

PE, Fitness, and Recess in Illinois: Requirements, Flexibility, and Practice

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About This Session

- Illinois requirements for physical education
- Student exemptions
- Fitness testing = FitnessGram
- Recess and playtime requirements
- Real-world scenarios and Q&A

The Chain of Command — Why It Matters

- ISBE's role is to clarify the law — we are not the first stop
- Most issues need to be worked through at the local level first
- Going straight to ISBE skips the people who can make changes
- Knowing the chain of command helps parents and schools get faster results

The Chain of Command — How It Works

- Step 1: Principal
- Step 2: Superintendent
- Step 3: School Board
- Step 4: Regional Office of Education (ROE)
- Step 5: ISBE — we clarify the law and refer to local authority

Physical Education

Requirements and Common Problems

PE Requirements — What the Law Says

- Sec. 27-705: School boards must provide physical education for all pupils
- Sec. 27-710: Students must engage in PE during the school day
- Sec. 27-725: PE must be part of the regular curriculum — not extracurricular
- PE cannot be replaced by sports, clubs, or other activities

PE Requirements — The 3 of 5 Rule

- Students must have PE a minimum of 3 out of every 5 school days
- The school board sets the schedule within that requirement
- Block scheduling exception applies on designated block days

PE Requirements — Common Problems

- Most complaints come from parents about kids not getting PE 3 days a week
- Schools cite scheduling or staffing, but that does not change the requirement
- Some schools count recess or sports practice toward PE — none qualify
- Parents who contact ISBE are directed to start at the school level first

PE and Graduation — Know What's Required

- PE is required by law — every student must take it
- Not completing PE does not prevent a student from graduating
- These are two separate things — and both sides get this confused

PE and Graduation — What This Means in Practice

- A school cannot drop PE just because it does not count toward graduation
- A parent cannot pull their child out for the same reason
- Schools still have to offer it, and students still must take it

Exemptions

Medical, Individual, and Special
Education

Medical Exemptions — The Law

- Sec. 27-710(a): Excuses may be given by a parent or guardian
- The Medical Practice Act of 1987 defines who qualifies to make this determination
- Special activities must be provided for students who cannot fully participate

Medical Exemptions — What Goes Wrong

- The most common question: who can write this note?
- It must come from someone licensed under the Medical Practice Act of 1987
- Parent notes by themselves do not meet the standard
- We have seen cases where a parent who is a doctor writes their own child's note
- Schools need to verify the note author, not just the signature

Individual Exemptions — District Options

- Grades 11-12: students in interscholastic athletics may be excused
- Grades 11-12: college admission or graduation-required classes can qualify
- Grades 9-12: marching band for credit or ROTC
- Grades 7-12: interscholastic or extracurricular athletics — case by case
- Any grade: physical activity during a period of religious fasting

Individual Exemptions — What Districts Need to Know

- None of these exemptions are automatic
- Districts choose whether to offer them — that is built into the law
- If a district exercises any exemption, a written board policy is needed
- Without a written policy, the exemption should not be granted
- Tell parents: check your district's board policy first

The Inconsistency Problem

- Here is where we get a lot of calls
- One district may grant an exemption that another does not — that is legal
- But it creates real confusion, especially for families who move districts
- A student excused in one district may not be excused in another
- Written board policy is what keeps this consistent within a district

Special Education and PE

IEPs, Adapted PE, and What the Law Requires

Special Education and PE (continued)

- Grades 3-12: students with an IEP may be excused if the parent agrees
- OR if the IEP team decides PE time must be used for special ed services
- That decision must be written into the IEP — it cannot be informal
- A student needing adapted PE must still receive it per the IEP
- PE time cannot be quietly replaced by other services without documentation

FitnessGram

Physical Fitness Assessments in Schools

FitnessGram — The Law, Part 1

- Sec. 27-720: Required for all students in Grades 3-12
- Schools must use a scientifically-based, health-related fitness assessment
- Fitness testing is an instructional tool — it gets built into the curriculum, not administered separately

FitnessGram — The Law, Part 2

- Testing helps students understand their own fitness levels and set personal goals
- Fitness scores should NOT be used for grading students or evaluating teachers
- Schools must periodically report aggregated fitness data to ISBE

FitnessGram — What Goes Wrong

- Schools not knowing how to sign up in IWAS (ISBE Web Application Security system)
- Not completing registration as a physical fitness data reporter in IWAS
- Using FitnessGram scores as part of student grades — prohibited by law
- Factoring scores into teacher evaluations — also prohibited
- For IWAS registration questions, reach out to ISBE

Recess/Playtime

Requirements and Common Problems

Recess — The Law, Part 1 (Section 27-715)

- Daily playtime is required for all students in kindergarten through Grade 5
- Playtime must be supervised, unstructured, and child-directed
- On school days 5 or more hours long: minimum 30 minutes of playtime required
- On shorter school days: minimum one-tenth of the school day must be playtime

Recess — The Law, Part 2

- Playtime may be split into periods — but each must be at least 15 consecutive minutes
- Playtime does NOT count as PE
- PE does NOT count as playtime
- These are separate requirements — neither one satisfies the other

Recess — What Goes Wrong

- Playtime broken into chunks shorter than 15 consecutive minutes
- Lunch and recess run together without a clear separation between them
- Full school days where the 30-minute minimum just is not happening
- Screens, tablets, phones, videos do not count as playtime under the law
- And the biggest complaint we receive recess taken away as punishment

Withholding Playtime — What the Law Says

- 27-715(e): Schools shall PROHIBIT withholding playtime as a disciplinary action
- This applies to individual students and to entire classes
- The prohibition is clear — it is not a gray area

Real-World Scenarios

Common Situations and How We Respond

Real-World Scenarios — PE

- A parent calls — their child has not had PE in six weeks due to testing prep.
- A school counts morning movement breaks as PE.

Real-World Scenarios — Exemptions

- An 11th grader is excused from PE for interscholastic athletics but there is no board policy.
- A physician parent writes their own child's medical exemption. The school needs a consistent verification policy. We flag it and refer it back to the district.

Real-World Scenarios — Recess and FitnessGram

- A teacher withholds recess from the whole class because of one student's behavior.
- A school is factoring FitnessGram scores into teacher evaluations.

Key Takeaways

- PE is required — not offering it is not an option, even if it does not affect graduation
- 3 out of 5 days is the requirement — we work with districts to get there
- Medical exemptions must meet the Medical Practice Act of 1987 standard
- Exemptions are a district choice — but a written board policy is highly suggested.

Key Takeaways (continued)

- Playtime and PE are separate requirements — one does not cover the other
- Taking recess away as punishment is against the law
- Start local: Principal → Superintendent → School Board → ROE → ISBE
- isbe.net | 105 ILCS 5/27-705 through 27-725

References — Illinois School Code

- [105 ILCS 5/27-705 — Physical Education and Training](#)
- [105 ILCS 5/27-710 — Courses in Physical Education Required; Special Activities](#)
- [105 ILCS 5/27-715 — Playtime Required in Elementary School](#)
- [105 ILCS 5/27-720 — Physical Fitness Assessments in Schools](#)
- [105 ILCS 5/27-725 — Physical Education Course of Study](#)

References — Additional Resources

- [225 ILCS 60 — Medical Practice Act of 1987](#)
- [ISBE Physical Education Resources](#)
- [ISBE Health Education Resources](#)