5.56%) and "punitive measure" (2.78%). These areas are shaded in Tables 9 and 10 and demonstrate that respondents felt strongly about these issues as they revisited them in responding to question 3.

This third question was incorporated to move beyond the constraints of advantage and disadvantages only. As hoped, it elicited a variety of new beliefs from the participants. The data showed that 16.67% supported the policy as written while 5.56% stated that they would like to see the district policy reflect the less restrictive state policy on recess. Participants stated concern that the 30-minute recess at this site is not truly that due to transition times. This accounted for 11.11%. Also, 8.33% of the respondents stated that the policy was not reflective of practice at the site while 2.78% stated that teachers have misused authority regarding recess policy implementation. Participants stated:

- "Being new to the district, I think it is great that the county supports recess. Coming from a county where recess was not a priority or even part of a daily schedule, I welcome this policy."

- "I believe the BCSS recess policy should match the state of GA policy, which states that is a student has had PE that day, recess is not a requirement, thus allowing a teacher to use recess as a motivational factor."

- "I think that it is important to be mindful of and make sure that students are getting their full 30 minutes. If recess time is from 12:00-12:30 and you wait until 12:00 to line up and then walk out and you want to be back in your classroom at 12:30 so you line up at 12:25 then the 30-minute recess just went to 20 minutes."

- "I know teachers who have misused that power."

- "The length of time given to students to play, talk, and release energy seems to be quite small. I know academics is our main concern, but we're cultivating the future of our world which will require more of them than academic skills."

It is also of interest that two respondents gave five or more responses to this survey question. As cited earlier in this study, this implies that respondents were not constrained by the survey format (Sutton, et al., 2004). For example, one participant stated, "It is well researched that physical activity does promote student academics. Unstructured play allows for creativity to flourish and social connections to be made with peers."

**Table 9**

*Coding Frame for "Other Views Related to Attitude" [Q3]*
*Behavioral Beliefs – Attitude*

| Item Codes/Other | Response Count | Response Percent |
|---|---|---|
| **teachers want authority** | **7** | **19.44%** |
| support for policy | 6 | 16.67% |
| break | 6 | 16.67% |
| **negative behavior** | **6** | **16.67%** |
| unstructured | 4 | 11.11% |
| not a true 30 min/transitions | 4 | 11.11% |
| socialization | 4 | 11.11% |
| play/creativity | 3 | 8.33% |
| not reflective of practice | 3 | 8.33% |
| **increase for positive motivation** | **3** | **8.33%** |
| indoor options needed | 2 | 5.56% |
| state law | 2 | 5.56% |
| physical activity | 2 | 5.56% |
| **unfinished classwork** | **2** | **5.56%** |
| equipment safety | 1 | 2.78% |
| build relationships with teachers | 1 | 2.78% |
| supports academics | 1 | 2.78% |
| common understanding | 1 | 2.78% |
| beneficial for students | 1 | 2.78% |
| supervision | 1 | 2.78% |
| rotating supervision | 1 | 2.78% |
| outdoors | 1 | 2.78% |
| **punitive measure** | **1** | **2.78%** |
| teachers have misused authority | 1 | 2.78% |
| assists students w behavior issues | 1 | 2.78% |

Note: Overlap with advantages
**Overlap with disadvantages**

**Table 10**

*Definition of Coding Frame for "Other Views Related to Attitude" [Q3]*
*Behavioral Beliefs – Attitude*

| Item Codes/Advantages | Definition |
|---|---|
| **teachers want authority** | **Teachers want the authority to make decisions on recess.** |
| Support for policy | The policy is supported as is. |
| Break | Recess is needed as a mental break. |
| **Negative behavior** | **Recess should be reduced for negative behavior.** |
| Unstructured | The unstructured break is discretionary time for students. |
| Not a true 30 min/transitions | Due to transitions, the break is less than the policy states. |
| Socialization | Recess is needed as time for socialization. |
| Play/creativity | Recess is needed as time to play and promotes imagination/creativity. |
| Not reflective of practice | All teachers are not following the policy as written. |
| **Increase for positive motivation** | **Teachers are not able to increase recess for positive behavior.** |
| Indoor options needed | Indoor recess options are needed due to inclement weather. |
| State law | The policy does not match state law. |
| Physical activity | Recess is needed as time for physical activity. |
| **Unfinished classwork** | **Recess should be reduced for unfinished classwork.** |
| Equipment safety | Equipment should be inspected regularly for safety issues. |
| Build relationships with teachers | Recess can be a time for students to build relationships with teachers. |
| Supports academics | Recess supports academic success. |
| Common understanding | The policy provides all stakeholders with a common understanding of the expectation. |
| Beneficial for students | Recess is beneficial for students. |
| Supervision | Proper supervision is needed. |
| Rotating supervision | Teachers would like to rotate supervision duties. |
| Outdoors | Outdoor play is viewed as beneficial. |
| **Punitive measure** | **Recess time should be used for punitive measure (ex. running laps for behavior infractions).** |
| Teachers have misused authority | If teachers were allowed authority over recess decisions, they may misuse that authority. |
| Assists students w behavior issues | Recess reduces behavioral issues in classroom. |

Note: Overlap with advantages
**Overlap with disadvantages**

**Subjective Norms**

The second section of the survey focused on three questions designed to elicit the salient beliefs of the participants with regards to their perceived social pressure towards implementing the district's written recess policy (Ajzen, 1991). There were 156 pieces of data gathered in this second section covering the following three questions:

1. Within or outside of your organization, who are the individuals, if any, who would APPROVE of you implementing the district's written recess policy?

2. Within or outside of your organization, who are the individuals, if any, who would DISAPPROVE of you implementing the district's written recess policy?

3. Is there anything else you associate with other people's views about implementing the district's written recess policy?

The following three sections will cover approve (see Tables 11 and 12), disapprove (see Tables 13 and 14) and other views related to approve and disapprove (see Tables 15 and 16).

*Approval*

In Table 11, 13 codes were assigned to 77 responses. Table 12 provides definitions of all codes listed on Table 11. Participant responses show a total of 51.35% expressed a salient belief that parents would approve of the recess policy being implemented. One respondent stated, "I think parents for the most part believe recess should not be taken away."  Another participant stated, "Maybe parents of students with ADHD would want their child to be provided the extra 30 minutes to burn energy."

The second highest coded response was "teachers and staff members" (37.84%) followed closely by "administration" (32.43%). "All stakeholders" (18.92%) and "most

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stakeholders" (10.81%) would combine for fourth had the verbiage not divided them in coding see Table 11). One respondent stated, "I would think that people who know about educating the whole child would approve of the recess policy. They would agree that students need unstructured break time. I would think that mental health professionals would definitely approve."

**Table 11**

*Coding Frame for "Approve" [Q4]*
*Normative Beliefs – Perceived Social Pressure*

| Item Codes/Other | Response Count | Response Percent |
|---|---|---|
| parents | 19 | 51.35% |
| teachers and staff members | 14 | 37.84% |
| administration | 12 | 32.43% |
| all stakeholders | 7 | 18.92% |
| students | 6 | 16.22% |
| district office/boe | 6 | 16.22% |
| most stakeholders | 4 | 10.81% |
| medical community | 3 | 8.11% |
| community members | 2 | 5.41% |
| people who enjoy strict schedules | 1 | 2.70% |
| the media | 1 | 2.70% |
| whole child | 1 | 2.70% |
| people who do not go into classrooms | 1 | 2.70% |

Two other responses of interest were as follows:

- "Students, parents, teachers and admin. We all see the need for it, sometimes it is just hard to implement the full 30 minutes with everything else we have to do in a day. "

- "I think parents would greatly approve of this policy, people who are not in the classroom day in and out, and community members. Obviously, within the school district, the board members would approve, as well. Again, anyone who does not

go in and function in a classroom daily would say that this plan is perfect on

paper."

**Table 12**

*Definition of Coding Frame for "Approve" [Q4]*
*Normative Beliefs – Perceived Social Pressure*

| Item Codes/Advantages | Definition |
|---|---|
| parents | parents of students in the district |
| teachers and staff members | teachers and staff members in the district |
| administration | members of administration at the school level |
| all stakeholders | all stakeholders within the district |
| students | students in the district |
| | members of leadership at the district |
| district office/boe | office and members of the board of education |
| most stakeholders | most stakeholders within the district |
| medical community | physicians, mental health experts, etc. |
| community members | members of the community within the district |
| people who enjoy strict schedules | stakeholders who enjoy strict schedules |
| the media | members of the media reporting issues within the community |
| whole child | stakeholders who understand educating the whole child |
| people who do not go into classrooms | stakeholders who do not go into classrooms |

*Disapproval*

In Table 13, 12 codes were assigned to 61 responses. Table 14 provides

definitions of all codes listed on Table 13. Participant responses show a total of 41.67%

expressed a salient belief that teachers and staff would disapprove of the recess policy

being implemented. This was interesting since in the previous question, respondents

stated that 37.84% believed that teachers and staff would approve of their implementing

the policy (see Table 11). And on this current survey question 19.44% stated that "no

one" would disapprove of the implementation of this policy. As evidence of this divide, participants stated:

- "I believe teachers do not really approve of the policy. I can remember when I was in school and we did not do our work or acted out, the teacher would take our recess away (we always were allowed at least 10 minutes of play time)."

- "Teachers who may take advantage of too much time away from students that misbehave in class."

- "I don't think all teachers agree with the policy, as I still see and hear about students sitting out."

- I don't know of anyone who would disapprove of the policy. Some teachers may not love it, but I believe we all understand the importance of children having free and unstructured time to play.

- "Many teachers disapprove of this policy. It was leverage against a student that was powerful. I also had some parents tell me they would like me to take the child's recess for various reasons."

"Behavior" (33.33%) for this coding process is defined as people who believe that recess should be reduced as a consequence of negative behavior and is cited by many of the respondents in their reasons that "teachers and staff" or "parents" would disapprove of the policy being implemented. "Students" (5.56%) were also cited as those who might disapprove (see Table 13). One respondent stated, "Students who have completed work and had no or very little behavior issues see the students that haven't completed work and have behavior issues being rewarded with recess time, IE: no consequence for behaviors."

**Table 13**

*Coding Frame for "Disapprove" [Q5]*
*Normative Beliefs – Perceived Social Pressure*

| Item Codes/Other | Response Count | Response Percent |
|---|---|---|
| teachers and staff | 15 | 41.67% |
| behavior | 12 | 33.33% |
| parents | 11 | 30.56% |
| no one | 7 | 19.44% |
| academics | 5 | 13.89% |
| administration | 3 | 8.33% |
| students | 2 | 5.56% |
| uncodable | 2 | 5.56% |
| recess must be earned | 1 | 2.78% |
| oppose physical movement | 1 | 2.78% |
| oppose unstructured | 1 | 2.78% |
| the media | 1 | 2.78% |

Another interesting discovery in the data was that participant responses show a total of 30.56% expressed a salient belief that parents would disapprove of the recess policy being implemented. This was of interest since in the previous question, respondents stated that 51.35% believed that parents would approve of their implementing the policy (see Table 11). As evidence of this secondary divide, participants stated:

- "To a certain extent, I feel that there are some parents who would not approve to the implementation of the district's written recess policy; especially with students who may have misbehavior conduct."

- "Parents of students with a behavior incident."

- "Some parents may disapprove of the policy as it is written because they think children should have more recess time during the school day."

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- "I feel that some parents may have a draw back to the recess policy since it is only 30 minutes and they may feel that their child(ren) may need more time to for recess (especially in the younger grades)."

**Table 14**

*Definition of Coding Frame for "Disapprove" [Q5]*
*Normative Beliefs – Perceived Social Pressure*

| Item Codes/Advantages | Definition |
|---|---|
| teachers and staff | teachers and staff members in the district |
| behavior | people who believe that recess should be reduced as a consequence of negative behavior |
| parents | parents of students in the district |
| no one | no stakeholders would disapprove of my implementation of the policy. |
| Academics | people who believe that recess should be reduced due to academic concerns |
| administration | members of administration at the school level |
| students | students in the district who believe that all students do not deserve recess due to behavior |
| uncodable | Response was not pertinent to the question/uncodable. |
| Recess must be earned | people who believe that recess should be earned |
| oppose physical movement | people who oppose students being allowed physical movement |
| oppose unstructured | people who oppose students being unstructured recess |
| the media | members of the media reporting issues within the community |

Two responses were deemed "uncodable". One participant stated, "There needs to be a system in place on who is making the decisions with clear expectations and protocol." Since this did not answer the question of who would disapprove of policy implementation, it was deemed uncodable. Another participant stated, "all stakeholders". Since this respondent used "all" on the prior question (Q4) regarding who would approve

of the policy being implemented, I inferred that this question was misunderstood and therefore it was coded as uncodable, as well.

***Other Related to Approval and Disapproval***

In Table 15, 14 codes were assigned to 18 responses. Table 16 provides definitions of all codes listed on Table 15. This question asked respondents for their salient beliefs in the broader area of other views of those who might approve and disapprove regarding implementing the district's recess policy. There were areas which overlapped for both advantages and disadvantages (see Tables 15 and 16). These areas are shaded in Tables 15 and 16 and demonstrate that respondents felt strongly about these issues as they revisited them in responding to question 6. There were also other beliefs which were stated that did not fit into either category.

One area which overlapped in the area of those who would approve of implementing the recess policy were "district office more willing" (6.67%). One respondent stated, "I feel that the people that work at the PDC would be more willing to implement the policy." However, two areas overlapped for those who would disapprove of implementing the recess policy. These included "consequence" (26.67%) and "academic" (6.67%). A participant stated, "I do believe that students should have responsibility for their actions in class and may need to miss 3-5 minutes of recess to catch up on missed work due to their behavior."

There were two responses that were considered uncodable and twenty-two of the survey respondents either stated that they had nothing to add or chose to leave the question blank. For example, one of the uncodable responses was in reference to middle school practices.

**Table 15**

*Coding Frame for "Other Factors Related to Others' Views" [Q6]*
*Normative Beliefs – Perceived Social Pressure*

| Item Codes/Other | Response Count | Response Percent |
|---|---|---|
| **consequence** | **4** | **26.67%** |
| uncodable | 2 | 13.33% |
| build relations w teacher | 1 | 6.67% |
| socialize | 1 | 6.67% |
| approve and disapprove | 1 | 6.67% |
| cleaning equipment | 1 | 6.67% |
| **academic** | **1** | **6.67%** |
| aware of policy | 1 | 6.67% |
| punitive | 1 | 6.67% |
| extend instructional day | 1 | 6.67% |
| not a full 30 minutes/transitions | 1 | 6.67% |
| district office more willing | 1 | 6.67% |
| hold people accountable | 1 | 6.67% |
| classroom experience | 1 | 6.67% |

Note: Overlap with approve
**Overlap with disapprove**

This third question in the area was to move beyond the constraints of advantage and disadvantages only. It did elicit a variety of new beliefs from the participants however, of the ten codes measured, each represented 6.67%. They include such areas as "approve and disapprove", "aware of policy", "punitive", and "not a full 30 minutes/transitions". Examples of these are as follows:

- "As with any policy(ies) there will be people who approve and disapprove."

- "As far as the written policy, I do not think that some parents and/or students are aware of the policy. Also, I think there may be some "gray" areas of what is considered taking away recess, such as walking laps, which is active, but still structured because it is required."

- "When making the schedule for the classrooms, make sure that there is enough time before and after the recess block that students are able to get their full 30 minutes outside."

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**Table 16**

*Definition of Coding Frame for "Other Factors Related to Others' Views" [Q6] Normative Beliefs – Perceived Social Pressure*

| Item Codes/Advantages | Definition |
|---|---|
| **Consequence** | **Recess should be reduced as a behavioral consequence.** |
| Uncodable | Response was not pertinent to the question/uncodable. |
| Build relations w teacher | Recess can be a time for students to build relationships with teachers. |
| Socialize | Recess can be a time for increased socialization. |
| Approve and disapprove | Some approve and some disapprove of the policy. |
| Cleaning equipment | Cleaning equipment is required after groups and is not being completed. |
| **Academic** | **Recess should be reduced if more time is needed for academics.** |
| Aware of policy | Some stakeholders are not aware of the policy. |
| Punitive | Recess should be able to be used in a punitive manner (ex. walking laps). |
| Extend instructional day | If recess is to be extended then the instructional day would need to be, also. |
| Not a full 30 minutes/transitions | The 30-minute recess period is not a true 30 minutes due to transitions. |
| District office more willing | Personnel at the district office would be more willing to implement the policy as it is written. |
| Hold people accountable | The policy holds stakeholders accountable. |
| Classroom experience | The stakeholder's level of experience in the classroom is what influences their beliefs. |

Note: Overlap with approve
**Overlap with disapprove**

**Perceived Behavioral Control**

The third section of the survey focused on three questions designed to elicit the salient beliefs of the participants with regards to their perceived behavioral control. These control beliefs indicate an individual's perception of a behavior as easy or difficult to perform (Ajzen, 1991). There were 149 pieces of data gathered in this third section covering the following three questions:

1. What factors would make it EASY for you to implement the district's written recess policy?

2. What factors would make it DIFFICULT for you to implement the district's written recess policy?

3. What other issues, if any, come to mind when thinking about implementing the district's written recess policy?

The following three sections will cover easy (see Tables 17 and 18), difficult (see Tables 19 and 20) and other factors related to recess policy implementation (see Tables 21 and 22).

*Factors Which Make Recess Policy Implementation Easy*

In Table 17, 15 codes were assigned to 60 responses. Table 18 provides definitions of all codes listed on Table 17. Participant responses show a total of 43.24% expressed a salient belief that the school schedule makes the recess policy easy to implement. This was by far the top coded area for this question. Examples of participant responses are as follows:

- "Recess is allocated for the same time every day and is guaranteed to every student, making it easier for teachers to implement."

- "The other thing is that that time is designated with schedules, and administrators ensure that the time is protected."

- "Designated recess times for each classroom to ensure that everyone has access to playgrounds for a set amount of time."

**Table 17**

*Coding Frame for "Easy" [Q7]*
*Control Beliefs – Perceived Behavioral Control*

| Item Codes/Other | Response Count | Response Percent |
|---|---|---|
| schedule | 16 | 43.24% |
| non-negotiable | 7 | 18.92% |
| clearly defined terms | 6 | 16.22% |
| admin support | 5 | 13.51% |
| personal beliefs | 4 | 10.81% |
| other behavior consequences | 4 | 10.81% |
| other academic consequences | 3 | 8.11% |
| adequate/specific location | 3 | 8.11% |
| compliant behavior | 3 | 8.11% |
| professional development | 2 | 5.41% |
| more time | 2 | 5.41% |
| uncodable | 2 | 5.41% |
| adequate playground equipment | 1 | 2.70% |
| more supportive parents | 1 | 2.70% |
| other motivators | 1 | 2.70% |

Other areas ranked highly were "non-negotiable" (18.92%) and "clearly defined terms" (16.22%). These both refer to the policy having clearly defined terms or language and the fact that implementing the policy is considered a non-negotiable within the

district. Ranking next was "admin support" (13.51%) for the written policy (see Table 17).

**Table 18**

*Definition of Coding Frame for "Easy" [Q7]*
*Control Beliefs – Perceived Behavioral Control*

| Item Codes/Advantages | Definition |
|---|---|
| schedule | Recess is scheduled daily and that makes it easy to implement. |
| non-negotiable | The policy is non-negotiable. |
| clearly defined terms | The policy has clearly defined terms. |
| admin support | Increased administrative support would make the policy easier to implement. |
| personal beliefs | Stakeholders whose personal beliefs are that recess is necessary have an easier time implementing the policy. |
| other behavior consequences | Having other consequences for negative behavior would make the policy easier to implement. |
| other academic consequences | Having other options for unfished classwork would make the policy easier to implement. |
| adequate/specific location | Having a specific location which was adequate would make the policy easier to implement. |
| compliant behavior | Having students who displayed complaint behavior would make the policy easier to implement. |
| professional development | Increased professional development would make the policy easier to implement. |
| more time | More time in the schedule would make the policy easier to implement. |
| uncodable | Response was not pertinent to the question/uncodable. |
| adequate playground equipment | Having an adequate amount of playground equipment would make the policy easier to implement. |
| more supportive parents | Having more supportive parents would make the policy easier to implement. |
| other motivators | Having access to other motivators would make the policy easier to implement. |

"Personal beliefs" (10.81%) were next in percentage. One respondent stated, "I believe that there is research behind our district's written recess policy, therefore, I follow it." Another participant stated, "The fact that I personally think this time should be

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protected for the students. In my experience, especially with behaviors, taking away recess has proven to make matters worse when we return to the structure of the classroom."

"Other behavior consequences" (10.81%) and "other academic consequences" (8.11%) were ranked next. While the previous coded areas referred to things that were already making the policy easy to implement, these areas differ as they refer to what would make the policy easy to implement if they were to come to fruition. One participant stated, "If there were consequences that could be implemented daily for not completing work and behavior issues in the classroom setting." Another area of interest is that "professional development" (5.41%) was cited as something that would make the policy easy to implement.

Two respondents gave answers which were deemed uncodable. For example, one respondent stated, "easier implementation". Since I could not ascertain what the participant intended, this response was coded as uncodable.

### Factors Which Make Recess Policy Implementation Difficult

In Table 19, 26 codes were assigned to 55 responses. Table 20 provides definitions of all codes listed on Table 19. Participant responses show a total of 35.14% expressed a salient belief that the "behavioral issues" makes the recess policy difficult to implement. One respondent stated, "Lack of ability to give consequences for student behavior." Another participant stated, "They can do unacceptable things in class, and yet still have recess."

It should be noted that one respondent said that teachers could use five minutes as a maximum for reducing recess as a behavioral consequence. Also, the data revealed

several references to teachers having students walk laps at recess as a punitive measure.

This implies that the policy is not being implemented as written.

**Table 19**

*Coding Frame for "Difficult" [Q8]*
*Control Beliefs – Perceived Behavioral Control*

| Item Codes/Other | Response Count | Response Percent |
|---|---|---|
| behavioral issues | 13 | 35.14% |
| academic issues | 7 | 18.92% |
| time constraints | 4 | 10.81% |
| no factors | 4 | 10.81% |
| uncodable | 3 | 8.11% |
| inclement weather | 2 | 5.41% |
| no action by admin | 2 | 5.41% |
| adequate/specific location | 2 | 5.41% |
| demanding curriculum | 1 | 2.70% |
| subjective terminology | 1 | 2.70% |
| lack of training | 1 | 2.70% |
| lack of parental support | 1 | 2.70% |
| students not thinking fair | 1 | 2.70% |
| others not adhering to sched | 1 | 2.70% |
| other teachers not following | 1 | 2.70% |
| schedules | 1 | 2.70% |
| stated time | 1 | 2.70% |
| other consequences | 1 | 2.70% |
| desire for added recess | 1 | 2.70% |
| individual students | 1 | 2.70% |
| adequate playground equipment | 1 | 2.70% |
| students know the policy | 1 | 2.70% |
| timing | 1 | 2.70% |
| parents who not supportive | 1 | 2.70% |
| lack of communication | 1 | 2.70% |
| lack of flexibility | 1 | 2.70% |

The next ranked item was "academic issues" (18.92%). One respondent stated, "If

a student is in the middle of working hard on an assignment, it is sometimes difficult to

stop in the middle." Another participant stated, "It is more difficult to implement the

policy when you've had students who have not completed work."

**Table 20**

*Definition of Coding Frame for "Difficult" [Q8]*
*Control Beliefs – Perceived Behavioral Control*

| Item Codes/Advantages | Definition |
|---|---|
| behavioral issues | students who display negative behaviors |
| academic issues | students who need extra time to complete assignments |
| time constraints | time constraints in the academic day |
| no factors | no factors would make it difficult to implement the policy |
| uncodable | response was not pertinent to the question/uncodable |
| inclement weather | weather factors which prohibit outdoor recess |
| no action by admin | inaction by onsite administration when behavioral infractions occur |
| adequate/specific location | not having a specific location which is adequate |
| demanding curriculum | having a demanding curriculum to teach daily |
| subjective terminology | the policy containing subjective terminology |
| lack of training | a lack of training or professional development would make it difficult to implement the policy |
| lack of parental support | a lack of parental support for behavioral and/or academic concerns |
| students not thinking fair | students who realize that students displaying negative behavior still enjoy recess would make it difficult |
| others not adhering to sched | other teachers and staff members not adhering to their schedules |
| other teachers not following schedules | other teachers not following the policy as written if teachers made their own schedules |
| stated time | if the policy did not include a stated/allotted time |
| other consequences | other consequences are not available |
| desire for added recess | desiring to extend recess or add an extra recess |
| individual students | individual students with extenuating circumstances |
| adequate playground equipment | not having an adequate playground equipment |
| students know the policy | students who know the policy take advantage of it |
| timing | timing is not effective when recess must be so early in the day or late in the day that it does not provide a break |
| parents who not supportive | parents who are not supportive of classroom expectations |
| lack of communication | lack of communication between teachers |
| lack of flexibility | lack of flexibility in the policy |

"No action by admin" (5.41%) was cited as a complicating factor. Respondents

stated, "If some teachers do not follow the policy, and no action is taken by

administrators." This implies that some teachers do not implement the policy and yet

there are no repercussions. Yet, another stated, "Inconsistent Administration". This could be inconsistent with issues such as the above example or inconsistent with students and behavioral consequences (see Table 19).

There were some respondents that said that "no factors" (10.81%) would make it difficult to implement the policy. However, "inclement weather" (5.41%) was cited as a factor that would make it difficult to implement the policy. One respondent articulated, "The weather makes it difficult but really I just have to get a little creative because I can tell when my students need a break."

There were many other coded responses with little consensus making it necessary to employ additional coded categories. Eighteen categories such as "others not adhering to sched", "parents who are not supportive", "schedules", and "children know the policy". These coded categories were measured at 2.70% each. Examples of responses are as follows:

- "Others not adhering to scheduling."
- "The lack of parent support makes it difficult, as well as the need for immediate consequences."
- "Timing during the day because recess is so long it is hard to schedule it effectively in time periods where students truly need breaks. When you have to have a 9:00 am recess, you will spend most of the time in the classroom for recess during winter because temperatures aren't warm enough to go out, so students truly aren't getting the "break" that they need."
- "The fact that children know that recess cannot be taken away is a problem. It doesn't make it difficult to implement, but it does make it harder to tolerate."

For this question there were uncodable answers (8.11%). For example, one respondent stated, "Having staff to man the students where recess is withheld." Since this would imply that the policy was not being implemented, I coded this as uncodable.

***Other Factors Related to Others' Views***

In Table 21, 24 codes were assigned to 34 responses. Table 22 provides definitions of all codes listed on Table 21. This question asked respondents for their salient beliefs in the broader area of other factors related to the views of others regarding their implementing the districts' written recess policy. There were areas which overlapped for both easy and difficult (see Tables 21 and 22). These areas are shaded in Tables 21 and 22 and demonstrate that respondents felt strongly about these issues as they revisited them in responding to question 9. There were also other factors which were listed that did not fit into either category.

An area which overlapped with making it easy to implement the recess policy was "teacher created incentives" (6.67%). One participant stated, "I have had to create other incentives." While there was only one overlap for "easy", there were seven areas which overlapped with "difficult". These were "teachers do not always follow policy" (13.33%), "inclement weather" (13.33%), "reduced for behavior" (13.33%), "no action by administration" (6.67%), "scheduling" (6.67%), "reduced for academics" (6.67%) and "more than one recess" (6.67%) (see Table 21). And while "reduced for behavior" and "reduced for academics" would reduce or eliminate a recess period, "more than one recess" indicates that the policy is felt to limit the practice to only 30 minutes daily.

However, as mentioned earlier in this study. The policy does not state maximums for this practice (see Appendix 1), so possibly this is a site-based limitation.

This third question in this area was employed to move beyond the constraints of easy and difficult only. This last question was also added to seek more deep thoughts and give them additional space to share their thoughts on the topic of implementing the district's written recess policy. As hoped, it elicited a variety of new beliefs from the participants. The data showed that 20% cited concern for students with "medical conditions" in recess activities. Also, 20% stated they support the use of recess time for "punitive" measures. One respondent's answer to this was, "Students should not miss the entire recess. Compromise by allowing part of the recess. Students could be given responsibilities such as cleaning the playground during that time so that they are outside."

Also, at 20% was "not in the classroom" which I define as stakeholders expressing a belief that this policy was created by those whom it does not impact. Respondents stated the following:

- "Again, policies being written by people who are not in the classroom to see what is happening."
- "It was most likely written by people who have never been in an elementary classroom."
- "It seems like more classroom business (teacher business) is being dictated to us and yet they want to make us more accountable for outcomes."

**Table 21**

*Coding Frame for "Other Factors Related to Recess Policy Implementation" [Q9]*
*Control Beliefs – Perceived Behavioral Control*

| Item Codes/Other | Response Count | Response Percent |
|---|---|---|
| medical conditions | 3 | 20.00% |
| not in the classroom | 3 | 20.00% |
| punitive | 3 | 20.00% |
| **teachers do not always follow policy** | **2** | **13.33%** |
| **inclement weather** | **2** | **13.33%** |
| **reduced for behavior** | **2** | **13.33%** |
| flexibility | 2 | 13.33% |
| supervision | 1 | 6.67% |
| safety | 1 | 6.67% |
| **no action by administration** | **1** | **6.67%** |
| interpretations of policy | 1 | 6.67% |
| structured/unstructured | 1 | 6.67% |
| **scheduling** | **1** | **6.67%** |
| decreased academic time | 1 | 6.67% |
| **reduced for academics** | **1** | **6.67%** |
| entire recess | 1 | 6.67% |
| recess reduction | 1 | 6.67% |
| outdoors | 1 | 6.67% |
| teacher created incentives | 1 | 6.67% |
| teachers want authority | 1 | 6.67% |
| increased teacher accountability | 1 | 6.67% |
| physical activity | 1 | 6.67% |
| **more than one recess** | **1** | **6.67%** |
| uncodable | 1 | 6.67% |

Note: Overlap with easy
**Overlap with difficult**

**Table 22**

*Definition of Coding Frame for*
*"Other Factors Related to Recess Policy Implementation" [Q9]*
*Control Beliefs – Perceived Behavioral Control*

| Item Codes/Advantages | Definition |
|---|---|
| medical conditions | Some students have health conditions that make recess policy difficult to implement (ex. asthma). |
| Not in the classroom | Stakeholders expressed a belief that this policy was created by those whom it does not impact. |
| Punitive | Recess should be able to be used as a punitive measure (ex. walking laps or cleaning equipment). |
| **Teachers do not always follow policy** | **Stakeholders expressed that they have observed teachers not following the recess policy.** |
| **Inclement weather** | Weather factors may prohibit outdoor recess. |
| **Reduced for behavior** | Students who display negative behaviors should have recess reduced |
| Flexibility | The policy should be more flexible. |
| Supervision | Supervision is necessary for recess. |
| Safety | Safety is an important factor at recess. |
| **No action by administration** | Stakeholders expressed a belief that onsite administration sometimes take no action when behavioral infractions occur. |
| Interpretations of policy | There may be varying interpretations of the policy. |
| Structured/unstructured | Stakeholders acknowledged that there is a difference between structured and unstructured recess. |
| **Scheduling** | scheduling constraints in the academic day |
| decreased academic time | Added recess would result in decreased time for academics. |
| **Reduced for academics** | Some students need extra time to complete assignments |
| entire recess | Students should not lose their entire recess. |
| Recess reduction | Recess reduction should be allowed, as needed. |
| Outdoors | It is beneficial for students to be outdoors. |
| Teacher created incentives | Teachers have created incentives to motivate students outside of recess deprivation/enhancement. |
| Teachers want authority | Teachers want authority to make decisions on recess implementation. |
| Increased teacher accountability | Teacher accountability has increased. |
| Physical activity | Students benefit from physical activity at recess. |
| **More than one recess** | **Students would benefit from more than one recess daily but, the policy does not allow for that.** |
| Uncodable | Response not pertinent to the question/uncodable. |
| Note: Overlap with easy | |
| **Overlap with difficult** | |

There were many other coded responses with little consensus making it necessary to employ added coded categories. Seventeen categories such as "supervision" and "physical activity". These coded categories were measured at 6.67% each. Examples of responses are as follows:

- "Teachers should make sure that they are walking around supervising their students, not be on their phones, and make sure their students are safe during this supervised play."

- "Children really do need physical activity."

There was one response that was considered uncodable and twenty-one of the survey respondents either stated that they had nothing to add or chose to leave the question blank. It is also of interest that three respondents gave five or more responses to this survey question and therefore were not constrained by the survey format (Sutton, et al., 2004).

**Demographic Factors and Their Associations with Recess Policy Implementation**

The demographic section included earlier presented the data collected for experience, certification, etc. This was broken down by question and presented in table format to illustrate the range of factors represented by this group of stakeholders. The demographic data was more fully examined once the attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral controls were analyzed in this study.

As mentioned earlier in this study, demographic questions are needed in surveys to provide an accurate description of the research sample. However, a second reason to ask specific demographic questions is to answer specific research questions (Hughes et

al., 2016). For this reason, demographics can be segmented to reveal differences between subgroups which can, in turn, reveal differences in behaviors between these subsections (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

Further, Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) stated that demographic characteristics can explain behavior and yet are not the cause of behaviors. In this, demographic differences may reflect differing life events and experiences and therefore lead to differing beliefs. The importance of demographics variables may vary while the constructs of TPB do not fluctuate (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Further, respondents from demographic groups who hold beliefs about positive outcomes of the behavior may also have stronger intention to carry out the behavior (Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2008).

Segmenting by general demographic categories generated in advance is referred to as a priori segmentation (Wedel and Kamakura 2000). This was conducted in the earlier data analysis when examining the variable by years of experience, highest degree held, etc. and it created homogeneous subgroups in the data analysis. For this revisit of the demographics portion of the study I used a post-hoc segmentation. Post-hoc segmentation is conducted post data collection and is determined by the data and methodology of the study (Wedel and Kamakura 2000). In this study post-hoc segmentation was based on attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control to divide the participants into clusters or heterogeneous groups.

As stated earlier in this study, the 4th research question is as follows: What demographic factors are associated with beliefs about implementing recess policy? To address this, I closely aligned the constructs on attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral controls and analyzed the data through the demographics to decide if/how

those factors influence behavioral intent. I chose to realign all responses for each participant rather than by construct. Responses were analyzed as to whether they were positive/in support of the practice of recess and recess policy implementation or if they were negative/not in support of the practice of recess and recess policy implementation.

Next, responses were then analyzed to determine if the respondent gave more positive or negative responses in the survey. Participants were then divided into 2 heterogenous groups and coded as either positive or negative overall. There were 22 of the 37 (59.46%) in the positive group and 15 of the 37 (40.54%) in the negative group (see Table 23).
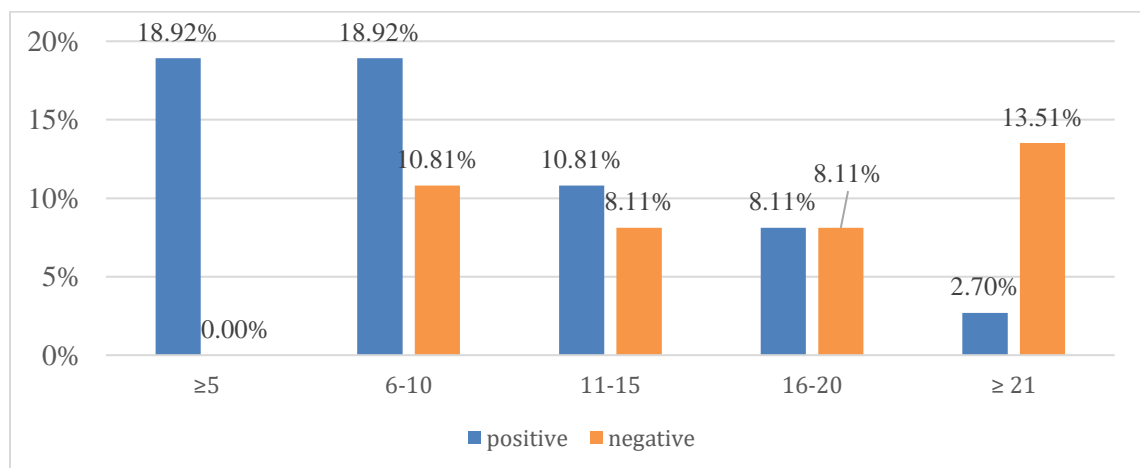
**Table 23**

*Post-hoc Segmentation*

| Positive or Negative | # | % |
|---|---|---|
| Positive | 22 | 59.46% |
| Negative | 15 | 40.54% |

**Figure 6**

*Years of Respondents' Experience in Education [+/-]*

Next, I aligned the demographic info for two areas: years of respondents'
experience in education and years of respondents' experience in the specific school
system (see Figure 6). This was then aligned with the overall positive or overall negative.
This became an interesting usage of the data as it shows specific factors which may
influence behavioral intent.
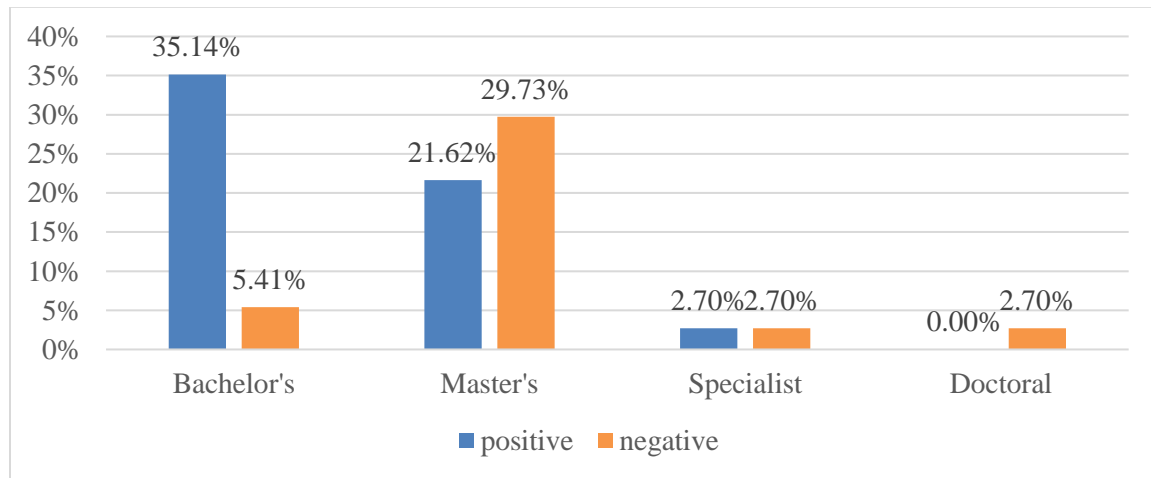
**Figure 7**

*Years of Respondents' Experience in the Specific School System [+/-]*
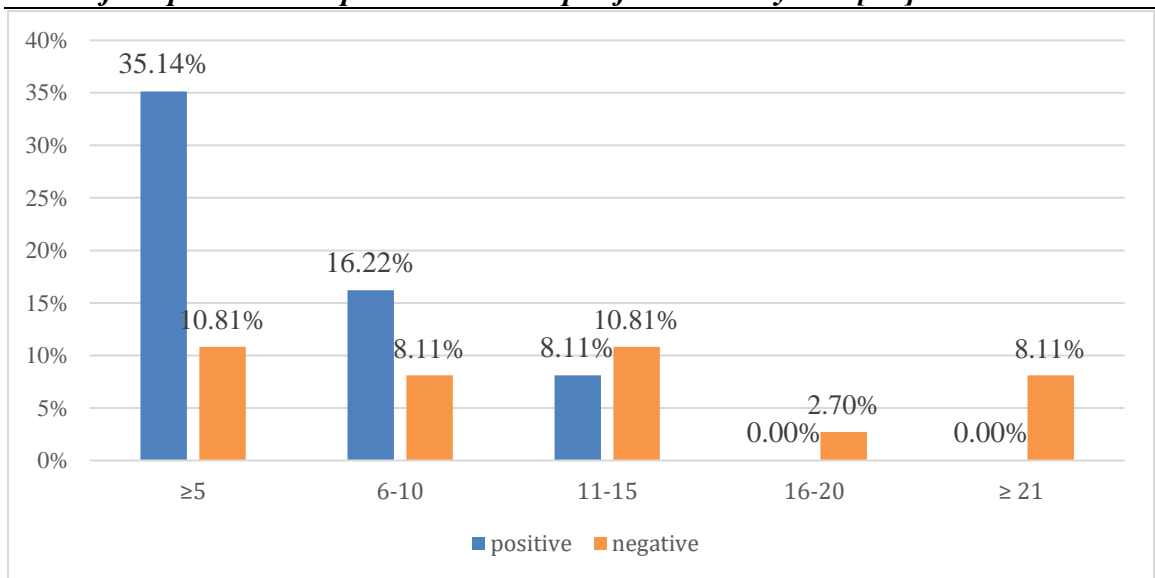


The data analysis illustrates that participants in this study who had ten or less
years of experience in education (37.84%) were more likely to express positive responses
on the practice of recess and/or recess policy implementation. Further, participants in this
study who had ten or less years of experience in this specific district (51.36%) were more
likely to express positive responses on the practice of recess and/or recess policy
implementation (see Figures 6 and 7).

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**Figure 8**

*Highest Degree Held by Respondents [+/-]*



Next, I aligned the highest degree held by the participants with the overall positive or overall negative. The distal variable which demonstrated the highest positive response was holding a bachelor's degree (see Figure 8). And when examining the respondent's primary area of certification, holding certification in early childhood education (35.14%) was the distal variable with the highest positive (see Figure 9).

When combining the four variables above, there were 7 respondents who had ≥5 years in education overall, ≥5 years in the specified district, a bachelor's degree, and were certified in early childhood education. These 7 participants reported positive responses with regard to the practice of recess and/or recess policy implementation (see Figures 6, 7, 8, and 9).

**Figure 9**
*Primary Area of Certification [+/-]*
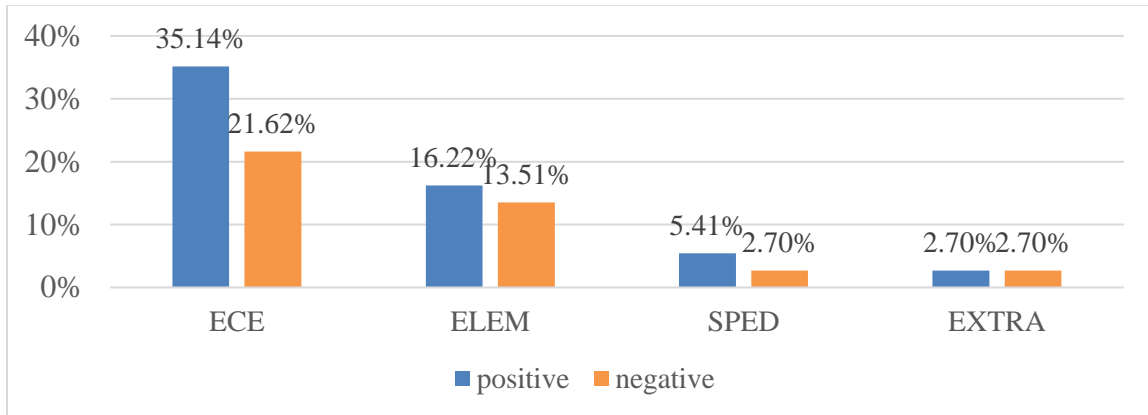


Next, I recoded the 9 constructs by positive or negative participant. The data

demonstrated that the ranked themes were recurring under these two groups. Table 24

includes the ranked codes for the positive group (59.46%) and the negative group

(40.54%). Table 25 provides definitions extracted from the respondent's salient

responses.

**Table 24**

*Demographic Factors and Their Associations with Recess Policy Implementation
Ranked Factors*

| Group 1 – Positive 59.46% | Group 2 – Negative 40.54% |
|---|---|
| an unstructured break | negative behavior |
| non-negotiable | teachers want authority |
| socialization | unfinished classwork |
| burn extra energy | time for instruction/remediation |

The positive themes reflected that teachers newer to the field were more prone to

believe that the policy was good because it was non-negotiable that students should be

afforded an unstructured break daily to burn energy and socialize. The negative themes reflected that more experienced teachers were more likely to report a belief that teachers should have the authority to reduce or eliminate recess as a consequence for negative behavior and also for unfinished classwork or extra time for instructional activities (see Tables 24 and 25).

**Table 25**

*Demographic Factors and Their Associations with Recess Policy Implementation Definition Coding Frame for Ranked Factors*

| Group 1 – Positive 59.46% | Definition Coding Frame |
|---|---|
| a mental break | Recess is needed as a mental break. |
| Non-negotiable | Policy makes recess non-negotiable. |
| Socialization | Recess is needed as time for socialization. |
| Burn extra energy | Recess is needed as time to burn extra energy. |
| **Group 2 – Negative 40.54%** | |
| negative behavior | Recess should be reduced for negative behavior. |
| Teachers want authority | Teachers want the authority to make decisions on recess. |
| Unfinished classwork | Recess should be reduced for unfinished classwork. |
| Time for instruction/remediation | Recess should be reduced for instruction/remediation. |

**Summary**

This elicitation study was constructed based on the TPB (Ajzen, 1991). The purpose of this research was to elicit the beliefs and practices of elementary administrators and teachers regarding how they implement recess policy at a public elementary school located in a district located in Northeast Georgia. This study used the

constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to identify factors that influence the decisions of administrators and teachers when deciding to implement or not implement the district's written recess policy. Understanding the perceived barriers and enablers can provide much-needed insight for policymakers and educational leaders when creating interventions that will increase recess policy implementation and, therefore, support students more effectively.

In this chapter, the data was presented in coding frames with accompanying definition tables. The respondents reported an understanding that recess is beneficial as a break, an unstructured event, and as generally beneficial for students. They also communicated difficulty with implementing the policy when they had no other behavioral consequences and limited options when students did not complete assignments. An overwhelming majority reported that the policy is too rigid as written. Further, the data displays demonstrated that demographics were influential in these respondents' behavioral intentions. The following chapter provides a discussion of the findings, conclusions drawn from the study, and recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

This study used the constructs of The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) to elicit 289 responses from 37 respondents. The participants were site-based decision-makers responsible for implementing a school district's recess policy. The benefits of recess are well documented, and some studies have examined the presumed barriers to children's access to school recess. This study contributes to the literature by examining the beliefs and perceptions of site-based decision-makers regarding the implementation of a written recess policy.

## Problem

Recess is a valuable part of a child's school experience. This "unstructured break" is associated with positive academic, physical, and emotional outcomes. Published position statements support the practice of recess and the literature indicates that both administrators and teachers believe that the practice of recess is beneficial and should not be denied. Policies have been established in many states and districts to protect children's access to recess. Yet, research suggests that despite these policies, recess is still often reduced or eliminated. Little information exists as to why site-based decision-makers such as administrators and teachers, circumvent policy to reduce or eliminate recess for individual students or groups of students in elementary schools.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this elicitation study was to elicit the beliefs and practices of elementary administrators and teachers regarding how they implement recess policy at a

public elementary school located in a district in Northeast Georgia. This study used the constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to identify factors that influence the decisions of administrators and teachers when deciding to implement or not to implement the district's written recess policy. Understanding the perceived barriers and enablers can provide much-needed insight for policymakers and educational leaders when creating interventions that will increase recess policy implementation and, therefore, support students more effectively.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What salient behavioral beliefs do administrators and teachers report relative to their attitudes regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy?

2. What salient normative beliefs do administrators and teachers report relative to their subjective norms regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy?

3. What salient control beliefs do administrators and teachers report relative to their perceived behavioral control regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy?

4. What demographic factors are associated with beliefs about implementing recess policy?

**Review of the Methodology**

TPB (Ajzen, 1991) was the conceptual framework for this qualitative study. Qualitative studies differ from quantitative studies as they use words generated by respondents rather than numeric values. (Roberts, 2010). The Theory of Planned

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Behavior is used for elicitation studies because it allows the researcher to seek responses related to participants' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control towards a subject or task. This study gathered responses through nine open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' perspectives regarding implementation of the district's written recess policy.

The study used criterion sampling for recruiting participants from site-based decision-makers at the chosen research location. An open-ended questionnaire was developed using the guidelines from the TPB (Francis et al., 2004). The questionnaire was constructed using Qualtrics which generated a link to the survey. The survey link was emailed to teachers and administrators at the research site. Once the questionnaire was completed, the data was coded by me and a peer using descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2016).

Survey responses to the nine open-ended questions were organized by code. Next the data was analyzed and categorized for further understanding. Coded words and phrases were listed from most frequently mentioned to least frequently mentioned under each variable: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Nine tables were constructed demonstrating the tabulated rankings with nine other tables constructed to define the descriptive coding that was employed.

**Major Findings**

*Demographics*

The sample for this elicitation study was a group of educators at an elementary school in a school district located in Northeast Georgia. All the invited participants were administrators or certified faculty who make site-based decisions on implementing the

district's written recess policy. As cited earlier in this study, a sample size of approximately 25 participants is appropriate for an elicitation study (Francis et al., 2004; Godin & Kok, 1996). According to Godin and Kok (1996), saturation is achieved at this number in an elicitation study.

Thirty-seven participants completed the survey for this study. Participants were closely split on the question of overall experience with 49% reporting ten years or less overall experience in the field and 51% reporting eleven years or more (see Table 2). However, on the question of how much experience they had in the specific district, 70% reported ten years or less and only 30% reported eleven years or more (see Table 3). On the question of grade level experience, grades kindergarten through grade five were similar with lower responses for those with preschool or older than elementary grade level experience (see Figure 3). On the question of highest degree held, 57% of these participants hold a master's degree as their highest level of education (see Figure 4).

As expected in an elementary school, thirty-four of the thirty-seven participants reported a primary certification in either early childhood (19) or elementary (15). Though most of these respondents hold multiple certifications, the other three respondents either hold a primary certification in special education or are certified in areas such as art, music, etc. These areas were coded as "extra" (see Figure 9). These demographics will be revisited later in the study as I seek demographic factors which are associated with beliefs on implementing recess policy.

### *Attitudes*

Attitude is the first area of the Theory of Planned Behavior. This construct refers to the connection between a person's behavioral beliefs or attitude and their behavioral

intentions (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, this construct reflects the participants' attitudes towards implementing the district's written recess policy. Attitude towards the task has an impact on whether or not they will implement the policy. This study sought to answer what salient behavioral beliefs administrators and teachers report relative to their attitudes regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy (see Tables 5, 7 and 9).

Table 5 outlines several advantages based on the salient beliefs that respondents shared related to implementing the district's written recess policy. The highest ranked advantage was giving students a mental break. As cited in the literature, recess serves as a break from academic tasks (Stegelin et al., 2015) and accordingly, 62.16% of participants' responses were coded as mental break (see Table 5) as well as an additional 6.67% under "other" (see Table 9). This indicates that these stakeholders understand that this scheduled daily break is important for students' wellbeing.

The other highest ranked themes under advantages (see Table 5) were as follows: that the policy is considered a non-negotiable, that children use this time for socialization, that children burn extra energy, that it is an unstructured event, and that children are able to exercise and also to play. This concurs with the literature as to the practice of recess benefitting the whole child. (Ramstetter et al., 2010; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; NASPE, 2006; NAEYC, 2009).

Table 7 illustrates the highest ranked disadvantages based on the salient beliefs that respondents shared related to implementing the district's written recess policy: negative behavior, teachers want authority, unfinished classwork, and time for remediation. These were by far the largest number of codes ranked in this data. These

barriers to policy implementation were subcodes under the policy is too rigid (see Table 7).

That the policy is too rigid was cited as a disadvantage by 83.79% (see Table 7) while conversely 54.05% cited that the policy is considered a non-negotiable as an advantage (see Table 5). And it should be noted that 19.44% of the codes reported in "other" (see Table 9) supported teachers wanting more authority with regard to implementing this policy. On the other hand, 10.81% stated that there was no disadvantage to implementing the policy and 16.67% expressed support for the policy as written. (see Tables 5 and 9). This is obviously lower than the number citing that the policy is too rigid or that teachers want authority nonetheless, it does demonstrate a divide between stakeholders. To reiterate, policy is best supported when obtaining buy-in from stakeholders (Bogden et al., 2012).

Negative behavior (67.57%) was the disadvantage ranked at the top of Table 7 with an additional 16.67% stating the same under "other views related to attitude" on Table 9. Respondents expressed frustration with the perceived need for students to require immediate behavioral consequences. Similarly, unfinished classwork had 45.95% (see Table 7) and 5.56% (see Table 9). And added time for instruction/remediation garnered 10.81% (see Table 7). Yet, as cited earlier in this study, this daily break can improve classroom behaviors which can, in turn, improve classroom instruction (CDC, 2010; Rasberry et al., 2011; RWJF & NAESP, 2010).

The need for behavioral consequences were a prevailing theme throughout this study. Understanding that a school's culture may encourage punitive measures over more authoritative approaches (Mayer, 2001), a prosocial environment is preferred. According

to Jennings & Greenberg (2009), instructors who establish prosocial classroom environments set the tone by developing supportive relationships with their students, creating and consistently employing behavioral guidelines, working with students to promote intrinsic motivation, and providing coaching in conflict resolution. Further, these instructors act as a role model by treating students with respect. This type of environment is also characterized by smooth transitions and a supportive environment with respect to diversity and individualized needs (La Paro & Pianta, 2003). Further, as to unfinished classwork, intuitive instructors design lessons that build on student strengths and abilities thereby mediating that as an issue (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Table 5 ranks socialization (40.54%) as a benefit to students when implementing the recess policy. Table 9 adds 11.11% for this area. This backs up the literature as recess is a time associated with physical activity, free play, and social interaction (Pellegrini et al., 1995; Murray & Ramstetter, 2013; Jarrett, 2013; IOM, 2013). Stapp and Karr (2018) describe it as a time for physical exertion but also a time to socialize with peers and create games.

Other advantages coded were burn extra energy (32.43%) and exercise (29.73%) see Table 5). As cited earlier in this study, children who are more active in recess are more focused and display better classroom behaviors (CDC, 2010; Van Dusen et al., 2011). Also, exercise during recess lowers the risk of obesity (NASPE, 2008; Burriss & Burriss, 2011) and contributes to healthy muscle and bone development (HHS, 2018).

Of advantages, 29.73% communicated that the policy stating that it was an unstructured event was an advantage for students (see Table 5). Also, 11.11% (see Table 9) were coded as this in "other views related to attitude". This is in agreement with the

extant literature as when recess is offered to students as discretionary time, improvement has been noted in activity levels (Stapp & Karr, 2018), concentration (Pellegrini et al., 1995; Michael et al., 2015), and levels of personal satisfaction (Jarrett, 2002). In the same way, interrupting concentrated instruction with unstructured breaks is beneficial for cognitive functions (Ramstetter et al., 2010). Further, according to Stapp and Karr (2018), the unstructured break is the most critical element of recess as all humans need such an interruption throughout the day.

### *Subjective Norms*

Perceived social pressure is the second area of the Theory of Planned Behavior. This construct refers to these site-based decision-makers and their perception of general social pressure to determine whether to implement the district's written recess policy (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, this construct reflects the participants' belief that some people would approve of their implementation of the policy, and others might disapprove of their implementation of the district's written recess policy. This perceived social pressure has an impact on whether they will implement the policy or not. This study sought to answer what salient normative beliefs administrators and teachers report relative to their subjective norms regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy (see Tables 11, 13 and 15).

In examining Table 11, respondents indicated that parents (51.35%), teachers and staff members (37.84%) and administration (32.43%) would approve of their implementing the policy. Further, 18.92% stated that all stakeholders would approve while 10.81% stated that most stakeholders would approve (see Table 11). As for

disapproval, 19.44% indicated that they felt that "no one" would disapprove of their implementing the policy.

And though respondents indicated that parents (51.35%) would approve of their implementation of the policy, 30.56% also indicated that parents would disapprove. Those believing that parents would disapprove indicated that it would be connected to a perception that parents would want recess reduction or elimination as a behavioral consequence (see Table 11 and 13). However, parent advocacy for the practice of recess is documented (Jarrett, 2013; Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Bilello, 2005) in the literature.

Another area of interest is that 37.84% expressed that teachers and staff members would approve of their implementation of the policy. Conversely, respondents also indicated that 41.67% teachers and staff members would disapprove of their implementation of the policy. As above, respondents indicated that it would be connected to a perception that parents would want recess reduction or elimination as a behavioral consequence (see Table 11 and 13). This divide is important as teachers and staff are present at recess and therefore stakeholders may experience increased social pressure if they believe that their performance poses an interpersonal conflict (Exline & Lobel, 1999).

Finally, on table 15, the desire to use recess deprivation as a behavioral consequence (26.67%) was the highest ranked code. This and time to complete academic assignments (6.67%) were the overlapping codes with "disapprove" (see Table 13). This is a recurring theme in the data and will be addressed more fully in the remainder of this study.

*Perceived Behavioral Control*

Perceived behavioral control is the third area of the Theory of Planned Behavior. This construct is the extent to which the participants perceive that performing the behavior will be easy or challenging. Further, perceived behavioral control is dependent on self-efficacy as well as controllability (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, perceived behavioral control applied to the perception of the participants regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy as easy or challenging concerning both internal and external factors. This study sought to answer what salient control beliefs administrators and teachers report relative to their perceived behavioral control regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy (see Tables 17, 19 and 21).

By far, the highest ranked code for "easy" was schedule (43.24%). Respondents indicated that the school's written schedule made the policy easy to implement. The next highest ranked codes were that these site-based decision-makers felt that the policy was non-negotiable (18.92%) and that the policy contained clearly defined terms (16.22%) (see Table 17). This is important from an external standpoint whereas other codes such as those representing personal beliefs would be internal factors (10.81%) (Ajzen, 2002). Participants who indicate a personal belief that protecting the practice of recess is important for children are more likely to implement the policy due to intrinsic motivation (Staunton et al., 2015).

As mentioned earlier in this study, some coded areas referred to factors that are already making the policy easy to implement, there were other areas which respondents indicated would make it easier to implement if those factors were in place. The two highest ranked codes for desired factors were other behavioral consequences (10.81%)

and other academic consequences (8.11%). In examining Table 19, the same two codes

for difficulty in implementing the policy were at the top: behavioral issues (35.14%) and

academic issues (18.92%). These two areas have been a common theme throughout the

study and indicate that teachers feel that they need other options in order to implement

the recess policy with fidelity (see Tables 17 and 19).

Table 21 dealt with other factors related to recess policy implementation and gave

participants the opportunity to voice any other opinions that had not yet been discussed.

There were twenty-four separate codes on this table which resulted in low percentages.

There were no new issues raised in these coded responses indicating that saturation had

been achieved for this sample (Godin & Kok, 1996).

**Demographic Factors and Their Associations with Recess Policy Implementation**

Demographic variables were readdressed in this elicitation study to answer the 4th

research question in this study: What demographic factors are associated with beliefs

about implementing recess policy? As respondents from demographic groups who hold

beliefs about positive outcomes of the behavior may also have stronger intention to carry

out the behavior (Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2008), this was a necessary next step in this

study.

While demographic characteristics can explain behaviors, they are not viewed as

the cause of behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). For example, this study found that

respondents with less experience were more prone to cite support for the practice of

recess and the implementation of recess policy than their more experienced peers.

However, lack of experience does not explain behavioral intent in and of itself.

The data analysis in this study illustrates that teachers with more experience in the field and more years in the specified district expressed a belief that behavioral consequences should outweigh the need for all or part of recess for students. According to Osher et al. (2007), if teachers are unable to effectively manage behavioral challenges the classroom environment may deteriorate and create a "burnout cascade." This can lead to teachers becoming emotionally exhausted as they are unsuccessful at managing these conflicts. Instead of creating an environment where student learn to self-regulate, disruption may become ongoing under punitive consequences. Therefore, these demographic factors may have an indirect influence on the behavioral intentions of these site-based decision-makers.

As mentioned earlier in this study, communication between stakeholders can be a barrier to policy implementation if those making site-based decisions sense a lack of support (Scwhartz et al., 2012; Cooper et al., 2016). This is an area for consideration as those who have the greater time both in the field and in the specified district may need increased communication and support in order to express increased buy-in for the policy (Bogden et al., 2012).

Turner et al. (2013) found that a lack of awareness of existing policies was a barrier to implementation, this study found no participants who were not aware of the district's written policy. On the contrary, these site-based decision-makers communicated a thorough understanding of the policy. Further, they communicated either positive or negative beliefs with no neutral beliefs expressed.

According to Montaño and Kasprzyk (2008), segmenting the demographic population in this type of study can lead to a deeper understanding. Examining these

external variables can inform the researcher on belief patterns of the subsets. And that, in turn, can allow for targeted interventions for those populations expressing differing beliefs and perceptions. Readdressing the demographic variables in this study assisted me in conducting a deeper analysis and will contribute to the recommendations for practice included later in this chapter.

### *Unanticipated Outcomes*

An unanticipated outcome in this study was the number of respondents who indicated that more recess was needed either in minutes allotted or in number of actual recess breaks daily. Providing multiple recess opportunities creates more positive social interactions, as well as providing support for improved attention classroom behavior (Rhea et al., 2016; Rhea & Rivchun, 2018). Further, Bauml et al. (2020) found that teachers maximized instructional time even while recess increased from fifteen to sixty minutes daily.

Another unanticipated outcome was that though participants shared highly ranked beliefs regarding recess being a time for a mental break and a period for socialization, there were fewer who expressed a salient belief that this was a time needed for play. Unstructured play is a critical piece of a sound early childhood pedagogy. This is supported in the literature by theorists both old and new. For example, unstructured play is an effective example of Piaget's theory of assimilation whereas children assimilate new information based on existing knowledge (Piaget, 1962). And according to Vygotsky (1967), play is important as children use this process of pretending in order to learn to use socially defined symbols to represent concepts. This is turn supports language acquisition

and literacy as children learn to substitute socially defined written and auditory words to represent concepts.

More currently Gray (2021) stated that play facilitates learning and should not be considered a luxury. Additionally, children acquire the most important skills when they are allowed to play without adult interference (Gray, 2011). Yet, the results of this current study demonstrates that there is a gap between policy and practice, and further, a gap between philosophy and practice.

**Conclusion**

This study was conducted to more fully understand the beliefs and practices of teachers and administrators regarding recess policy implementation at a public elementary school located in a district in Northeast Georgia. This elicitation study employed the TPB as a theoretical lens to report participants' beliefs and perceptions regarding the implementation of the district's written recess policy. Nine open-ended questions were utilized to explore three constructs: behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs (Ajzen, 1991).

This data analysis reveals that helping stakeholders to understand the value of unstructured breaks in supporting behavior issues and academic focus could improve implementation of the district's written recess policy. Also, the data analysis indicates that providing teachers with tools for behavioral interventions as well as a block of time for academic interventions could improve implementation of the recess policy.

As a small study conducted at one site in one school district with a written recess plan, these results of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population. This type of initial inquiry lends credibility to TPB studies (Downs & Hausenblas, 2005). However,

these results may be used for conducting further TPB studies, as well as driving the following interventions and for future research. The following section will address recommendations for practice.

*Recommendations for Practice*

This study sought to explore the beliefs and practices of site-based decision-makers regarding the implementation of a written recess policy. This is the first known study to use the TPB to explore the intentions of site-based decision-makers regarding the implementation of a policy centering on the practice of recess. This study reviewed the literature concerning TPB and elicitation studies. Elicitation studies conducted using TPB are valuable in predicting behavioral intent (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

This study further reviewed the extant literature on both the practice of recess and policy implementation regarding recess. The review coupled with the results of this study were used to make the following recommendations:

**Policy.** A lack of motivation to implement policy was voiced by participants in this study and was also identified as a barrier to policy implementation in the literature (Cooper et al., 2016). Site-based decision-makers should be included as future policies are developed and adopted (Cooper et al., 2016; Bogden et al., 2012; Burriss & Burriss, 2011). As stakeholder buy-in is an important part of policy implementation (Bogden et al., 2012), this type of collaboration is important in the process of development, adoption, and effective implementation of policy. Collaborative policy design is best implemented when stakeholders from varying levels write policies (Ansell, 2017).

**Professional Development.** Respondents who voiced a behavioral intention to implement the district's written recess policy also communicated an understanding of the

far-reaching benefits of recess. Professional development could be conducted at the site and across the district to convey clear policy objectives, as well as establish connections between research and practice (Cooper et al., 2016). This type of targeted professional development has been found to be a significant enabler for policy implementation in the area of increasing physical activity at the school level (Kelly et al., 2019). Therefore, increasing professional knowledge in this area could work as an facilitator to promote recess policy implementation.

Further, due to the findings in this study with regard to demographic variables and their impact on these site-based decision-makers and their behavioral intent, professional development should be differentiated. For example, those with advanced years of experience would benefit from professional development targeted to areas such as renewing their pedagogical ideology with regard to the benefits of an unstructured recess for their students. Teachers who have been in the field longer may experience emotional exhaustion if they are ineffective at managing classroom behaviors. These teachers may become more harsh overtime and maintain rigid rules. This type of environment can be especially harmful to students at risk for mental health issues (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

When providing professional development in best practices, Klingner (2004) found that there were five facilitators to creating lasting change. These include leadership setting clear expectations that the practice is important, creating a community in which stakeholders feel enabled to seek and also provide help to peers, being presented research that clearly links the practice with improved student outcomes, all resources needed for implementation and the flexibility to modify a practice if needed in order to support

students and/or staff more effectively. An example of that flexibility would be in allowing extra time for recess, as was a request from many respondents in this study. These elements should be considered when planning for professional development opportunities for a district or for a specific site.

**Behavioral Options.** The results of this study indicates that one of the biggest barriers to policy implementation at this site was a perceived need for expanded behavioral consequences. This could be accomplished by more effective implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is an evidence-based program that integrates data and practices impacting student behaviors (Pas et al., 2019; Kittelman et al., 2019). This can assist site-based decision-makers in understanding the difference in punishment and discipline in both philosophy and practice.

Another behavioral support could be in incorporating *Let's inspire innovation 'N Kids* (LiiNK) (Rhea et al., 2016; Rhea & Rivchun, 2018). This program provides a framework for additional recess segments as well as character development lessons. By lessening behavioral management issues, policy implementation could be implemented with increased fidelity. And further, to tie in with the recommendation above for targeted professional development, in-service sessions providing classroom management strategies could facilitate more consistent implementation (Turner et al., 2013).

Attention should be given to the classroom climate, also. DeVries et al. (1991) differentiated between classrooms with a constructivist approach, an eclectic approach and a direct-instruction approach. Classrooms with a constructivist environment emphasized natural consequences and logical outcomes rather than punishments. On the contrary, the direct-instruction classrooms were more authoritarian in nature with little

personal choice and directions dictated by the teacher. The eclectic classrooms, while not completely rule bound, leaned more towards authoritarian rather than allowing choice.

**Academic Support.** Based on the data analysis in this study, stakeholders are concerned about students' academic acquisition with the reality of a demanding curriculum and time constraints. This could be resolved by allowing a block of time in the schedule for academic interventions. And again, to tie in with the recommendation above for training, targeted professional development can reinforce the positive relationship between physical activity and academic achievement for both teachers and administrators (Roberts et al., 2010; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008; Strong et al., 2005). This can assist stakeholders in recognizing that recess is a factor in improving cognitive performance (Murray & Ramstetter, 2013) and that students perform better academically (Barros et al., 2009) and with improved focus (Stapp & Karr, 2018) post recess. And as mentioned earlier in this study, as to unfinished classwork, instructors in prosocial classrooms design instruct that builds on each student's strengths and abilities thereby mediating simply completing assignments as a need (Jennings & Greenberg (2009).

*Recommendations for Further Research*

While policy is created at various levels, teachers and administrators act as site-based decision-makers when choosing levels of implementation. The majority of literature in this area focuses on the benefits of the practice of recess and the advent of policies. Little focus has been placed on policy implementation in this area or the beliefs and perceptions of the teachers and administrators asked to implement these policies daily. This study was developed to elicit the salient beliefs of these stakeholders regarding their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral controls regarding

the implementation of the district's written recess policy. As a result of the data collected through this study, the following recommendations are made for future research:

- This elicitation study was conducted to elicit the salient responses of site-based decision-makers at one site in a district with a written recess policy. Elicitation studies are seen as the initial piece of TPB studies when a topic has not been extensively researched (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Future researchers could extend this study by employing a close-ended survey district-wide to assess the behavioral beliefs of site-based decision-makers at this site or district-wide.

- This study used the Theory of Planned Behavior to address behavioral intentions and did not examine the actual behaviors of these stakeholders. Future studies should further this study of the actual behaviors of site-based decision-makers in the area of recess policy implementation.

- Some participants felt that parents would approve of implementing the district's written recess policy while other respondents stated that they would not support this. Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Bilello (2005) documented parent advocacy for the practice of recess and future research should explore the perspectives of parents in the area of recess policy implementation.

- Many of the respondents gave either/or responses such as recess or behavioral consequence while others gave both/and responses such as children needing recess and yet needing separate behavioral consequences. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) refer to these two modes of thinking as either/or and both/and. They encourage those in the field of early childhood education to

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move towards both/and ways of thinking while valuing developmentally appropriate practice and evidence-based practice. This should be an area for future research with regards to recess policy implementation as we further investigate the pedagogical beliefs of site-based decision-makers.

**Summary**

The Global Recess Alliance was formed in 2020 to address the need for recess as schools reopen post the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. This group of scholars, health professionals, and educational leaders published a statement which supports a focus on a need for prioritizing recess as schools reopen (McNamara et al., 2020). An unstructured break is more important than ever as children return to school post-pandemic so advocates for children must work for solutions which protect this vital piece of a student's day.

Site-based decision-makers are the ones asked to implement recess policy thus this study used TPB (Ajzen, 1991) as a theoretical lens to explore the beliefs and perceptions of teachers and administrators who make decisions on implementing the district's written recess policy daily. This elicitation study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of barriers and enablers to implementing recess policy. The outcomes of this study can be used to provide insight and for policymakers and educational leaders when creating facilitators that will increase recess policy implementation and therefore, support the whole child more effectively.

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Appendix 1

District Policy on Recess – <u>confidential</u> School System – <u>confidential</u> County, Georgia

| | |
|---|---|
| Type: | Policy |
| Descriptor Code: | IEDA |
| Title: | Unstructured Break Time |
| Status: | ADOPTED |

The Board allows the scheduling of unstructured break time for students in Pre-K through grade 8. Students in grades Kindergarten through 5 in all schools shall have at least thirty minutes of break time each day.

The school principal shall issue regulations regarding the timing and location of breaks at each school. In determining the schedule for unstructured break time for students, the principal shall consult with appropriate instructional personnel at the school and system level, as appropriate, to insure that the break time does not interfere with and provides support for academic learning. The principal shall also issue directions or regulations concerning the responsibility of supervision of students so that break time will be a safe experience for them.

Breaks may not be withheld from students for academic reasons. Decisions to withhold break time for disciplinary reasons may only be made by a school administrator and shall not be inconsistent with any behavioral plan developed by the school for the student, including a Section 504 plan or an individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Last Revised Date: 7/14/2016

Original Adopted Date: 1/1/2005

<u>confidential</u> County School System
Last Reviewed Date: 7/14/2016

Policy Reference Disclaimer: These references are not intended to be part of the policy itself, nor do they indicate the basis or authority for the board to enact this policy. Instead, they are provided as additional resources for those interested in the subject matter of the policy.

| State Reference | Description |
|---|---|
| O.C.G.A 20-02-0323 | <u>Unstructured Break Time</u> |
| Rule 160-5-1-.02 | <u>School Day and School Year for Students and Employees</u> |