

Restoring a Research-Based 20-minute Daily Recess Period for Florida's Elementary School Students

Senate Bill 1002 by Sen. Alan Hays/House Bill 833 by Rep. Rene Plasencia

- Scientific research is clear that providing a daily recess period for our elementary students serves to **optimize social, psychological, emotional, physical and cognitive development; maximize learning effectiveness and retention; improve classroom behavior, memory and attention; and positively affect student achievement.** Requiring a daily 20-minute recess period for Florida's elementary school children ensures regular access to an unstructured break in the school day that is proven to foster multiple critical components of healthy childhood development, including **lifelong skills relating to communication, negotiation, cooperation, sharing, problem solving, and coping.** These skills are not only foundations for healthy development but more predictive of future success than any other measure. In the current era of evidence-based practice, empirical research must be utilized when making decisions regarding educational policy. **Empirical research does not support the elimination or reduction of recess.** Recess is a critical part of the school day.
- If enacted in 2016, beginning with the 2016-2017 school year:
 - Each district school board shall be required to provide 100 minutes per week of supervised, safe, and unstructured free-play recess for all elementary school students
 - At least 20 consecutive minutes of free-play recess are required per day
 - Free-play recess may not be withheld for academic or punitive reasons
- Recess is a compliment to, but not a replacement for, physical education. This legislation does **not** adversely affect the State's requirement, via Section 1003.455(1)(3), Florida Statutes, that district school boards provide 150 minutes weekly of physical education instruction at the elementary level. Recess and physical education are different, each provides unique benefits, and **both** are integral parts of a child's education.
- **Research shows that state recess laws correlate with higher odds of schools having 20 minutes of recess daily** and that district policies are not significantly associated with school-level recess practices. Additionally, schools with students of predominantly white race/ethnicity were more likely than all other racial/ethnic groups to have daily recess, and schools with the highest number of students receiving free or reduced-cost meals were less likely to have 20 minutes of recess daily.
- The State of Florida requires (1) a 90-minute uninterrupted reading block, (2) 150 minutes of structured physical education per week, and (3) 720 annual instructional hours for grades K-3 (approximately 4 hours of instruction daily) and 900 annual instructional hours for grades 4-12 (approximately 5 hours of instruction daily). In Florida, the school day is generally 6-7 hours long, with an additional hour added for the bottom 300 schools. There is plenty of time in the already-existing school day for 20 minutes of recess so that children are allowed the opportunity to decompress from the rigor and curriculum of the classroom.
- Recess is often withheld to punish children for academic and/or punitive reasons. In 2013, one study found that 77 percent of school principals reported taking away recess as a punishment, while another study that same year found that 72 percent of elementary schools withheld recess due to poor behavior and 73 percent withheld recess for academic reasons.
- As of January 2016, 13 states require recess for elementary school children. In addition, the New Jersey legislature voted unanimously in December 2015 to mandate 20 minutes of daily recess for its elementary school students. **No additional funding was required.**

Endorsed by:

