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## “Just Give Kids a Break...Not Just Any Break, a Quality One!”

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Recess, once a reliable part of American children’s daily life, now is absent or only an afterthought in many schools, especially urban public schools. In the aftermath of No Child Left Behind, every minute of the school day has been scrutinized for its instructional value—and recess, a break from academic instruction, often hasn’t survived the scrutiny. It is, by definition, a waste of time. This capstone project seeks to define “quality recess” in the 21st century, emphasize its burgeoning importance for urban public school students, and identify the human capital and financial resources necessary to achieve quality recess in urban public schools. I conducted this project using three approaches: a literature review, case studies and interviews. Each case study details the effects of school recess on the overall school environment at a low-income minority urban public school, located in West Philadelphia. In my research, I discovered two forms of recess that are prevalent in the recess literature and sought to find a third form of recess- called quality recess- that would be most adaptable to urban public school environments. My research and analysis resulted in three important findings. First, I have come to define quality recess as semi-structured recess in urban schools as a break during the school day where children are playing inclusive, interactive games in a safe, well managed environment and can return to the classroom re-energized and ready to learn. Secondly, Playworks, a national non-profit, offers a form of semi-structured recess that can work in urban schools and provide opportunities- to enhance academic learning, to develop integral social skills, and to engage in physical activity. Lastly, I offer policy recommendations on facilitating the implementation of semi-structured recess with collaborations between school districts, local universities and individual schools.