

# Great Recess Framework: Training Manual

This manual has three sections. We recommend reading through the Introduction first and then exploring the list of indicators and the descriptions.

## 1. Introduction to the Great Recess Framework:

The Great Recess Framework (GRF) is a valid and reliable observation tool intended to measure the quality of elementary school recess.

## 2. List of Indicators on GRF

Gives a complete list of the indicators in the three large sections of the GRF: safety, engagement, and empowerment.

## 3. <u>Description of each indicator</u>

Contains a description of the full rubric and examples of each score.









## INTRODUCTION TO THE GREAT RECESS FRAMEWORK

The Great Recess Framework (GRF) is a valid and reliable observation tool intended to measure the quality of elementary school recess.

## **GRF** Organization:

The GRF is organized into three sections: safety, engagement, and empowerment.

**Safety** includes indicators associated physical and emotional safety. This includes play space, equipment use, student behavior, and adult interventions.

**Engagement** includes indicators associated with increasing engagement of both student and adults during recess. This includes games and available equipment, transitions to/from recess, and overall participation of adults and students.

**Empowerment** includes indicators associated with students taking ownership of their recess. This includes games and play initiation, conflict resolution skills, and adult behavior.

#### **Rubric Format:**

The GRF is organized using a rubric style format. Each indicator has 4 potential options with a narrative description of each score.

1	2	3	4
The play space for recess is unsafe due to hazards (e.g. trip hazards, broken glass/sharp objects, hidden areas that cannot be seen by adults) that aren't identified as "no play" zones.  There are significant safety concerns	The play space for recess has some safety concerns due to hazardous areas	areas but most are identified as "no	The play space for recess has no safety concerns. It is clearly free of hazards and/or all unsafe areas are identified as "no play" zones

## Conducting an Observation:

**Preparation:** Prior to completing a GRF observation, it is important to do several preparation activities.

- 1. Review the Great Recess Framework rubric (GRF) and read through this GRF Training Manual. This will help the rater become familiar with the indicators and the scope of the observation.
- 2. Conduct a calibration exercise if possible (see Calibration description below).
- 3. Print the Great Recess Framework rubric and the GRF Onsite Observation Guide.
- 4. Schedule observation at a recess.









**Observe Recess**: We recommend that during recess the rater is strictly an observer taking notes of what they see. The observer should not have additional supervision responsibilities. The observer should not try to rate each indicator during recess. Complete the scoring post recess.

- 1. Arrive at the recess 5-10 minutes early to review the space.
- 2. Use the GRF Onsite Observation Guide to note what the space looks like prior to the start of recess
- 3. Move around the playground. Be close enough to students and adult that you can hear the communication.
- 4. Use your GRF Onsite Observation Guide to take lots of detailed notes. You will use your notes to determine a score for each indicator.

**Score the recess**: We recommend completing the rubric as quickly after the end of recess as possible. The notes should support your scoring but having the recess fresh in your mind contributes to more accurate scoring.

## Calibration

An important step in using the GRF successfully is to calibration expectations across all raters. A simple recommendation for calibration is as follows:

- 1. All raters review the GRF Training Manual. Initiate conversation as a group reviewing indicators and answering questions together.
- 2. All raters observe the same recess together.
- 3. Post recess, all raters individually complete their GRF rubric.
- 4. Post recess, review scoring and discuss any discrepancies.

**Important:** the GRF is intended to improve recess quality. There are no right or wrong answers. The conversation between staff and raters is critical in helping a school decide action steps for improving recess quality.

#### **General Recommendations**

- Complete a GRF rating for each unique recess rather than observing multiple recesses and trying to capture a score for all of them.
- Observe for at least 15 minutes of a recess and include both the start and stop of the recess (to observer the transition to/from recess)
- The GRF is intended for an outdoor recess. If using for indoor recess, not all indicators will be applicable.









**GRF Indicators.** Click on any of the GRF indicators below for a description and notes about scoring.

Play Space HazardsVariety of GamesStudent ChoicePlay Space SafetyInclusiveness of GamesGame InitiationPlay Space BoundariesType of EquipmentSustaining GamesEquipment UsageTransition to RecessStudent Conflict ResolutionStudent CommunicationTransition from Recess	SAFETY	ENGAGEMENT	EMPOWERMENT
Physical Altercations  Adults and Rules  Adult to Student Ratio  Adult Supervision  Adult Positioning  Adult Engagement	Play Space Safety Play Space Boundaries Equipment Usage Student Communication Physical Altercations Adult to Student Ratio Adult Supervision	Inclusiveness of Games  Type of Equipment  Transition to Recess  Transition from Recess  Adults and Rules  Student and Rules  Physical Activity	Game Initiation  Sustaining Games  Student Conflict









## **Description of Each Indicator**

#### **SAFETY**

## **Play Space Hazards**

The play space for recess is unsafe due to hazards (e.g. trip hazards, broken glass/sharp objects, hidden areas that cannot be seen by adults) that aren't identified as "no play" zones. There are significant safety concerns

The play space for recess has some safety concerns due to hazardous areas that aren't identified as "no play" zones

The play space for recess has few safety concerns.
There are few hazardous areas but most are identified as "no play" zones

The play space for recess has no safety concerns. It is clearly free of hazards and/or all unsafe areas are identified as "no play" zones

Unsafe Hazards include objects such as:

- Broken glass/sharp objects
- Hidden areas that cannot be seen by adults
- Drains/sewer caps that are obvious tripping hazards
- Potholes in blacktop or divots in the grass that are tripping hazards
- Broken play structures or poor quality of equipment
- Broken fence
- Cracks in cement that are obvious tripping hazards















A <u>score of 1</u> would demonstrate hazards on or near almost all play spaces on the playground that could cause safety concerns. None of these safety concerns would be marked as "no play" zones. By and large, there hazards in multiple high traffic areas and it is very likely that someone is going to get hurt.

A <u>score of 2</u> would demonstrate hazards on or near play spaces for the majority of playground (> 50%) that could cause safety concerns. These hazards would not be marked as "no play" zones. It is important to note that a score of "2" does not indicate that more than 50% of the entire playground is covered in hazards, but rather more than 50% of play areas.

A <u>score of 3</u> would demonstrate there are few safety concerns on the playground. There are only some hazards that may cause safety concerns and most of these areas are marked as "no play" zones. If the safety concerns are on the edges and not in the middle of the playground, then it might not be a major safety concern.

A <u>score of 4</u> would demonstrate that by and large there are no safety concerns or the few safety concerns. Any unsafe areas present are clearly marked as "no play" zones. This is a very safe play area, it is enclosed, it has a quality surface, and you cannot foresee students getting injured.









## **Play Space Safety**

	The play space for	The play space for	The play space for	The play space for
	recess is inappropriate	recess is somewhat	recess is mostly	recess is appropriate
2	(too small, near open	inappropriate and	appropriate in that	in that there are no
2	roads, etc.) and has	has some	there are very few	
	many immediate	immediate safety	immediate safety	immediate safety
	safety concerns	concerns	concerns	concerns

**Examples of Safety Concerns** could be due to a variety of factors: size of play space for the number of students present, location of playspace, easy public access.

A score of 1 occurs when a play space is not large enough for the amount of students present at recess. It may also be located near busy roads or near a street where a student can easily access the road for pedestrians may enter the play space. This play space causes immediate concerns and it is likely that a student will be unsafe.

A score of 2 occurs when a play space has some safety concerns such as too small of a space for the amount of students, or the playground is located near a busy intersection, but there are a few areas that are not of concern.

A score of 3 occurs when a play space has a few immediate safety concerns such as an area that is too small of a space for the amount of students or there is a small area of the playground that is located near busy roads.

**A score of 4** occurs when a play space is large enough to accommodate the number of students present and there are no immediate safety concerns such as being located near a busy intersection.

## **Play Space Boundaries**

	The play space for	The play space for	The play space for	The play space for
z	recess has no clearly	recess has a few	recess has many	recess is well marked
)	identified boundaries	boundaries	boundaries	(cones, chalk, paint)
	for games (no cones,	identified but a	identified but a	and all game









chalk, paint)	large percentage	small portion of the	boundaries are clear
	of the play space	play space does	
	does not have any	not have any game	
	game space	space marked	
	marked		



A score of 1 indicates a play space that does not have any clearly marked areas for games (example: blacktop with no markings for games like 4 square or basketball or a large open grass field with no field markings for a soccer game).



A score of 4 indicates a play space that has all areas clearly marked for games. (example: separate areas are marked on the playground for tag, kickball, soccer, basketball, etc.).









## **Equipment Usage**

Some of the Most of the Almost all of the equipment equipment Hardly any of the equipment provided provided **(11-50%)** provided (51-89%) equipment provided **(90% or more)** is is being used is being used (10% or less) is being being used as appropriately but appropriately but used as intended and in intended and in a there are a few there are many a safe manner safe manner instances of instances of inappropriate use inappropriate use

Examples of unsafe equipment usage:

- Flipping off play structure
- Climbing up side of structures
- Kicking cones
- Using hula hoops as lassos
- Standing on swings

Note: this does not include where students are using equipment differently as intended but within clearly identified new games, in a safe manner.

#### **Student Communication**

		Communication	Most of the	Almost all of
	There is evidence of	between students	communication	communication
	negative	is generally neutral		
_	communication	in tone. OR, there is	(verbal and non	(verbal or nonverbal)
5	between students with	little negative	verbal) between	between students is
	hardly any positive	communication	students is positive	positive and
	communication.	and little positive	and encouraging	encouraging towards
	Communication.		towards each other	each other
		communication.		

#### Examples of negative communication are:

- Swearing
- Teasing
- Taunting









- Yelling
- Negative tone of voice
- Exclusionary body language

#### Examples of positive communication are:

- Cheering
- Clapping
- High-fives
- "good job"
- "nice try"

A **score of 1** indicates a lack of positive communication <u>and</u> the presence of negative communication. You may see students giving dirty looks, showing threatening or uninviting body language, or participating in any of the negative communication examples identified above. Negative communication will take place across multiple groups of students for a score of "1".

A **score of 2** represents a fairly neutral playground. While there is little negative communication, there is also little positive communication as defined above. The observer may witness small amounts of positive and negative communication.

A **score of 3** represents positive communication amongst multiple groups of students/games throughout the playground. The observer may witness isolated occurrences of negative communication, but multiple groups exhibit examples of positive communication as defined above.

A **score of 4** indicates a high level of observed positive communication and no observed negative communication on the playground.

## **Physical Altercations**

6	There were several physical altercations between students	There were some physical altercations between students	There were few physical altercations between students	There were no physical altercations between students
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A **physical altercation** is any form of unwanted physical contact between students, which include (but not limited to):

- Pushing
- Shoving
- Hitting
- Kicking
- Punching
- Pinching
- Biting
- Throwing equipment

<u>A score of 1</u> is when there are several and/or severe physical altercations. For example, there may be altercations that do not lead to large fights that happen across recess and across different groups. If recess is full of the above examples (but no major fights) still score this item a "1". Additionally, if there is a large fight (e.g., two or more students fighting, most of the playground stopping to watch, need for major adult intervention) this item will also be scored a "1" even in the absence of other incidents.

<u>A score of 2</u> is when there are physical altercations between students that are more aggressive in nature. While not as pervasive as a score of "1" would indicate, these altercations happen across multiple groups throughout recess.

<u>A score of 3</u> is when there are few physical altercations between students, and generally, adult intervention was not required. For example, there may be a few isolated incidents of pushing or shoving, but nothing that results in a physical fight.

<u>A score of 4</u> is when there are no physical altercations between students.

Note: how to handle play fighting.

Fantasy play where kids are fighting a common enemy or

#### **Adult to Student Ratio**









		The adult to	The adult to	
7	The adult to student	student ratio is	student ratio is	The adult to student
′	ratio is more than 75:1	approximately	approximately	ratio is less than 35-1
		50-75:1	35-49:1	

Tip to calculate total students: Count number of classes when they line up at end of recess. General rule of thumb 25 children per class.

## **Adult Supervision**

		A few supervising		
8	No supervising adults arrive on time and there are periods of time in which there is no adult supervision	adults arrive on time, but supervision is compromised because not enough adults are on the playground (Less than 50%)	Most of the supervising adults arrive on time, but a few come out late (51-89% arrive on time)	All supervising adults arrive on time and there are no periods of time in which students are unsupervised

A **score of 1** is when the students are all alone.

A <u>score of 2</u> is when a few staff members are out there, but a majority of the staff members are late.

A <u>score of 3</u> is when most/majority of the staff members arrive on time, but there are a few that arrive late.

A **score of 4** indicates that all of the staff members arrive at the start of recess.









## **Adult Positioning**

	A few of the	Most of the	
No supervising adults are strategically positioned to view students in the recess play space (i.e., adults are all huddled together)	supervising adults are strategically positioned to view students in the recess play space, but many students are unsupervised (less than 50%)	supervising adults are strategically positioned to view students in the recess play space, but some students are unsupervised (51-89%)	All of the supervising adults are strategically positioned to view students in the recess play space

A Score of 1 is marked when adults are huddled into one area that is not proximal to children at recess. When children can hide behind corners, play considerably far away from recess monitors (e.g., far side of the field where it is difficult to observe children's behavior), or monitors have their backs turned to students mark as a 1.

A Score of 2 is marked when half (e.g., two of four) or less than half (e.g., one of three) of adults are strategically positioned to observe students. Because not all adults are strategically positioned, there will still be children who are able to play in hidden areas of the playground. A Score of 3 is marked when more than half of adults (e.g., three out of five) are strategically positioned to view children.

A Score of 4 is marked when all adults, or all but one adult is strategically positioned to view children and there are not children playing outside of the supervision area.

## **ENGAGEMENT**

## **Variety of Games**

	Hardly any organized	A limited number	A limited number of	A variety of
10	games and/or activities	of organized	organized games	organized games
	are available during	games and/or	and/or activities	and/or activities are









recess	activities are	are available	available during
	available during	during recess, but	recess
	recess but there is	there is <b>variety</b>	
	<u>limited variety</u>		

Looking at both number of games and variety.

A recess with 2 four square courts but no other games would score a 2. A recess with 2 four square, 1 tag game, soccer and tetherball would be a 4

A score of 1 means that are little to no activities for the students to participate in.

A score of 2 is when the games/activities offered are all the same.

A score of 3 is when there is a small variety of games/activities being offered and students have the choice between the games offered.

A score of 4 is when there is a large variety of games/activities being offered and the students have the choice to choose between all of the games.

## **Inclusiveness of Games**

11	Hardly any games are inclusive to certain groups by gender, ability, race and/or age (10% or less)	inclusive to certain groups by gender,	Many of the games are inclusive to certain groups by gender, ability, race and/or age (51-89%)	inclusive to a variety
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**Score 1** is if all the sports are exclusive to gender, race, age, and/or ability. For example, all the boys are playing one game and all the girls are doing a separate game or all of the older kids are playing kickball and all of the younger kids are playing hopscotch. There has to be visible exclusionary practices, for example, the boys have to tell the girls that they are not allowed to play with them.

**Score 2** is when some of the some of the games are exclusive. Most of the games might be separated by gender, but there is one game that is limited to a certain group of gender, race, ability, etc. Additionally, there should be evidence of exclusion for a score of 2 (i.e., girls are not allowed to play games with boys).









**Score 3** is when some of the games are inclusive. One game might be only boys, will the rest of the multiple games are separated by groups.

<u>Score 4</u> shows that all of the games and activities are filled with a mixture of students by gender, ability, race and age.

## **Type of Equipment**

12	No equipment (fixed or not fixed) is available	A limited variety of equipment is available <b>OR</b> what is available isn't accessible to students (ie basketball hoops with no basketballs, play structure is off limits to all students)	A variety of recess equipment is available but <b>not enough to support</b> the number of students or a diversity of interests.	A variety of recess equipment is available to support multiple games and activities.
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## A score of 4 indicates that the equipment is sufficient to support the number of students and a range of diverse interests.

- Example of non-fixed equipment include jump ropes, soccer balls, kick balls, hula hoops, teeter-totters, cones, etc.
- Examples of fixed equipment include playgrounds/jungle gyms/play structures, basketball hoops, bars, swings, painted blacktop games, etc.

#### **Transition to Recess**









		Transition(s) to	Transition(s) <u>to</u>	
13	Transition(s) to recess are chaotic and unorganized	recess lean toward	recess lean toward organized with only a few examples of unorganized behavior	Transition(s) <u>to</u> <u>recess</u> are organized and smooth

#### Examples of unorganized transitions to/from recess:

- Running
- Screaming (students and/or staff)
- Pushing and shoving
- No line/clusters of students
- Students do not know what they are supposed to do or where to go
- Lack of adult supervision

A <u>score of 1</u> would be indicative of many of the above examples occurring during the transition. This is a clear example of poor transitioning.

A <u>score of 2</u> would be if the transition process is leaning towards chaos, but is not completely disorganized. Some of the examples above might be evident, but not all indicators would be present.

A <u>score of 3</u> would be if the transition process is leaning towards an organized process, but there are a few examples of poor transition examples listed above.

A <u>score of 4</u> would show the students transitioning in a quiet, smooth, and organized manner to enter the recess area. You can observe the kids following the rules and it is clear to the observer what the rules are even if they are not stated.

#### **Transition from Recess**

		Transition(s) from	Transition(s) <u>from</u>	
	Transition(s) <u><b>from</b></u>	recess lean toward	<u>recess</u> lean toward	Transition(s) <b>from</b>
14	recess are chaotic and unorganized	chaotic but not completely	organized with only a few examples of unorganized	recess are organized and smooth
		disorganized	behavior	









#### Examples of unorganized transitions to/from recess:

- Running
- Screaming (students and/or staff)
- Pushing and shoving
- No line/clusters of students
- Students do not know what they are supposed to do or where to go
- Lack of adult supervision

See scoring example in Transition From Recess

#### **Adults and Rules**

	No adults reinforce the	A few adults	Most adults	
15	rules which creates	reinforce the rules,	consistently	All adults consistently
13	conflict	but it is inconsistent	reinforce the rules	reinforce the rules
	COMMICT	(11-50%)	(51-89%)	

### **Student and Rules**

	There were several	There were some	There were few	There were no
16	disagreements about	disagreements	disagreements	disagreements about
10	rules between students	about rules	about rules	rules between
	rules between students	between students	between students	students

**Note**: When scoring this question observers should consider negotiations between students as normative behavior. In this context, disagreements about rules refer to instances when students disagree/argue within the context of a game, and this disagreement disrupts the flow of the game, or impedes play for others.









Examples may include (but are not limited to):

- Disagreements over who gets to use equipment
- Disagreements over who gets to take the first turn in the context of a game
- Disagreements over rules of game play (which may include, but not limited to):
  - Safe or out (baseball, softball, kickball)
  - Fouls/Penalties (basketball, soccer, etc.)
  - o In bounds or out (baseball, soccer, softball, kickball, basketball etc.)
  - Whether or not someone was tagged in a tag game

A **Score of 1**is marked when there are disagreements across most games and/or play activities

A **Score of 2** is marked when there are multiple disagreements that affect games and/or play activities

A **Score of 3** is marked when there are isolated incidents of disagreement that affect games and/or play activities

A **Score of 4 is** is marked when there are no disagreements based on rules are observed.

## **Physical Activity**

	Hardly any students	Some students are	Many students are	Almost all students
17	are involved in	involved in	involved in	are involved in
17	physically active play	physically active	physically active	
	(less than 10%)	play (11-50%)	play (51-89%)	physically active play

**Note:** If students are actively waiting in line during a game, they will still count as being physically active because that is the nature of that particular game to wait for your turn.

## **Adult Engagement**









		A few adults are	Most adults are	
	No adults are playing	playing games	playing games	All adults are playing
18	games or engaged with	and/or are	and/or are	games and engaged
	students	engaged with	engaged with	with students
		students (11-50%)	students (51-89%)	

#### Notes:

The adults do not have to be actively playing the game, but as long as they are actively involved in the game/engaged with students (cheering, clapping, encouraging, etc.) then it is still considered "playing games and engaged with students".

## **EMPOWERMENT**

#### **Student Choice**

	Students have no free	Students have	Students have	Students are free to
19	choice of activities to	limited free choice	some free choice of	choose activities to
19	play during recess	of activities to play	activities to play	play during recess
	play during recess	during recess	during recess	play during recess

A **score of 1** is when students are not allowed to join any activity that they want. They are assigned to play certain activities during the recess period.

A <u>score of 2</u> is when students are not able to choose from all of the activities available at recess. For example, an adult may tell the student that they are only able to choose between soccer or kickball and they are not allowed to do anything else but one of those two options.

A <u>score of 3</u> is when students are told by adults to participate in activities, but they have greater selection of activities to choose from.

A score of 4 is when students are allowed to play any activity that they want.









#### **Game Initiation**

<u>A score of 1</u> is when students are either not playing games (i.e. standing around talking) or adults are initiating all games/activities.

<u>A score of 2</u> is when there is more adult intervention and only a small number of the games/activities that are initiated by students.

<u>A score of 3</u> is when more students are initiating some of the games than others. There might still be adult intervention, but this score is leaning towards the side of more student initiated activities.

A score of 4 is when the vast majority of games/activities are initiated by students.

## **Sustaining Games**

	Little to no games are	Some games are	Many games are	Almost all games are
21	sustained by students	sustained by	sustained by	sustained by students
	(less than 10%)	students (11-50%)	students (51-89%)	(90% or more)

#### Notes:

• Consider the age appropriateness of sustaining games. A K playground might appropriately end games after a few minutes but a 4th/5th grade recess should keep games going.









- There may be adults playing in the game, but that does not mean the adults are sustaining the game
- Look at overall picture of the playground to see if students are playing without adult influence.

<u>A score of 1</u> is when students are either not playing games (i.e. standing around talking) or adults are telling students to keep playing a game/activity.

<u>A score of 2</u> is when there is more adult intervention and only a small number of the games/activities that are sustained by students.

<u>A score of 3</u> is when more students are sustaining some of the games than others. There might still be adult intervention, but this score is leaning towards the side of more student sustained activities.

A score of 4 is when the vast majority of games/activities are sustained by students.

## **Student Conflict Resolution**

22	Students demonstrate hardly any strategies for resolving conflicts on their own	Students demonstrate a few strategies for resolving conflicts on their own, but a lot of adult support was needed	Students demonstrate adequate strategies for resolving conflicts on their own, but some adult support was needed	Students demonstrate strategies to resolve their conflict without adult intervention
			was needed	

#### Examples of student conflict resolution strategies include:

- Rock-paper-scissors (ROSHAMBO)
- Speaking honestly and kindly to each other
- Listening to others opinion carefully
- Proposing solutions and agreeing on a solution.
- Peace Path
- Disagree without losing temper
- De-escalation strategies
- Setting up to not have conflict by agreeing to game rules









• "I" messages

## **Adult Modeling**

No adults model positive culture (e.g. positive language, getting students involved, supporting conflict resolution skills, etc)

A few adults model positive culture (e.g. positive language, getting students involved, supporting conflict resolution skills, etc) (11-50%)

Most adults model positive culture (e.g. positive language, getting students involved, supporting conflict resolution skills, etc) (51-89%)

All adults model positive culture (e.g. positive language, getting students involved, supporting conflict resolution skills, etc)

A **Score of 1** is marked when no adults (or just one designated adult) is modeling positive culture as defined above.

A **Score of 2** is marked when half (e.g., two of four) or less than half (e.g., one of three) of adults are modeling positive culture as defined above.

A **Score of 3** is marked when more than half of adults (e.g., three out of five) are modeling positive culture as defined above.

A **Score of 4** is marked when all adults who are recess monitors model positive at some point throughout the duration of recess (adults who come in and out of the playground do should not count for this).

\* Adults do not have to be continuously performing the above mentioned behaviors to count as modeling positive culture. However, they should be periodically engaged in these behaviors throughout the duration of recess.





