

Extending Break Time Duration



Description: Increase the total duration of breaks throughout the school day. Aim to have a total of at least 75 minutes of break within a school day AND include one break (probably lunchtime) that is at least 60 minutes in duration.

Reach

- **All students** have break times at school – usually a morning break and a lunch break (unless detention policies result in missed break times).

Equality

- This policy change is potentially more effective for increasing physical activity in **boys**, but the evidence for this is limited.
- It might be more effective in **younger adolescents**. Evidence from primary schools show that physical activity undertaken at break time reduces with age (therefore extending the break duration might not make any difference to older students who are less active anyway).

Acceptability

- Students in our CASE advisory group reported **wanting longer break times** (especially the lunch-break) in order to be physically active.
- Within research evidence and within our CASE advisory groups, teachers report that extending break duration is a good thing as students return to class **more alert and have better behaviour after a break**. They reported that breaks are good to “**let off steam**” and most teachers indicated that the current break times are too short to enable this.

Feasibility

- Extending break time is likely to bring some initial **extra school-admin time** to organise this change. This will cease once established.
- Sufficient supervisory staff need to be identified. This can be existing teachers or external staff.
- If the extra time for breaks comes from lessons, this should be quite feasible (according to our CASE advisory group). However, if the change has to come from extending the length of the school day this will be more challenging to implement.

Effectiveness

- In UK adolescents, longer break time is associated with more moderate-to-vigorous physical activity and less sedentary (i.e., sitting) time **in boys only** (although these were very small associations).
- There are no studies that have examined the effect of **changing break time length** on students' **social, mental and educational outcomes**; however there is evidence to support **the importance of break-times in general for these outcomes (mostly reports from teachers)**.
- Most evidence comes from studies conducted in **primary schools**. It is important to note that these usually combine approaches (i.e., not just increasing break time length) therefore it is difficult to attribute any positive effects on physical activity to break duration alone.
- If the school grounds are small (i.e., a lack of space), then increased break time may not result in more activity (the physical environment somewhat limits the effect this policy change can have).

Cost

- Estimated costs for lunchtime supervisors is approximately £25,000 (total costs) for the school year for a 45 minute lunchtime. If lunchtime was increased by 15 mins, then this would add an additional **£6500 per year** to the school running costs.
- If the time available for increased break came from re-organising lessons (e.g. no increase to the length of the school day) – there would be no additional cost for the introduction of this change.
- If the time for increased break resulted in a change to the length of the school day, there would be additional initial costs related to the consultation/change process (including head teacher meeting with parents and local authorities to lay out changes to the school day). Also there would potentially be a need to change contracts for school buses (i.e., later/earlier time). This could equate to > **£10,000** as a one-off cost.
- There would be no additional teacher costs due to the nature of the teaching contracts (i.e., this time would be covered by their existing contracts).