Keeping Recess Positive

Recess is the most important "class" of the day. Most kids certainly think so! For the classroom teacher, it can be challenging to help students at recess. Many schools have teachers or aides on duty, but so much of what happens on the playground happens fast and without an adult witness. Here are some simple suggestions that can make a big difference.

Before Recess

Minutes before recess, ask students what they are going to do at recess. Have them predict, plan, and practice for what could happen that would not make recess fun. For example, if everyone wants to be first on the new monkey bars, students will need a quick show to practice what to say and do should someone not take his turn. Wish them luck and then quickly check in with how things went at the monkey bars upon their return to class.

Put up a playground billboard where students can advertise what they are playing, invite others to join their activity, and/or post that they are looking for something new to do.

Ask kids what they are excited to do at recess. This will give a heads-up to those who are slow decision-makers or have trouble finding friends.

During Recess

Take the Kimochis™ Bowl to a recess game. Call "Freeze" and invite players to pull feelings from the bowl. Talk about the feelings as they relate to the game.

"What's happening to cause this feeling?
What could you say or do to make it better?"

"What could make this game
more fun and fair?"

"Would this game be better if an adult
was close by? Why?"

Most students will not get frustrated if you stop a game to talk about how it's going, ask how people are feeling, and ponder ways to make the game more fun. If you don't want to do this activity during an actual recess, hold a "fake" recess so students can practice prior to their real recess.

After Recess

Give students Happy and Sad Kimochis™ faces. (Go to www.kimochis.com for downloadables.) When students come in from recess, have them quickly and privately turn their faces to Happy or Sad and put in their desk to communicate how recess went. Do a quick check to see how students responded. Watch for a pattern of unhappiness, not just an occasional upset.

Ask your class to close their eyes and give a thumbs-up if they had fun at recess and a thumbs-down if they did not. You will begin to see if there is a pattern with students who keep having less-than-positive experiences. At a private time, take a walk with a student who continues to say recess is not good. "Paula, I keep seeing a thumbs-down from you about recess. Is there more you can tell me? Maybe together we can think of a way to make recess more fun for you."

Have students respond to the following writing prompts on blank Kimochis™ Notes:

Recess is fun because …
Recess could be more fun if …