

New Rhode Island Law Mandates Daily School Recess, Calls It a Student's Right

By Marva Hinton on July 8, 2016 6:25 AM | 1 Comment

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The governor of Rhode Island recently signed [legislation into law requiring schools to provide 20 consecutive minutes of recess a day](#) for students in kindergarten through 6th grade.

The law recognizes recess as a right for students. It also asks teachers to make a good-faith effort not to take away recess as a form of punishment and allows schools to treat recess as instructional time. That provision means schools won't have to extend the school day to meet the requirement.

"Parents really speaking up is what actually made this a reality for students," said Tracy Ramos, the director of [Parents Across Rhode Island](#).

Her group, along with others, pushed legislators to mandate recess after they noticed that some children were missing out on time for unstructured play, Ramos said.



The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) has called recess, "a crucial and necessary component of a child's development." And some educators believe [free playtime leads to more success in the classroom](#).

Before this law passed, [Rhode Island school regulations](#) called for schools to, "provide daily recess opportunities for students" in kindergarten through 5th grade.

But Ramos said parents found that insufficient.

"We found that there was great disparity of availability of recess depending on the district and in some cases within the district depending on the school," said Ramos. "This was about leveling the playing field so that all kids would get a bare minimum standard."

A spokesman for the [Rhode Island Department of Education](#) said he doesn't believe the new law will have a significant impact.

"We think that most schools have already met this requirement in that we've had a regulation on the books for quite a while that daily recess should be available to students in grades K through 5," said Elliot Krieger, the state education department spokesman. "For those that may not have had 20 minutes of recess, they'll have to adjust their schedules to fit the extra time in."

Ramos disagrees.

"This law actually says children have to have 20 consecutive minutes of free play every day," said Ramos. "The regulation that existed prior to the law just said that children have to have opportunities for recess, and we know on a regular basis children were not getting that."

In December of 2015, [Ken Wagner, the state education commissioner](#), told a local newspaper [he didn't think the state's schools needed another mandate from the state](#).

"That view holds," said Krieger. "He believes these problems can be and should be resolved at the district or school level."

Ramos said they tried that without any success. [A parent group in Florida](#) made the same argument earlier this year before trying to get state legislators to pass a law mandating recess, but their efforts failed. The measure passed in the state house but never got a hearing in the state senate.

Ramos had hoped that the law would have gone a bit further in prohibiting schools from taking away recess as a form of punishment.

"I expect that we'll continue to monitor that as the next school year comes and see how the law is implemented," said Ramos. "Parents are really playing attention now."

Photo: Chloe Watson rides down a slide during kindergarten recess at Eastridge Elementary School in Lincoln, Neb.

--Andrew Dickinson for Education Week-File

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