

The Importance of Recess & Alternatives to Withholding Recess

Sarah Whiteway and Kate Huber

Wellness Wednesday Webinar



CREATING HEALTHY
SCHOOLS AND
COMMUNITIES

The big question:

Is recess a **reward** to be earned only by the children who are on task and who comply with academic and behavioral expectations?

Or

Is recess an important part of every child's school day, offering benefits—to physical health, social development, and sense of autonomy—that are **too important to be taken away**?

Today's outline

1 Benefits of Recess

2 Withholding Recess
Statistics

3 The Impact of
withholding recess

4 Alternative discipline
options

Today's outline

1 **Benefits of Recess**

2 Withholding Recess
Statistics

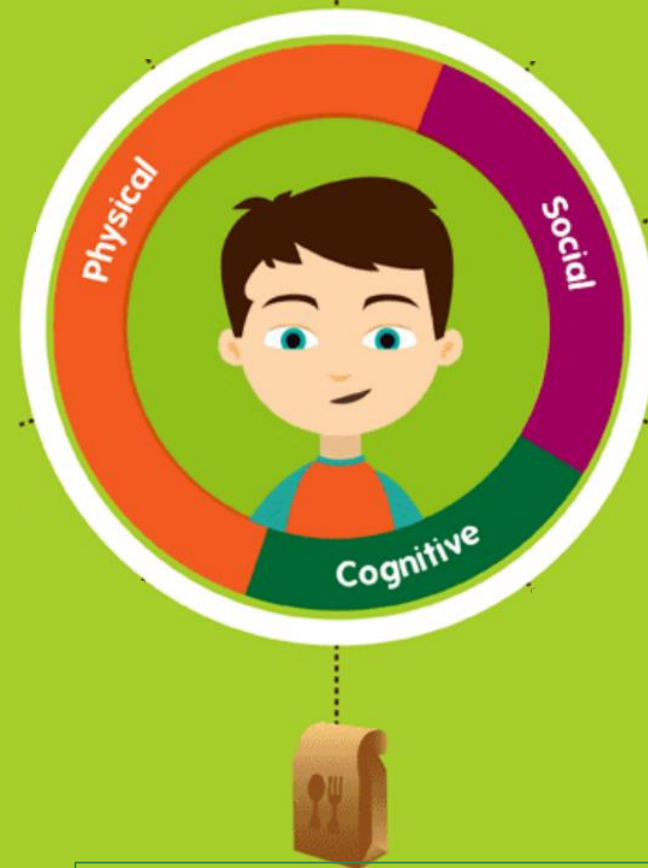
3 The Impact of
withholding recess

4 Alternative discipline
options

The **best** recess provides cognitive, social and physical benefits



**Indoor recess in
classroom with
students playing
on a device or
with small toys
at their desk**



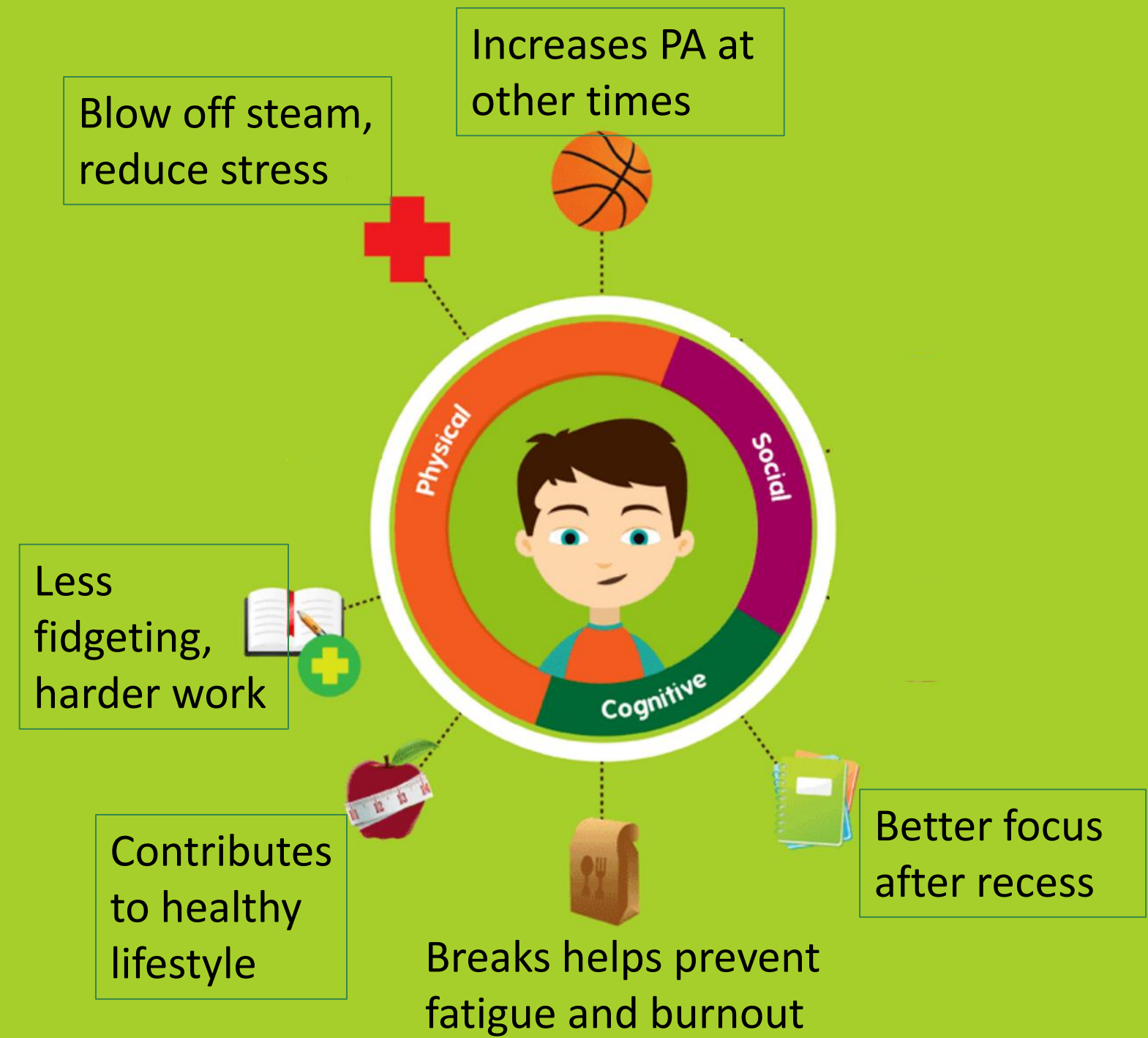
Breaks helps prevent
fatigue and burnout

Indoor recess in classroom with students able to choose a quiet game/activity to play with others

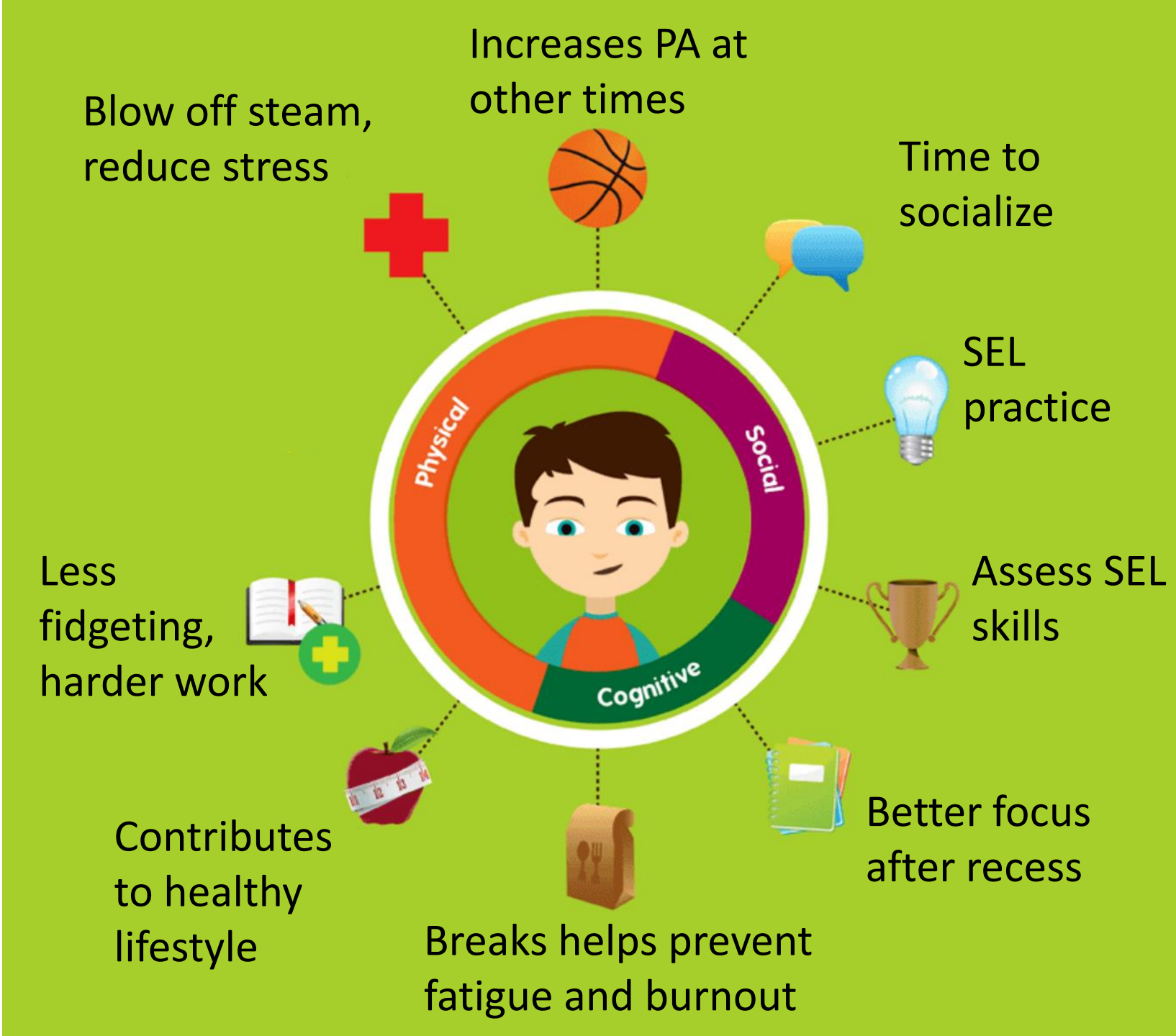


Breaks helps prevent fatigue and burnout

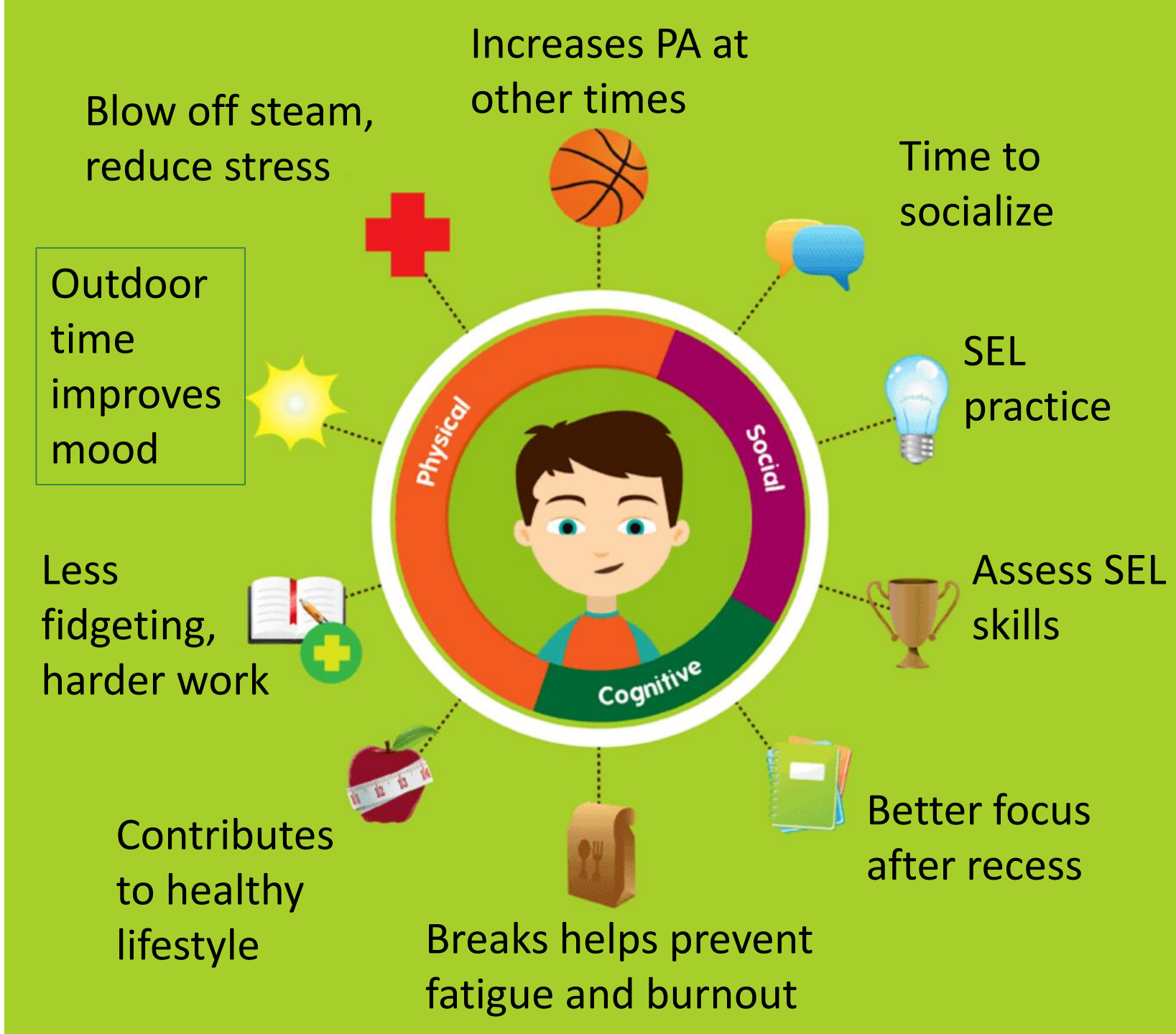
Indoor recess in classroom with go noodle or other physical activity video



Indoor recess in gym or other room with space/equipment to run and play



Outdoor recess with access to equipment



Today's outline

1 Benefits of Recess

3 The Impact of
withholding recess

**2 Withholding Recess
Statistics**

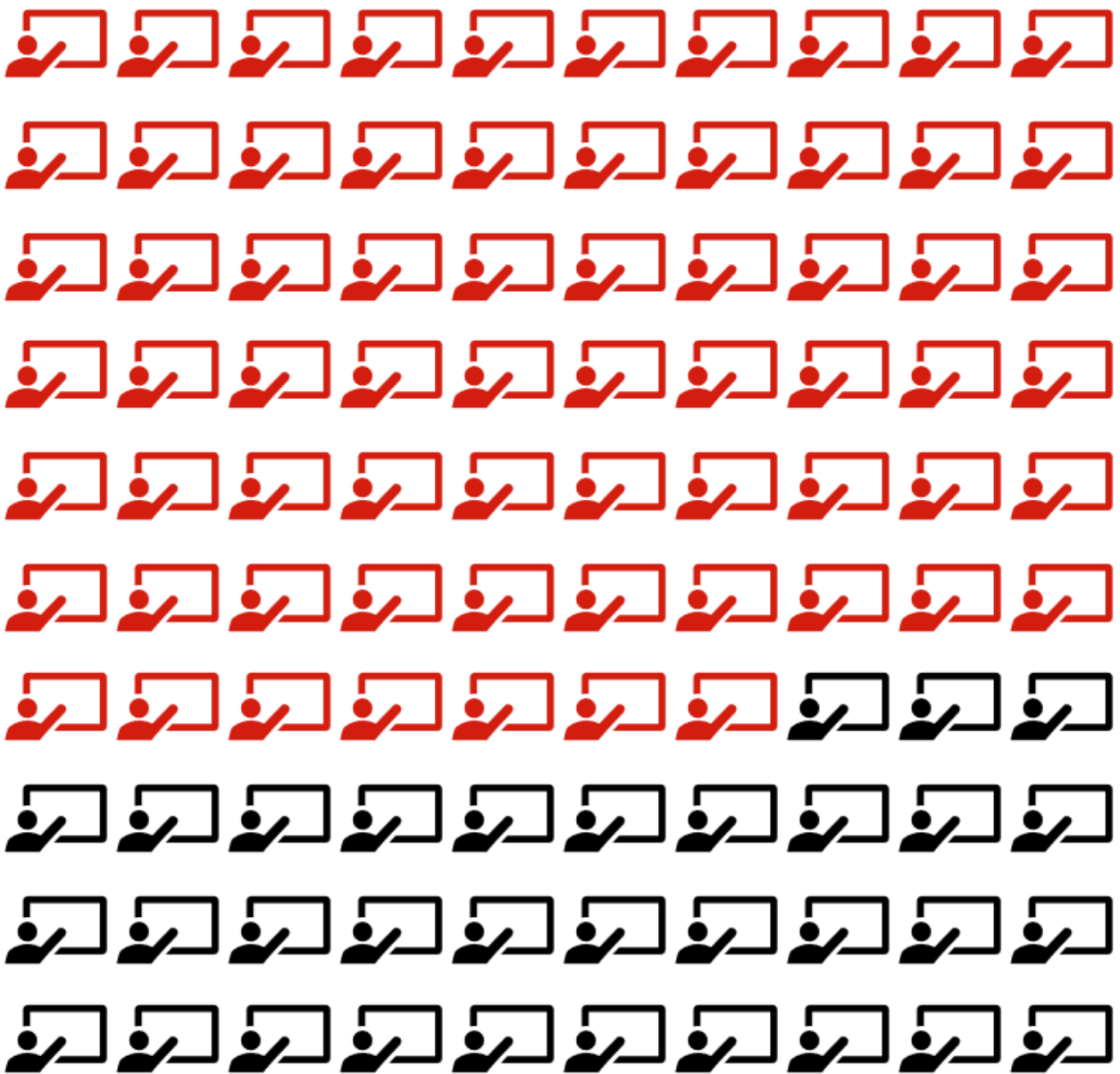
4 Alternative discipline
options

77%

of principals said that some or all of their teachers used withholding of recess as punishment.

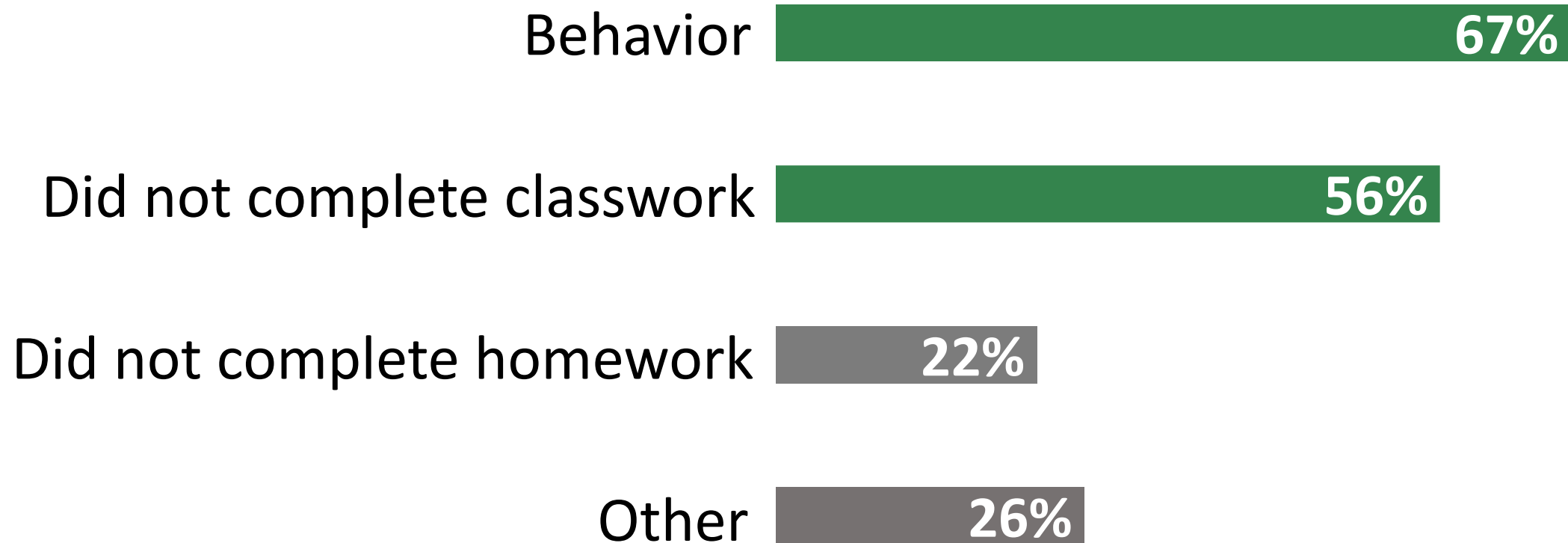
2010 Gallup Survey- [Poll Shows research shows Play is Essential to Physical, Social and Emotional Development of Kids - RWJF](#)

100% of teachers surveyed said that recess was beneficial though 67% had withheld recess that year.



Teachers who withhold recess do so primarily due to misbehavior and failure to complete academic class work

Survey of 213 teachers in Massachusetts in 2014 and Ohio in 2017



Teachers express

frustration

and a sense that they have

few other options

for controlling misbehavior in their classrooms.

Today's outline

1

Benefits of Recess

2

Withholding Recess
Statistics

3

**The Impact of
withholding recess**

4

Alternative discipline
options

When recess is withheld, it's not only that they aren't able to enjoy the time, they're also being harmed by taking away this opportunity for important child development.



Rebecca London, PhD. Associate Professor of Sociology University of California, Santa Cruz.

[Rethinking Recess | Harvard Graduate School of Education](#)

Withholding recess as a punishment can negatively affect a child's relationships with teachers, feelings about school and sense of self-worth. It is a punishment that is especially stigmatizing and visible to their peers.



Jackie Mader, MA. Journalist covering early childhood education

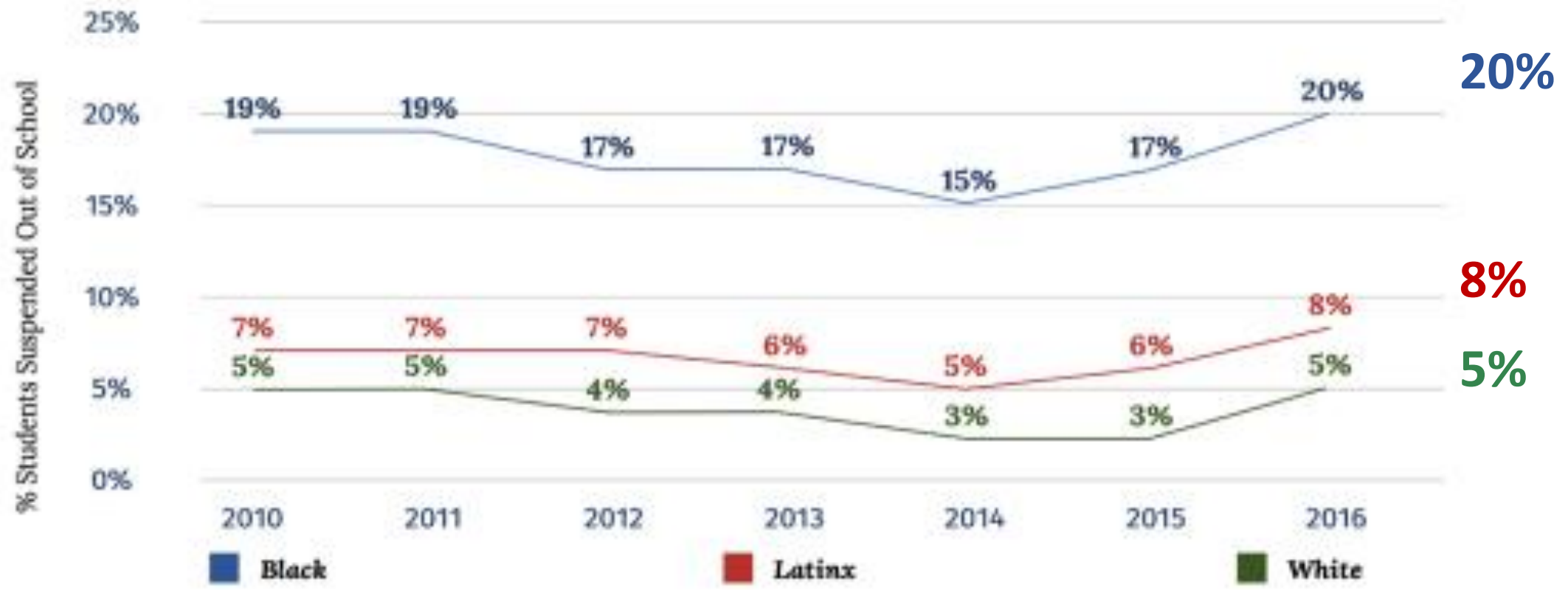
[Is recess a right or a privilege?](#)

hechingerreport.org

Who has recess withheld?

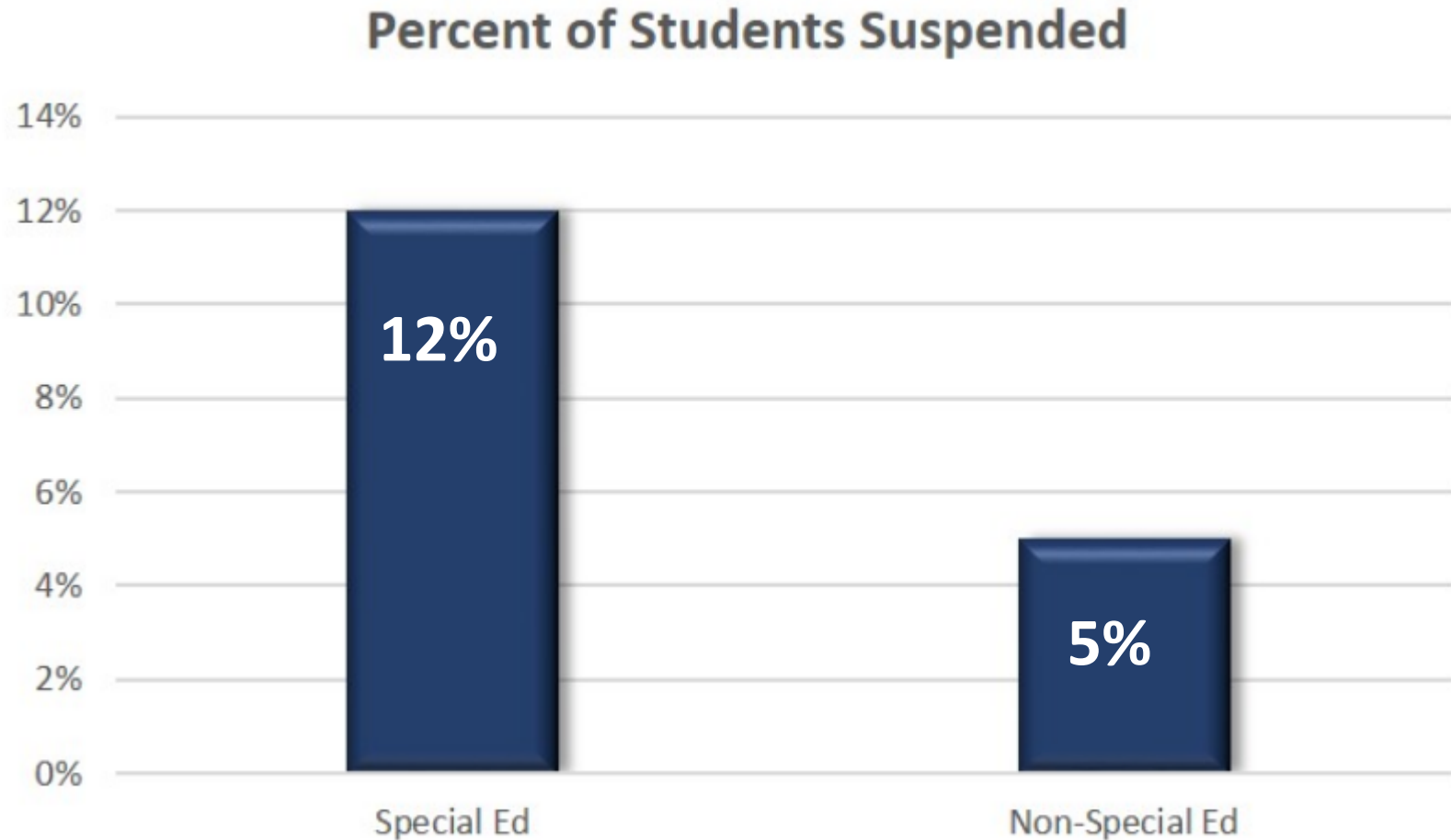
Given what we know about disproportionality in school discipline,

Black students more likely to be suspended



Source: VDOE restricted use data, 2016

Special Education students more likely to be suspended



Who has recess withheld?

Given what we know about disproportionality in school discipline, we might guess that **Black and Latino boys as well as children in special education experience the highest rates of recess withholding.**

[The right to play: Eliminating the opportunity gap in elementary school recess - kappanonline.org](http://kappanonline.org)

The big question:

Is recess a reward to be earned only by the children who are **on task and who comply with academic and behavioral expectations?**

Or

Is recess an important part of every child's school day, offering benefits—to physical health, social development, and sense of autonomy—that are too important to be taken away?

The **best** recess provides cognitive, social and physical benefits



Withholding recess promotes inequity



Today's outline

1 Benefits of Recess

2 Withholding Recess
Statistics

3 The Impact of
withholding recess

4 Alternative discipline
options

Non-exclusionary discipline

School discipline has evolved from exclusionary discipline to finding more effective ways to address behavior issues that ensure kids remain in the learning environment and grow from a whole-child perspective.

[School Climate and Student Discipline Resources: Support School Staff \(ed.gov\)](#)

Restorative Practices

Proactive schoolwide strategies to create a sense of community, build healthy relationships, and develop conflict resolution skills, sense of belonging, and agency.

Restorative processes like circles, conflict-resolution programs, peer-led practices, and tribunals to respond to incidents that cause harm.

Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS)

TIER 1

Tier 1 practices and systems establish a foundation of regular, proactive support while preventing unwanted behaviors. Schools provide these universal supports to all students, school-wide.

[Learn More](#)

TIER 2

Tier 2 practices and systems support students who are at risk for developing more serious problem behaviors before those behaviors start. These supports help students develop the skills they need to benefit from core programs at the school.

[Learn More](#)

TIER 3

At Tier 3, students receive more intensive, individualized support to improve their behavioral and academic outcomes. At this level, schools rely on formal assessments to determine a student's need.

[Learn More](#)

Positive approaches to discipline using recess

Provide daily recess to all students.

Allow classes or students to earn extra recess as a reward.

And if this seems impossible:

Withhold part- but not all- of recess.

Restrict recess activity choice.

Make small changes!



Recess offers cognitive, social, emotional, and physical benefits that may not be fully appreciated when a decision is made to diminish it. Recess is necessary for the health and development of children and should never be withheld for punishment or for academic reasons.

American Academy
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®

[The Crucial Role of Recess in School | Pediatrics | American Academy of Pediatrics \(aap.org\)](https://www.aap.org)

What should you do?

Advocate for a required daily recess that can not be withheld.

Wellness policy update

Push for school wide positive approach to discipline.

Professional development on classroom management.

Administrator support and leadership in positive discipline.

Resources

[The Crucial Role of Recess in School | Pediatrics | American Academy of Pediatrics \(aap.org\)](#)

[The right to play: Eliminating the opportunity gap in elementary school recess - kappanonline.org](#)

[Is recess a right or a privilege? \(hechingerreport.org\)](#)

[Rethinking Recess | Harvard Graduate School of Education](#)

Resources (cont.)

[Poll Shows research shows Play is Essential to Physical, Social and Emotional Development of Kids – RWJF](#)

[2018 Survey on Recess - IPEMA - Voice of Play](#)

[ERIC - EJ1200225 - Ready for Recess? The Elementary School Teacher's Perspective, American Educator, 2019](#)

[School Climate and Student Discipline Resources: Support School Staff \(ed.gov\)](#)