

Play-Based Learning in Early Childhood Classrooms Law



Public Act 23-101

Sec. 20

Public Act 23-159

Sec. 4



Effective July 1st, 2023, the state of CT passed a law requiring that “Each local and regional board of education shall provide play-based learning during the instructional time of each regular school day for all students in kindergarten and any preschool program offered by the board.”

Additional Implications

- This law applies only to classrooms regulated by boards of education. The intent is to fill in the gap for programs not regulated by NAEYC Accreditation.
- Also permits teachers to utilize play-based learning during the instructional time of a regular school day for all students in grades one to five.
- Beginning in the 2024-25 school year, play-based learning must be incorporated into annual professional development programming for pre-K through fifth grade teachers.

Policy Impact

- Any policies governing restrictions on a student’s participation in physical exercise (including recess) during the school day for disciplinary purposes will have to conform to the new laws governing play-based learning.

Frequently Asked Questions

Families

Is this going to negatively affect my child's academic readiness?

- No. Children that learn in a play-based environment can learn the content and skills while reaching the same standards appropriate for their age and stage of development. In addition, research shows that play-based environments foster critical thinking, communication, and other executive function skills helpful to school success.

Does this mean free play all day?

- No. There are many types of play, including teacher initiated or guided play, during which teachers intentionally offer materials or prompts that ask children to practice specific skills, engage with information or content, or provide opportunities for specific types of investigation, all aimed at growing developmentally appropriate knowledge and abilities.

Teachers

What's my role in Play-Based Learning?

- A teacher's role is to be a facilitator or "guide on the side". They create an appropriate learning environment, ask guiding questions, set up investigations and challenges, offer ideas, and give feedback. While children play, teachers are hard at work observing, documenting, assessing learning, and planning for the next "just right" experience.

How will I maintain control in a Play-Based Learning environment?

- Play-Based Learning is not simply free play all day with no rules. Instead, teachers set clear rules and boundaries, and stick to consistent routines so that there is no need to "control" children's behaviors. When children are actively engaged in meaningful play, they are building self-regulation and cognitive flexibility.

Resources

[The National Association for the Education of Young Children](#)

[Gesell at the Yale Child Study Center](#)

