

What is PEP?

The Playground Enhancement Project™ (PEP) is a proven intervention for 'jump-starting' cooperative game play during school recess. PEP provides field-tested and research-based curriculum resources that caring adults use to teach cooperative games, game-playing skills and game etiquette directly to children ages 5-13+. PEP's practical tools and tips help school staff and volunteers attend to the intangible aspects of recess, the social-emotional needs of students, what they are doing together and how it effects them.

Why is PEP necessary?

What happens during school recess can contribute to or undermine the education and well-being of students. Recess is a challenging time for schools - when a high percentage of school bullying occurs. Students can easily spend 150 hours of unstructured time at recess



each year. Group dynamics on playgrounds can spin into cycles of fear and negative interactions that leave students feeling intimidated and bullied. Sometimes bullying can not be seen, but it undermines the security and well-being of all students. Chronic social isolation and humiliation can lead to deep emotional scarring, trouble studying, an unwillingness to go to school, and violence. Dealing with recess troubles uses up valuable teacher energy and class time. It is time to pro-actively pay attention to what students are doing during recess.

Why teach games, particularly cooperative games?

Games might sound like a trivial solution to recess troubles. But research shows that age-appropriate, cooperative games help students learn pro-social skills, and create a more supportive playground climate. Games are a natural, even magical, way to meet the needs of children and to prevent the negative dynamics that can plague children at recess. PEP has been shown to significantly reduce levels of serious aggression (bullying behavior). Games provide a predictable structure for social interaction. But all games are not the same in their effect on children. Students can most successfully play games that match their developmental needs and capacities. Cooperative games allow players with all skill levels to join in a fun effort to meet group challenges. Some PEP games have competitive elements, but are not focused on winning, and players are not eliminated. Few teachers and students know playground games anymore. PEP helps bring games back.

What are the main benefits of PEP?

- 1) social-emotional safety / improved climate**
PEP decreases incidents of students acting to harm/humiliate others, and helps students achieve a sense of 'belonging' among their peers.
- 2) physical well-being / prevention or reduction of obesity**
Children who feel free to move about and engage in fun, active games are burning more calories, and developing new skills and exercise habits. Students like PEP games. When 226 students at a school were surveyed, 33% (in grades 1-5) chose a PEP game as their favorite.
- 3) cognitive development / learning**
Active games promotes physical activity which stimulate the brain. Cooperative games require decision-making, planning, and negotiation that inspire students to remember, conceptualize and communicate. Classroom learning is enhanced when more students have fewer complaints and are more focused after a harmonious recess.

How does PEP work?

Success relies on the involvement of teachers, staff and volunteers during recess. PEP provides practical tools for on-the-spot guidance in choosing games, and for teaching games and game-playing skills that allow students to play successfully on their own. Broad implementation will reap broad and sustainable benefits. But PEP can make an important difference even if only a few adults implement the program.

PEP Kit Components

- **The Cooperative Games Handbook** includes guidelines for choosing and playing over 45 kid-tested cooperative games and 12 group jump rope games within guidelines of respect, inclusion, fairness and cooperation
- **The PEP Games Video** (70 minutes) features kids-in-action playing 30 of the most popular PEP games and demonstrating key group game-playing skills (video guide available).
- **The PEP Can** is a water-resistant game resource center on wheels which displays game ideas and stores game equipment for easy access on the playground or in the gym.
- **The PEP Instruction Manual** includes practical information for developing and sustaining a school PEP effort.

