

A photograph of two young girls playing in a playground. One girl, wearing a pink shirt and dark pants, is standing and holding a large yellow cardboard box. The other girl, wearing a grey dress, is sitting on the ground, leaning against a large orange cardboard box. Several other cardboard boxes, mostly yellow and some red, are scattered on the ground around them. In the background, there is a playground structure with blue and green metal frames, a slide, and some orange cone-shaped decorations. The text "Recess Advocacy Team" is overlaid in the center of the image in a bold, orange, sans-serif font.

# Recess Advocacy Team

A group of organizations dedicated to health and wellness, education, and play with a focus on recess practices and policies in pre-k through 6th grade in Allegheny County.

The survey in this document was the first step in an effort to gather information on school recess practices throughout Allegheny County. The following are our initial findings.



# Organizations

Action for Healthy Kids

Allegheny County Health Department

Allies for Children

A+ Schools

Children's Hospital

Department of Health and Physical Activity, University of Pittsburgh

Let's Move Pittsburgh

Office of the Mayor/City of Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh Cultural Trust

Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy

Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative

Propel Schools

Trying Together

United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania's fitUnited

# Why?

- Since the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), 20% of school districts decreased recess time.
- When reviewing local wellness policies in Allegheny County:
  - Only one district uses the term ‘recess’ in their policy
  - Discrepancies exist between districts on whether or not to take away recess as punishment
  - Unclear guidelines around physical activity
- Several studies have shown that recess increases children’s attention span and productivity in the classroom and improves grades, attendance, classroom behaviors, and cognitive performance.
- Locally, we were approached by a parent who wanted to improve the quality of play and recess at her child’s school.

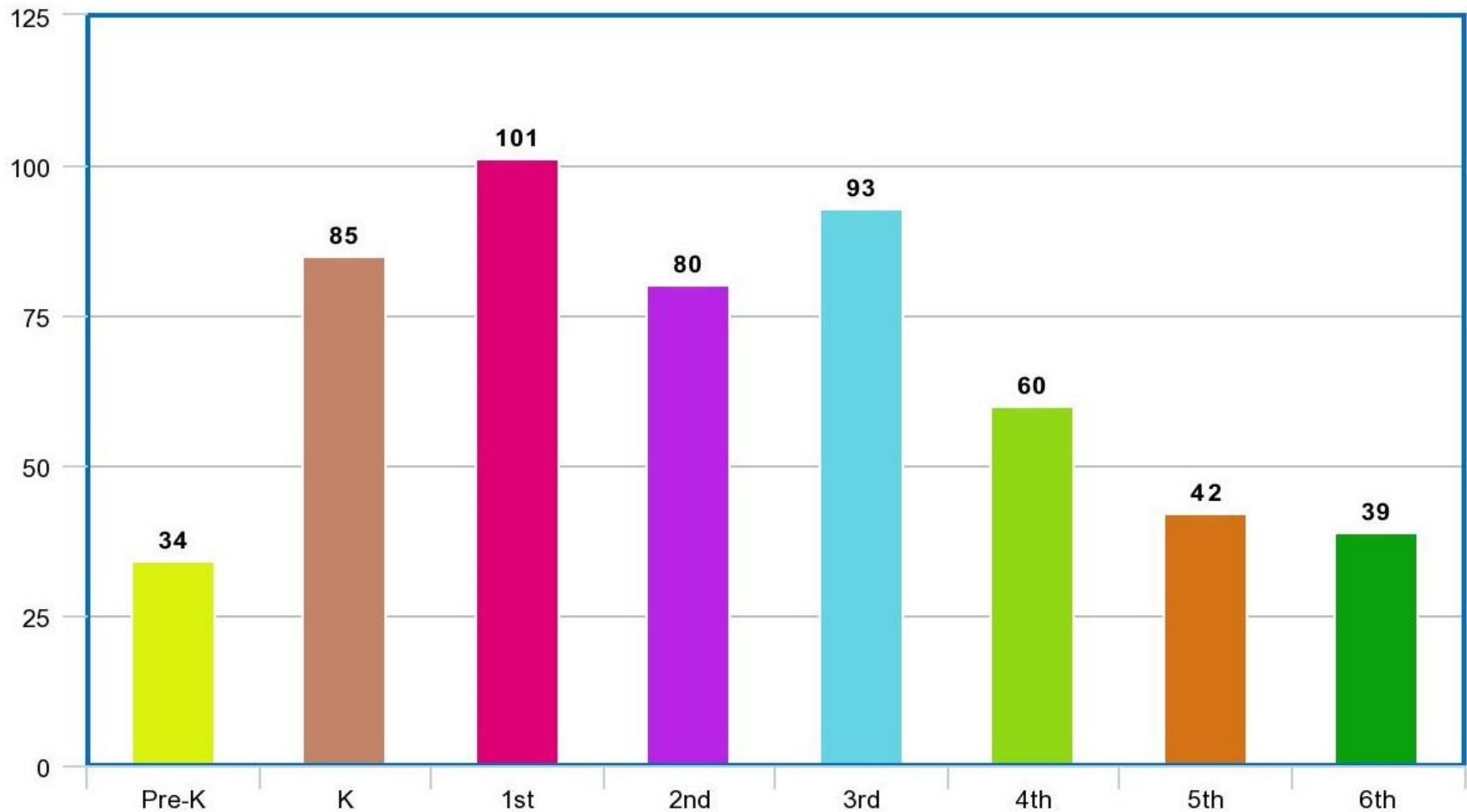
# Process

- Recess Team formed in October 2017
- Survey distributed from the end of April 2018 through the beginning of July 2018
- Distributed in English and Spanish
- Shared hard copies at community engagement events

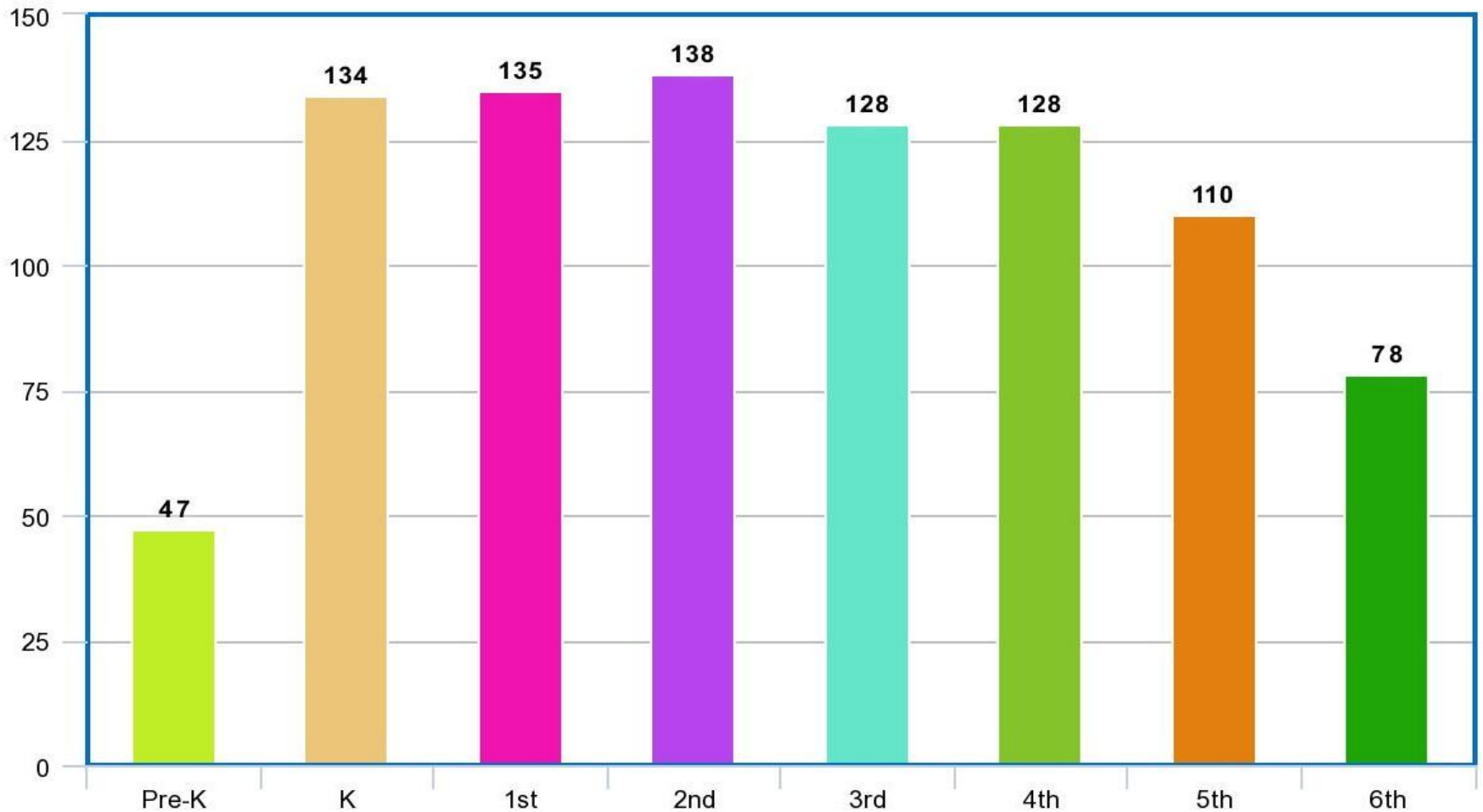
# Responses

- 821 total responses
- 41 public school districts represented
- 5 charter schools represented
- 18 parochial and/or private schools
- 538 parents/caregivers
- 229 school staff (including teachers, administrators and support staff)
- 64 other (most common responses: nurse, food service worker, social worker, concerned community member)

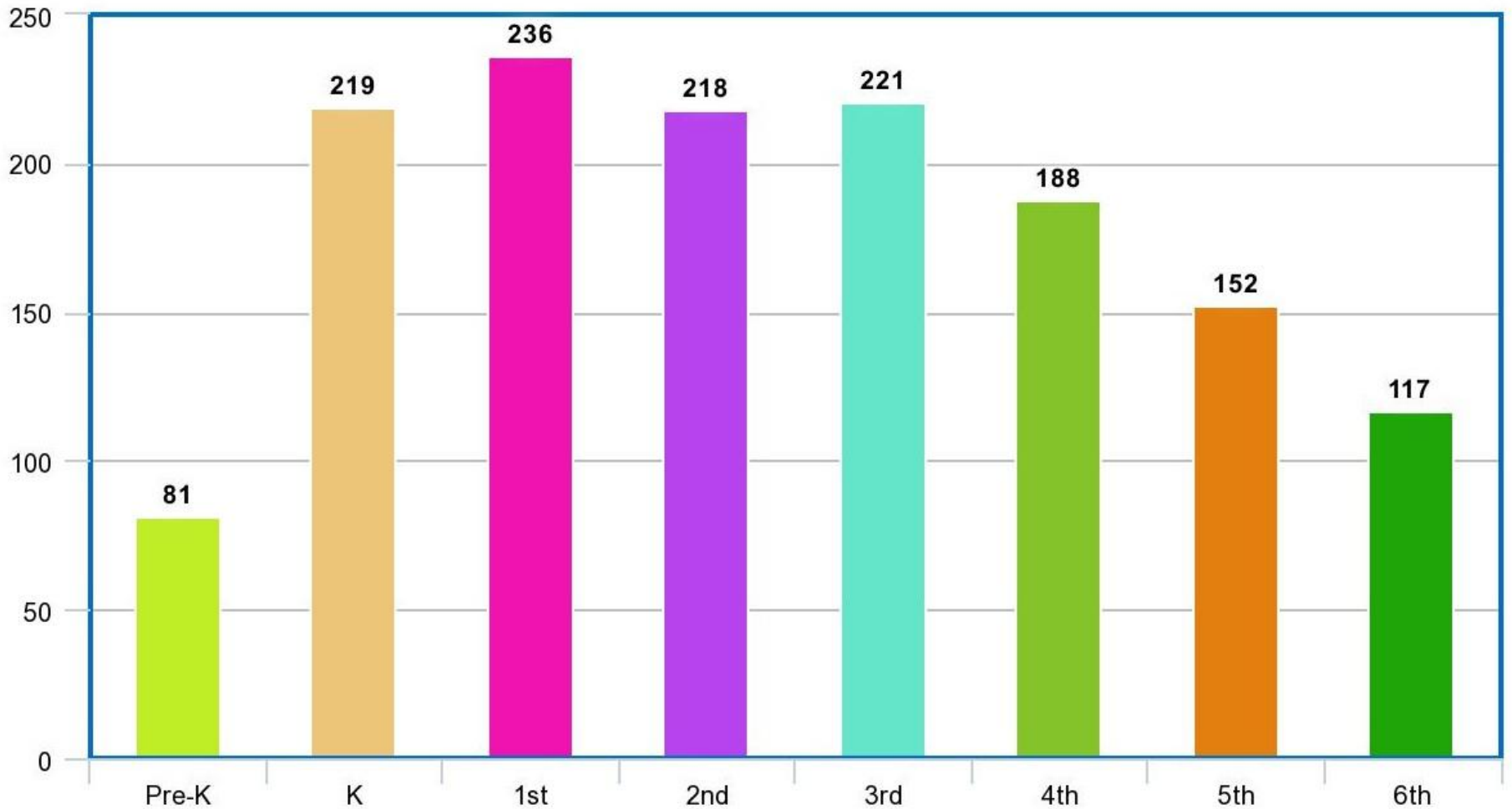
# Grades Represented (parent response only)



# Grades Represented (school staff response only)



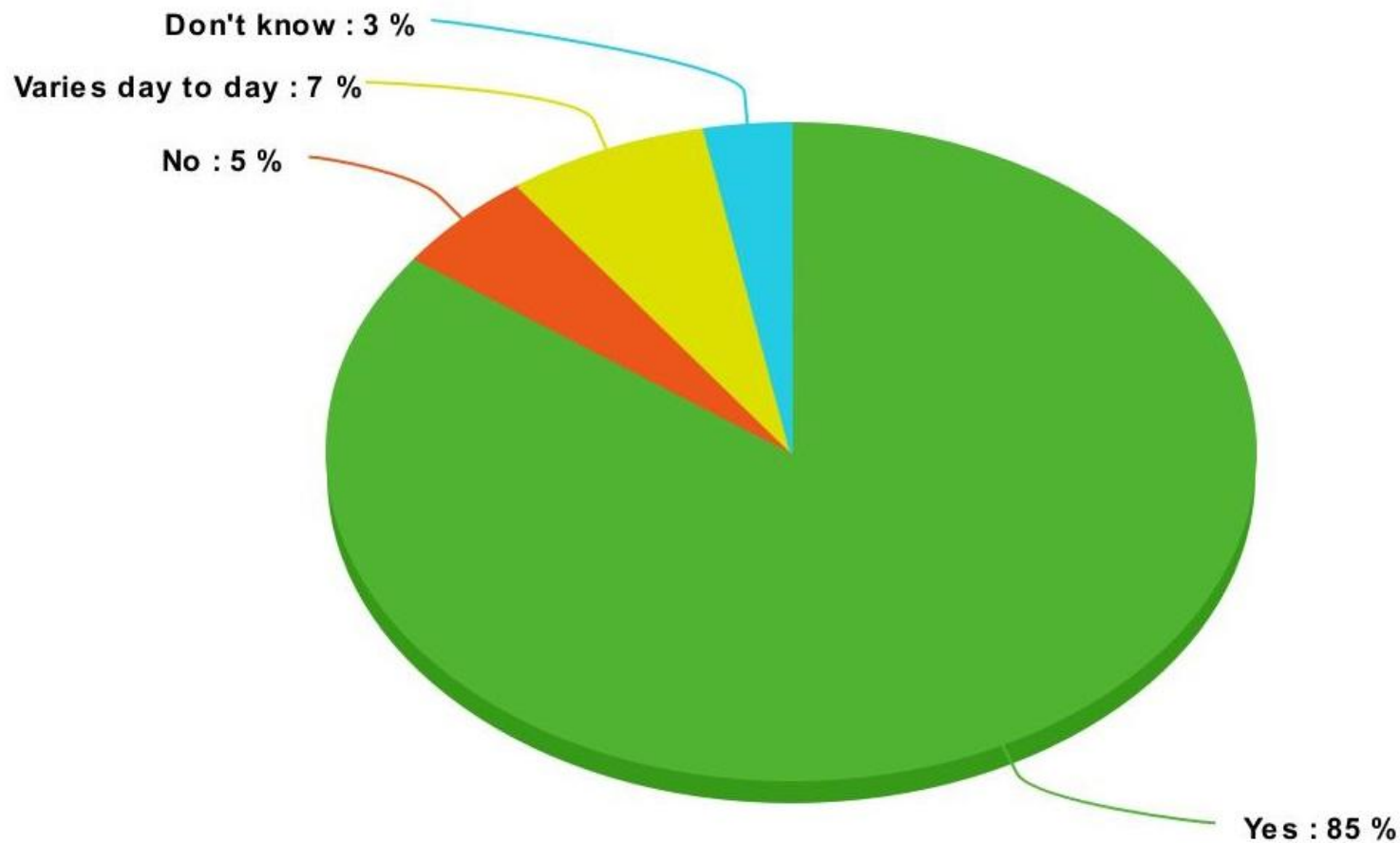
# Grades Represented (ALL)



# Defining Recess

- Most respondents defined recess as unstructured free play, outdoor play, and physical activity (each over 80%)
- Only 22% defined recess as a time for structured/organized games
- Few respondents think of recess as part of lunchtime or physical education (each under 13%)

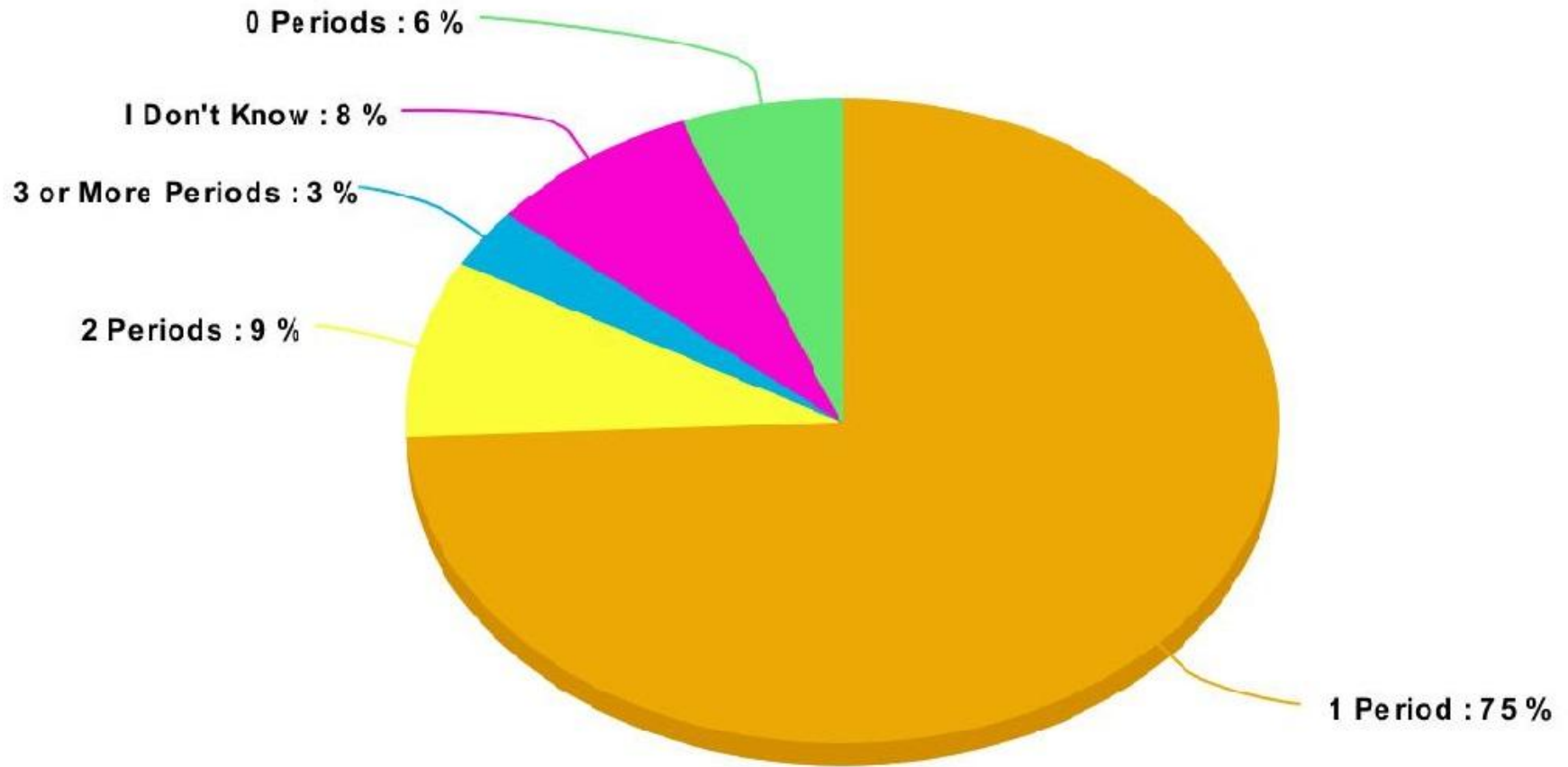
# Does your school have a daily scheduled time for recess?



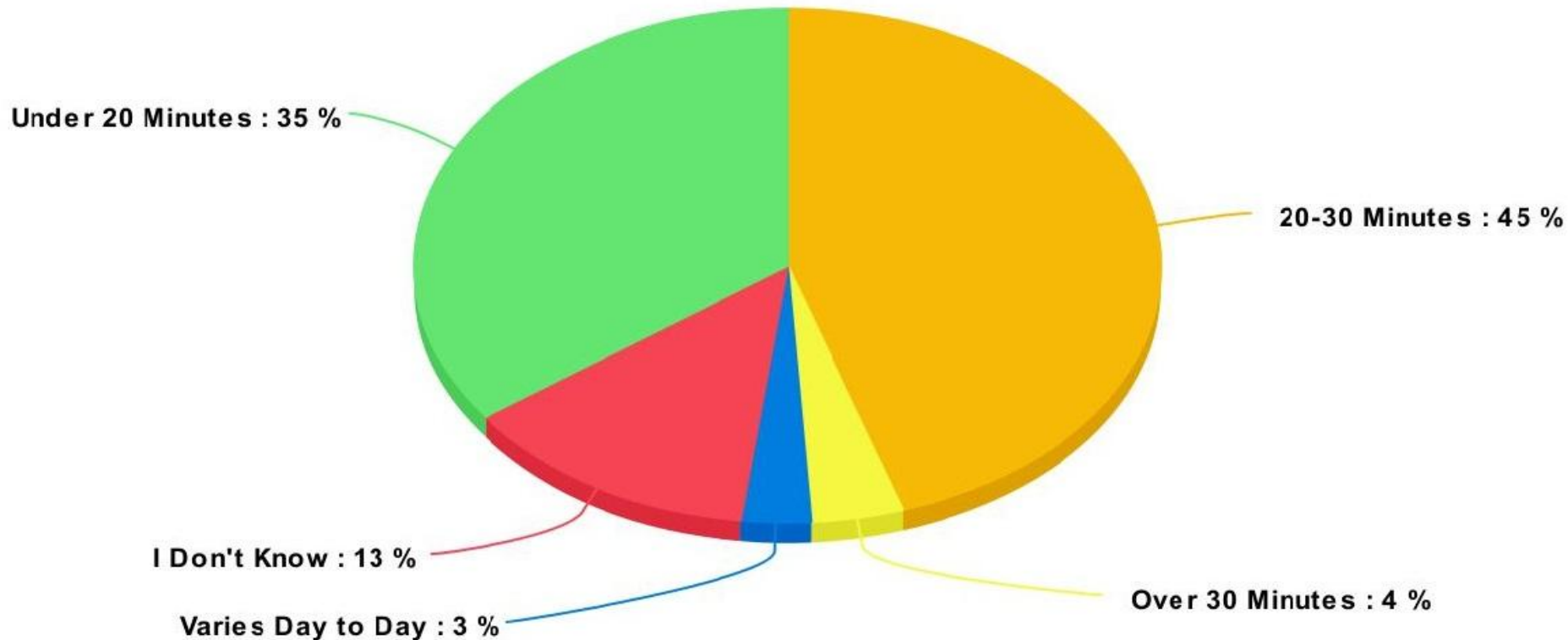
# When is recess scheduled?

- Nearly 68% of participants noted recess is held during the lunchtime block
  - 28% before lunch
  - 40% after lunch
- The other 32% of respondents reported recess periods may occur in the morning, afternoon, or that it varies day to day

# How many recess periods are offered per class per day?



# How long is recess (excluding lunch)?



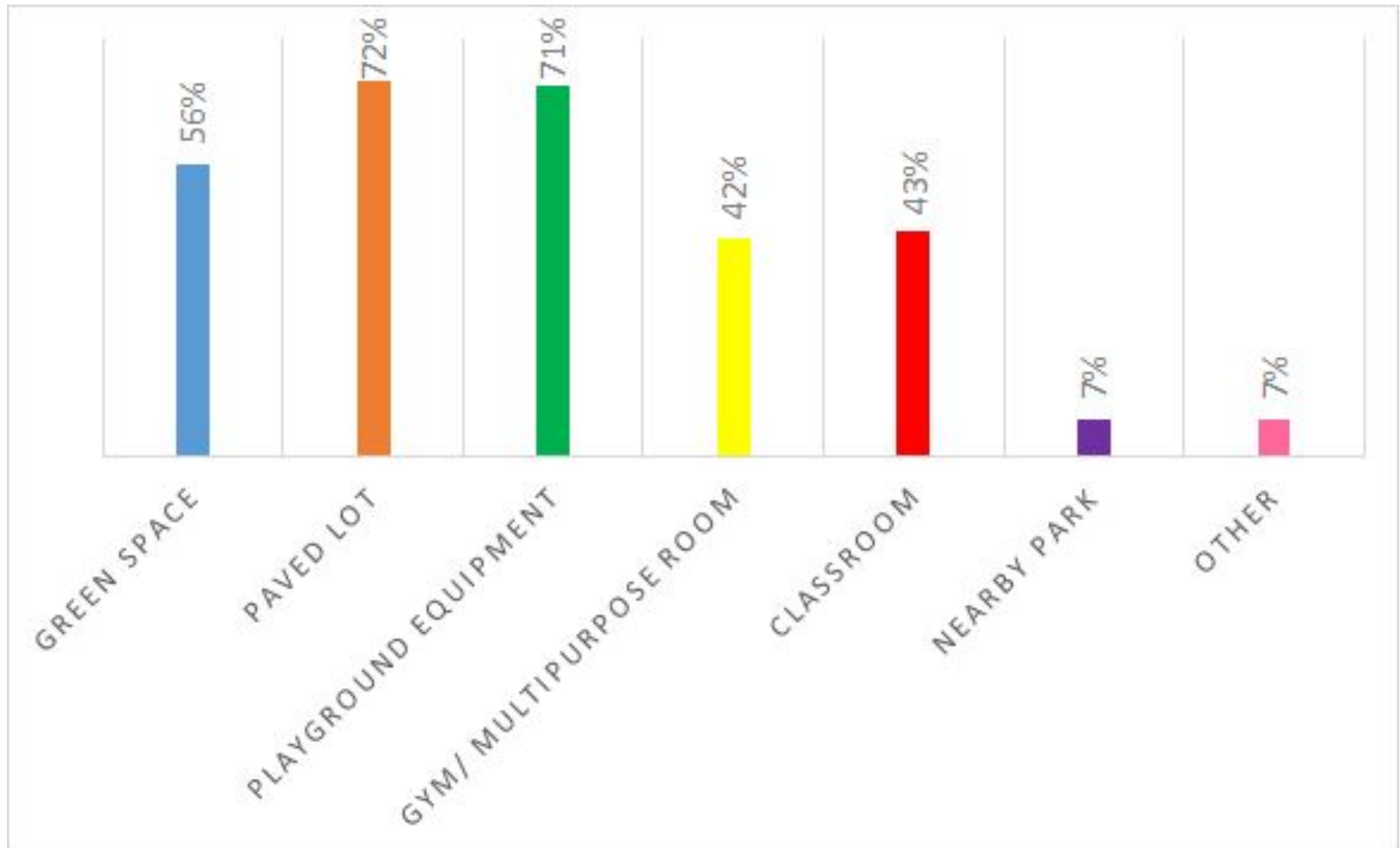
***The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) recommends elementary school children have at least 20 minutes of recess daily.***

# Does your school ever take away recess from students?

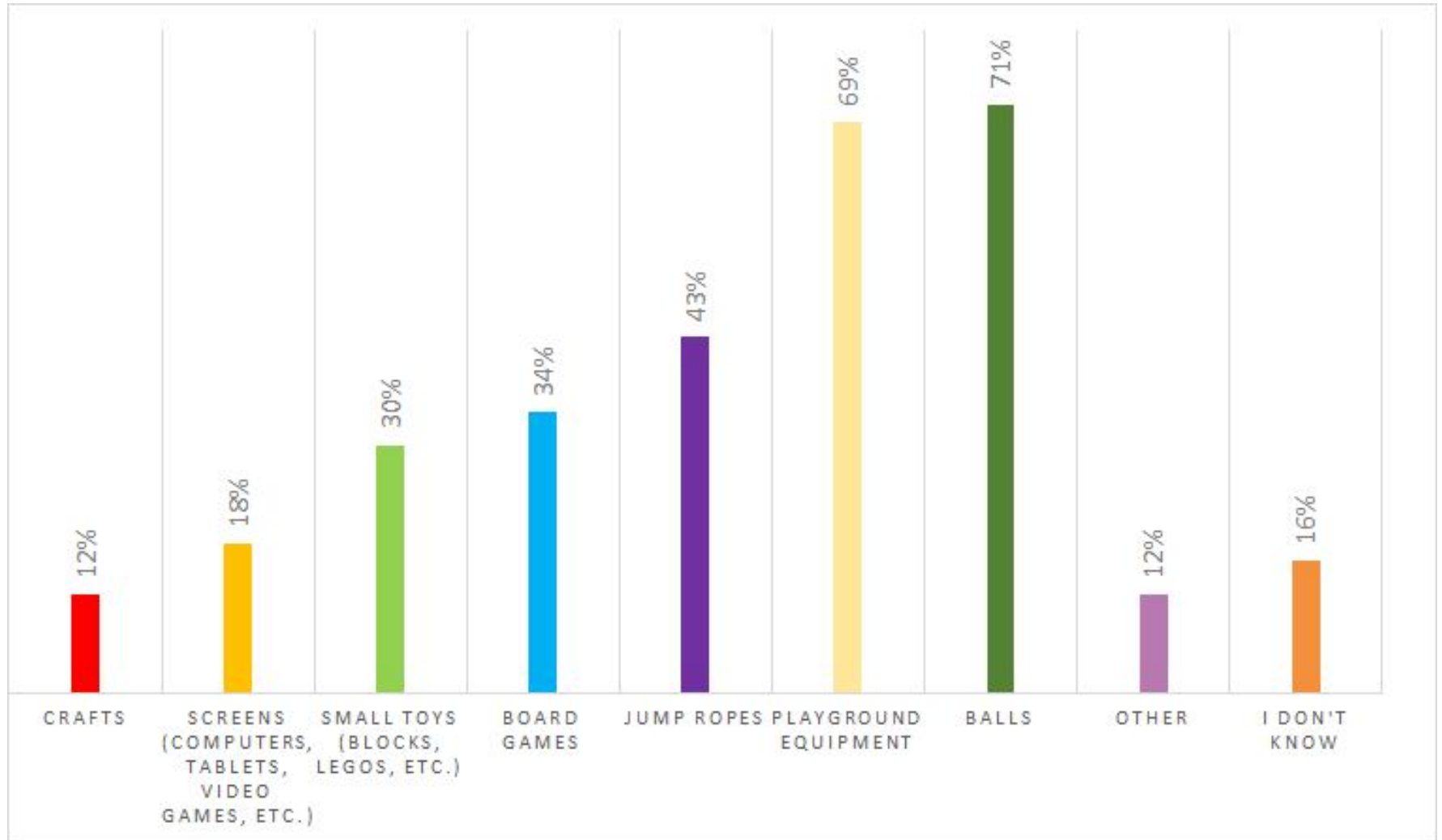
- 64% of respondents report that recess is taken away as punishment and/or to complete work
- Nearly 25% of parents responded that they did not know if recess is taken away at their child's school

***The American Academy of Pediatrics recognizes recess as a crucial and necessary component of a child's development and recommends that recess is NOT withheld for punishment or academic reasons.***

# What space is available for recess?



# What playthings are available during recess?



# What is the plan for recess in case of inclement weather?

- Respondents noted in most cases utilizing existing indoor spaces such as a gym, auditorium or classroom
- Activities noted included computer or other screen access, watching movies and playing board games or other small activities
- Findings were unclear as to whether or not recess plans were in place for these instances

# Barriers to daily recess

- Many barriers identified, top responses being:
  - not enough time in the day and more instructional time needed (53%)
  - lack of alternative punishments (24%)
  - lack of adult supervision/space (21%)
- 23% of participants reported no barriers to daily recess

# Who are the adult supervisors during recess?

- Overwhelmingly respondents reported either teachers (67%) or other school staff (51%) supervise recess
- Only 12% reported parent volunteers and under 4% reported community organization volunteers

# How important do you feel recess is for your child/students?

- Overall participants believe that recess is very important to children's health and wellbeing (95%) and children's academic success (88%)
- Parents/guardians were more likely to rank the importance of recess as higher than that of educators and school staff

***“I feel strongly that every child should have the opportunity to move their body and let out steam so they can have mental clarity to learn.”***

***- 2nd Grade Parent***

***“I think it is really important for even the older students to have recess. It is a time for them to learn how to play with others and develop social skills.”***

***- 5th/6th Grade Teacher***

***“Recess (unstructured physical activity) is so important for young bodies. They need to move and play in order to meet academic needs in the classroom. Less instructional time and more play would improve learning.”***

***- Kindergarten Parent***

***“Personally, I never take recess away from my first graders. If they do miss some time, I have them walk quietly for 5 or 10 minutes, but my kids need recess every day!”***

***- 1st Grade Teacher***

***“I think that recess, or any kind of free/open play is vital, especially to young kids. It gives them time to burn physical energy that they don't get to burn while in class all day. Being unstructured gives them a chance to be creative, and socialize with friends. Socialization is very important in life, and can help them with group projects and tasks within school and the future workforce. Kids learn through play, in many ways. Beyond that, they need that outlet and mental break so that they will be better focused while in class.”***

***- 2nd Grade Parent***

# Next Steps

- Examine the equity between districts and access to recess and play
- Develop standards for playful school designation
- Create toolkit for families and educators who want to advocate for more and better recess
- Develop report that further examines results and highlights best practices
- Follow up with participants to support needs
- Focus on finding alternatives to withholding recess as punishment or to complete work
- Determine ways recess and play can support Pennsylvania Future Ready Index Indicators

# Contact information

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