



Active Recess Extreme Makeover

“Engaged students definitely have less behavior concerns in our experiences. Health office visits due to recess injuries have been about cut in half”

Erika Yoney,
Fergus Falls School Nurse



Active recess experts from Concordia College and North Dakota State University were invited by the Fergus Falls School District Wellness Committee and funded by PartnerSHIP 4 Health (PS4H) to observe the Kennedy Secondary School Middle School Outdoor Recess. It was quickly noted that when you combine four adult recess supervisors, 200 middle school students, three soccer balls, and one fenced in area, the result is a lot of chaos, wrestling, grass fights, random balls whizzing past heads, and many students choosing to be inactive.

Just six months later, these recess experts would be amazed to see that the recess area is subdivided into four to five separate activity areas with one adult supervisor per area. And, depending on the day, nerf footballs, volleyballs, hula hoops, four-square balls, tennis rackets and balls, and stretch jump ropes are in use.

Erika Yoney, School Nurse and School Wellness Committee Chair, stated that, “Students are definitely moving more; allowing for a variety of activities has encouraged less active kids to try new things or start with a small activity. Positive change related to student safety have also been noted. Liz Hanstad, recess supervisor, reports that recess time is more fun and more active for both staff and students.

According to Yoney, “We are so thankful to PartnerSHIP 4 Health for partnering with us to create active recess for our middle school students.” PS4H provided funding for salary reimbursement for recess supervisors to participate in the Active Recess training and funds to purchase much needed recess equipment.

Lessons learned at the annual School Wellness Summit resulted in the formation of an Active Recess Committee (ARC). ARC Members include Yoney, the Middle School Principal, Recess Supervisors, and Wellness Committee Members.

Members were engaged in the decision to re-structure the recess time as well as the creation of a communications plan. The Fergus Falls 544 Education Foundation provided funding for walkie-talkies to enable the supervisors to communicate with one another and the office.

Some pre-recess training was needed in order to encourage appropriate use of the Chinese Jump Ropes. Bowhall instructed 6th and 8th students during FACS class and observed that “Boys and girls have been equally engaged and taken turns at holding the bands and jumping. All sizes of students have engaged in the jumping. The DVD has been a key to teaching students the routines. Only one group tried to use the ropes to tie up another student so we also talked about appropriate use and how the recess supervisors would take the ropes away if not used as intended.”

Moving middle school recess indoors for the winter was another opportunity for growth as the indoor gym is much smaller than the outdoor fenced in area. The ARC has already integrated the zone structure and has brainstormed the addition of two potential new venues, the auditorium stage and the north region of the cafeteria. According to recess supervisor, Brenda Stoen, “Students are more active in the gym this year as compared to last year. We have less kids sitting along the wall. And, we are sending fewer kids to the office during recess.”

There are still challenges to active recess, such as students misusing equipment, getting into equipment not meant for recess, and not listening to the supervisors. However, with ARC in place, these challenges become opportunities to address in order to continue to support increased daily physical activity among the middle school student population.

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