



Active Insight: Evidence in Action



Tip #431: Active Playgrounds That Work

Overview

A well-designed playground does more than provide space for students to move. It gives them a structure within which social skills, physical confidence and independent decision-making can develop. When activity zones are clearly defined and expectations are visible, students spend less time negotiating and more time participating. Schools that invest in playground organisation see fewer incidents during break times and stronger movement habits across the student body. The physical environment shapes the culture of play.

Key Teaching Ideas

Effective playground design starts with zoning. Separating high-energy game areas from quieter spaces reduces conflict and allows students with different needs to find their place. Student play leaders add another layer of structure by facilitating games for younger peers and modelling respectful participation. Equipment access hubs placed at key points around the yard encourage spontaneous activity without requiring teacher setup. When the environment does the work, students are more active and supervision becomes more manageable.

Practical Application

- **Zoned Activity Areas:** Designate specific areas for high-energy games, skill challenges and quieter movement. Clear zones reduce crowding, conflict and the need for constant teacher redirection.
- **Student Play Leaders:** Train senior students to set up and lead simple games for younger peers during break times. This builds leadership skills and keeps activity options available across the yard.
- **Equipment Access Hubs:** Place tubs of simple equipment such as skipping ropes, hoops and beanbags at accessible points around the playground for students to use independently.
- **Visual Rule Displays:** Install weatherproof signs in activity areas showing simple, icon-based rules for popular games. Students can resolve disputes independently without waiting for a teacher.
- **Seasonal Rotation:** Refresh playground activity options each term to maintain interest. Introduce a new game or challenge at the start of each term to re-engage students who have lost interest in existing options.



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Next Steps

Explore whole-school movement resources and playground design guides at activeeducationaustralia.edu.au.

References and Research

1. Australian Sports Commission. (2019). Australian Physical Literacy Framework – Defines physical literacy as the development of physical, psychological, social and cognitive capabilities that support lifelong participation in physical activity.
2. Australian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines – Recommends regular physical activity throughout the day to support health, wellbeing and active lifestyles across the lifespan.