



COLD WEATHER RECESS PLANNING

COLD WINTER TEMPERATURES ARE A REALITY IN ALBERTA.

Most school boards require or recommend that students stay indoors when temperatures drop below a certain temperature; the typical cutoff is around -20°C, with the wind chill. Despite predictable winter weather patterns in Alberta, many schools do not take a proactive approach to recess on cold days.

A cold weather recess plan should provide an outline of policies, strategies, supervision schedule and space, and equipment inventory. Ideally, this cold weather plan is part of a larger year-long recess plan, developed with input from a recess committee.

Taking the time to formulate a recess plan for your school acknowledges recess as an important and valued part of the school day, but it does have to be complicated. This resource will support your school in creating and implementing a successful indoor recess strategy. Although these strategies are geared towards cold weather, they are also great for any inclement weather, such as heavy rain or extreme heat.

A note on language: Ever Active Schools intentionally uses the language of 'Cold Weather Recess Planning' rather than 'Indoor Recess Planning'. We believe that a holistic approach to quality recess planning may utilize a variety of physical spaces within a school, including both indoor and outdoor environments. As you work through this document you'll notice that not all cold weather recess strategies involve indoor spaces – let's get creative!

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STRATEGIES

This is by no means an exhaustive list. When creating a recess plan, it is important to form a strategy that reflects the unique qualities of your school community and takes into account the resources available. Your plan may include a combination of approaches.

1. STUDENT LEADERSHIP

Engaging student leaders to lead safe and active indoor recess games is a great way to provide physical activity opportunities, build interconnectedness across grade levels and develop leadership skills in students. In this approach, student leaders are selected and trained (perhaps you engage an existing team, such as your Student Wellness Action Team, or create a new team of students for this purpose) to lead activities during recess. Students can be trained in as little as one hour, using the guiding questions and game suggestions in the [Student Leader Handbook](#) (page 13). At the end of the training, students should feel prepared to lead low-organization games or activities for their peers.

Things to consider:

ORGANIZATION

Student leaders should be sorted into groups of 2-3 so that they are working together to lead activities. The simplest format would be to assign student leaders a homeroom and have them lead activities for students in that room during indoor recess. Unfortunately, that arrangement does not allow for the students in the homeroom to connect with peers from other classes. To increase opportunities for building student connectedness, sort students into cross-graded pods and have them participate in student-led activities with this group in various spaces in the school.

SPACE

How you organize the groups will influence the space you need, and vice-versa. For some schools, it may make sense to just use classroom space; for others, there may be additional space available and/or needed. Classrooms, learning commons, gymnasiums and hallways may all be utilized as diverse recess spaces.



ACTIVITIES

We encourage student leaders to lead non-elimination games to keep all students in the game! It may also be helpful to have leaders offer an active game as well as another choice such as reading, colouring or board games to give the students a choice of leisure activities.

SCHEDULE

Depending on the size of your team, it may be worth considering rotating students through the leadership role. This way they are not leading consecutive days in the event of on-going inclement weather.

SUPERVISION

In this approach, the typical outdoor supervision schedule can be adapted to suit the indoor space. Adult supervisors float the hallways and support student leaders when needed. Staff that are not scheduled to supervise can take their break as per usual.

EQUIPMENT

Create small equipment bins to keep equipment organized. A list of our favourite games, descriptions and equipment to include in bins can be found in the [Student Leader Handbook](#) on page 13.

CELEBRATE & REFLECT

Make sure to recognize and celebrate all of the student leaders and their hard work in the spring! Take that as an opportunity to reflect on what went well, what students learned and what can be improved next year. Find a certificate of excellence for student leaders on page 11.

2. SUPERVISOR STATIONS / ACTIVITY ZONES

This approach asks adult supervisors (Administrator, Teacher, Educational Assistant) to bring a part of their personal identity to indoor recess. When a staff member is on supervision and the recess is indoors, that staff member creates a station that connects to something they are passionate about. It may be dance, juggling, basketball, hopscotch, twister, jenga or colouring; the possibilities are endless. During any indoor recess, supervisors are responsible for their station and the students who choose to participate.

Things to consider:

ORGANIZATION

Have each staff member identify what “station” they would like to lead in the event of indoor recess. This can be done at a staff meeting at the beginning of the year. In the event of an indoor recess, communicate options with students, and allow them to determine what station they would like to join for the recess time period.

SPACE

Space requirements will have to be determined based on what activities staff plan to lead. Here is another opportunity to be creative with the use of multiple recess spaces throughout the school, such as learning commons and hallways.

SCHEDULE

The schedule would not change from the normal supervision schedule. Staff that are not scheduled to supervise may take a break as per usual. This stations approach may be best suited to the lunch hour recess and another approach may be needed for shorter morning or afternoon recesses.

EQUIPMENT

Equipment would need to be determined based on stations and school’s available resources. You may ask teachers to use what is available within the school, or dedicate a small budget towards providing supplies.

CELEBRATE & REFLECT

Take some time as a staff at the end of the winter or school year to reflect on how this approach influenced relationships between staff and students and the recess experience of the school community as a whole. Discuss what went well, what was learned along the way and what can be improved next year.

3. POLAR CLUB

Inspired by the École Barrie Wilson Polar Bandit Club, established Winter 2019.

This approach may allow students to head outside even when temperatures dip below what would normally result in indoor recess. **Make sure to check with your school board authority or superintendent before implementing this approach.**

ORGANIZATION

Parents are provided the opportunity to give their children permission to go outside for recess at temperatures below what the school board recommends. However, there should still be a lower temperature limit that would result in all students staying inside; for example, -35 degrees Celsius. This should be determined ahead of time and communicated with parents, students and staff. Further, it is important that students and parents understand the importance of dressing appropriately for cold weather and are given opportunities to learn proper layering techniques. Extra clothing should be kept at school to be lent out if a student is in need. Lastly, there should still be an activity opportunity for students who stay inside. École Barrie Wilson set up a walking track through the school hallways for those students. An example letter to parents is included on page 12.

Check out **Move and Play Through Winter, Eh?** from Be Fit For Life for some outdoor play ideas:

<http://bepfitforlife.ca/resources/winter>



SUPERVISION

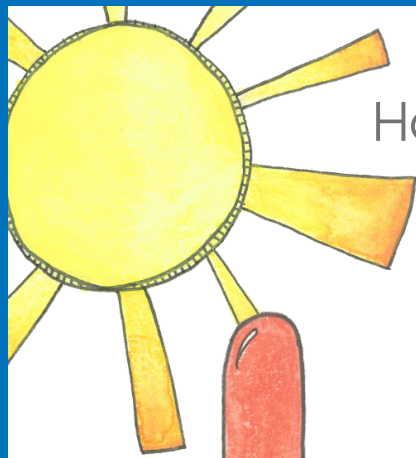
Supervision would need to be increased as it would be required both inside and outside. Allow staff to volunteer to supervise Polar Club.

CELEBRATE & REFLECT

We live in a country with cold winters! It is important to learn how to dress properly for the weather and to enjoy physical activity outside in the winter. Celebrate helping your students develop essential skills and build resilience! Take some time as a staff at the end of the winter or school year to reflect on how this approach influenced relationships between staff and students and the recess experience of the school community as a whole. Ask parents for their thoughts and feedback too.

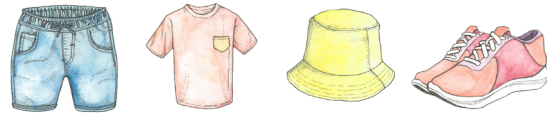
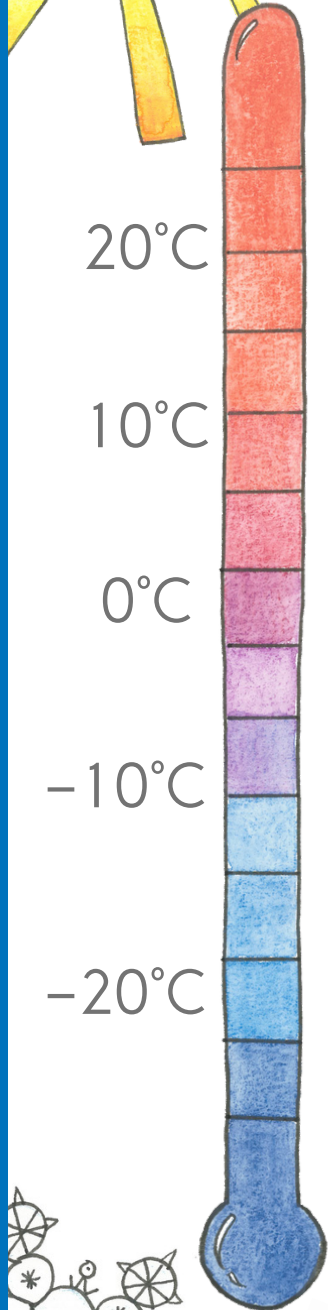
HOT TIPS FOR COLD DAYS

- **Get a weather station for your school.** It will provide more accurate weather updates than a general weather channel which means you can probably go outside more often! This can also tie into the grade 5 science curriculum.
- **Educate students and parents about dressing properly for the weather.** Use the resource on the next page from Be Fit For Life! Students should be prepared to go outside when the temperature is hovering around the cutoff point.
 - Consider creating a “Layers Library” of donated items from which students can borrow mittens, touques, snow pants, or a jacket if they forget theirs, or it is wet or muddy.
 - Consider including an extra pair of mittens and a toque on students’ school supply lists so they will have extras if and when needed.
- **Think creatively about your space!** Resources such as *Don’t Walk in the Hallway* (everactive.org/online-store) can help to activate your underutilized spaces for indoor recess.
- **Prioritize non-elimination activities that include movement as well as peer interaction.** While a video that encourages movement is better than nothing, we think that the social and emotional benefits of recess and play are just as important as the physical benefits!
- **Embed opportunities for student choice!** Recess and play should remain child-driven, even when inside.



How to Dress for the Weather Guide

Outdoor play is a great way to support healthy growth and development. Opening the doors to outdoor play in all kinds of weather provides children and adults with opportunities to spark their curiosity, leading to wonder, exploration and learning. When children have the right clothing for the season it contributes to them having positive, rich outdoor play experiences that just can't happen indoors. Get outside, be curious, let children lead and have fun!



Supporting Outdoor Play Year Round



www.getoutsideandplay.ca



www.befitforlife.ca

STUDENT LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

In the following pages you will find these resources to support your student leadership team:

- Student Leadership Training
- Indoor Recess Bin Suggestions
- Student Leader Handbook
- Student Leadership Recognition Certificate Template

STUDENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING

This training is intended to provide student leaders the information, skills and resources needed to be successful in their roles. The questions in the first three pages on the student leadership handbook on page 13 can serve as a great starting point.

PREP

1. Select your student leadership team and determine when training will take place.
2. Print student leadership handbooks for all students.
3. Have indoor recess equipment bins assembled so that students are able to familiarize themselves with the bins at training.
4. Have the schedule and procedures ready to share with student leaders:
 - Where the bins will be stored;
 - When they will be scheduled for a leadership shift;
 - Who they will be working with; and
 - What space they will be working in.

TRAINING

1. **Introductions and Icebreaker Activity.** This is especially important if the student leaders are coming from different classes:

Icebreaker game idea: *Sorts and Mingle*. There are two parts to this icebreaker.

- **Sorts:** The moderator tosses out two contrasting choices and everyone must move either east or west of the room. For example: Do you prefer nature (points east) or cities (points west)? Then the moderator shouts out two

more choices and everyone moves north and south of the room. In this way, each person must move to somewhere and can't get "lost" in the crowd. Some sorts that work well: cats vs. dogs; books vs. movies; sweet vs. salty; casual vs. dress-up; inside vs. outside; be on stage performing vs. in the audience watching.

- *Mingle*: The moderator shouts out a general category and the group is asked to mingle around to find others that have the same answer. They clump up to form a larger group. After 30 seconds to one minute, the moderator asks each group to call out their answer. If a person is unique and is the only one with an answer, that's okay! Examples of mingles: your favourite physical activity; your favourite dessert; your favourite animal; your favourite colour; how many siblings do you have; your favourite subject.

2. Discussion. These questions are included in the Student Leadership Handbook. As the "trainer" you can lead a group discussion, make notes on poster paper and have students record answers in their books:

- What makes a good leader?
 - First, it may be good to define what a leader is. Ask students to give examples of people they think are good leaders.
 - Have students share some of the qualities that make them good leaders.
- What makes a good game?
 - Students will have differing opinions on what makes a good game. Work towards the consensus that as a leader, we want to make sure that the games are safe, inclusive and fun.
- What is a positive way to deal with conflicts?
 - Work through possible conflict scenarios together.
 - Provide them with strategies to deal with conflicts that may arise.
 - Remind them that they can always ask an adult supervisor for help.
- Create a Recess Leadership Agreement
 - Based on the answers to the first three questions, create a Recess Leadership Agreement together. This should incorporate all the qualities and attributes that your leadership team values and wants to role model within the school. It can be in point form or in sentences. You may want to make a master copy on poster paper that all the student leaders get to sign.

3. Learn Games. Help the students become familiar with the games and equipment bins. There are several ways to facilitate this depending on the group size and the amount of time you have:

- Play all the games together as a group

- Sort students into teams. Have each team learn and lead a game to the rest of the group or to another team.

As you work through the games, be sure to discuss with student leaders how to explain and play the game effectively. Remind students that they will have a game description they can read off of in the equipment bins

4. Schedule and Procedures. Share with students the details of the leadership role. Go over when, where and with whom they will be leading games and activities. Include where the equipment bins can be collected from and returned to.

POST

It is good to plan a quick check-in after the student's first leadership shift. Regular scheduled check-ins with the team are a valuable way to gather feedback, make improvements and changes when needed and keep student leaders engaged!

INDOOR RECESS BIN SUGGESTIONS

Set student leaders up for success with ready-to-play bins! These bins should all be stored in a common place, such as the office or a storage closet. Students collect bins at the beginning of their recess leadership shift and return them at the end. Each bin should include all the necessary supplies for leading one or two activities, as listed below.

In the following pages you will find a Student Leadership Handbook, which includes game descriptions, equipment needed and more for your reference.

Each bin should include:

- Game Description
- Associated Equipment
- Equipment List

You could also include:

- Pinnies, vests or magnetic badges that help identify student leaders during indoor recess
- A Conflict Resolution handout

CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE

Awarded to

for active participation in student leadership
throughout the school year. Thank you for setting
an example for your peers and helping to make our
school community great!

School Staff

Date

POLAR CLUB - SAMPLE LETTER HOME TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Borrowed from our friends at Ecole Barrie Wilson Elementary School

Please use this sample to create a parent letter for your school. The underlined green text may need to be changed to reflect your schools context.

Dear Parents,

Winter is once again upon us and although we have been lucky so far we will no doubt face the prospect of an indoor recess soon. The (School District) policy on inclement weather recommends that if the temperature is below -20C, with or without the windchill, that students stay inside for recess. In previous years our school practice has been to have students stay in classrooms when this happens to play games or watch a video. We have found that when colder weather persists and students are inside for several days, their ability to focus and complete academic work suffers. This year we would like to try something new in order to reduce the number of indoor recesses. We are going to be starting a Polar (Insert Your School Mascot) Club. If parents or guardians give permission by signing the form below, then students will be able to go outside for recess up to a temperature of -30C, provided they have proper winter clothing. If parents would prefer their children to stay inside during colder weather, then we will create a run/walk loop in the gym and hallways so that students can still remain active. If you would like your child to be a part of the Polar (Mascot) Club, please fill out the form below and send it back to the school. Please contact (Principal) if you have any questions or concerns about our new school policy.

I'm a Polar (Mascot)!!

I bundle up and play outside when it's cold.

I wear rain gear and play outside when it's drizzling.

I learn better when I've had fresh air and playtime.

I am resilient! I am Canadian!

I, _____ am a Polar (Mascot).

I, _____, give permission for my child to play outside in the cold until -30C and when it is drizzling. I will ensure my child has appropriate snow and rain gear.

Parent/Guardian signature _____

Date _____