

Public School Recess – H833/S1002

Questions and Answers

Is there time in the day for recess?

Without question. The state of Florida requires (1) a 90-minute uninterrupted reading block (120-minute block recommended), (2) 150 minutes of structured physical education per week, and (3) 720 annual instructional hours for grades K-3 (4 hours of instruction daily) and 900 annual instructional hours for grades 4-12 (5 hours of instruction daily). And yet, the school day is 6-7 hours long. Districts are making a choice to utilize additional minutes above and beyond what the State requires for instruction and test preparation without providing elementary children with 20 minutes of recess daily to decompress from the rigor and curriculum of the classroom. It is very important to note that some schools (many of them "A" schools) fit it all in. If they can do it, all schools can do it. Their schedules are evidence that there is time in the day already.

Why does the State need to step in?

Our districts are placing quantity over quality when it comes to instruction and test preparation. They have overloaded their schedules and added mandatory expectations on top of the State's requirements. They refuse to reduce or revise their self-imposed expectations because they take the position that more is better – more instruction and more test preparation equals better test scores. And meanwhile, our children are suffering. To date, recess restoration efforts statewide over a period of more than a decade have been unsuccessful in their efforts to secure adequate and uniform recess policies in their districts. We are unable to find even one single district in the entire State of Florida that affords its elementary students the universally-recommended 20 minutes of daily recess at all grade levels. Not one. The solution is not to leave the existence of a daily recess period for elementary school-aged children in the hands of districts any longer. The solution is for the State of Florida to mandate a break in the day for our children.

Is the punishment language contained in the bill really necessary?

Yes. Our children have a right to a break in the school day to decompress from the rigor and curriculum of the classroom. And yet, children are losing access to what little recess they have because their class is too chatty, or they didn't turn in their homework, or they don't know their multiplication tables with appropriate automaticity, or, believe it or not, they can't sit still. As an example, there is already an appropriate punishment for not turning in a homework assignment – it's a zero on the homework assignment. Finally, the vast majority of districts that have recess policies (albeit inadequate ones) already use similar (in numerous cases, identical) language regarding the prohibition of withholding recess as punishment. Withholding a break in the day from child is not an appropriate punishment for any infraction. Children are human beings.

But what about bullying?

Recess hasn't disappeared because of bullying. With that said, we know that bullying can happen on the playground and at recess just as it can happen in the classroom, in the hallways, and in the lunchroom. Each district should already have bullying prevention policies in place and those guidelines should be used to address bullying, or to discourage it in the first place. Withholding a brief respite in the day for children is not an appropriate response. If a child is actually doing the bullying on the playground, the child can and should be removed from the area and may be given an unstructured break in another

location. The bullying should also be addressed in other ways, among them, via detention, suspension, and if appropriate, expulsion.

How can we mandate recess when not every school has a playground?

You don't need a playground in order to provide recess! Children learn through play. They can play anywhere! In fact, in inner-city and space-challenged schools, paved areas like parking lots are often painted to make unique and engaging play spaces. Schools can also utilize recess carts stocked with equipment the school already has, such as balls, jump ropes, sidewalk chalk, etc. We know of plenty of overcrowded schools where kids enjoy their recess in an empty field or bus loop! Schools need to provide children with nothing more than a safe place to run and play and socialize and rest. The children will take care of the rest.

Will mandating recess cost money?

Absolutely not - but you are sure to hear the words "unfunded mandate" over and over again from school board members, superintendents, and district lobbyists. The truth is that requiring districts to provide children with a 20-minute unstructured break in the school day will not cost a penny. The children are already in school. Teachers are already supervising the children. No additional equipment is needed. Mandating recess will simply result in a reallocation of 20 minutes of the already-existing school day to allow 5-11 year olds the break in the school day that they need and deserve.

We already mandate physical education. Isn't that enough?

No. Recess and physical education are different, each provides unique benefits, and both are an integral part of our children's education. Like recess, the differences between recess and physical education are well-researched and well-settled. Physical education is a class, led by an educated, trained, and preferably certified teacher. It includes an instruction component and a requirement that children follow directions, pay attention, and learn concepts and put those concepts into practice via action, the success or failure of which is often measured via an end-of-course exam. There are Florida Standards attached to the physical education curriculum and children are expected to show learning gains. Physical education is not a break.