

2025-2026 Legislative Agenda



H.543/S.417 | *An Act relative to recess for elementary and middle school students*

Lead Sponsors: Rep. Marjorie Decker (D-Cambridge) | Sen. Patrick O'Connor (R-Weymouth)

Reports issued by national organizations such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics have detailed the many academic, social, emotional and physical health benefits provided by recess. Unstructured, free-play recess ensures that students have opportunities both to engage in physical activity and to develop their communication, cooperation, problem-solving and other vital life skills that will enrich their lives inside and outside of the classroom.

That is why the CDC recommends that all students receive at least 20 minutes of unstructured, free-play recess per school day. To-date, 13 states, including California, Connecticut and Rhode Island, have laws on the books to guarantee recess as a right for students in their states. While those laws may vary in the required length of recess and covered grades, they demonstrate that a growing number of states are recognizing the need to ensure widespread access to free-play recess in public schools.

Despite its clear importance, however, many students in the Commonwealth are not receiving the amount of unstructured recess they need and Massachusetts does not require recess. In the absence of a uniform state requirement, access to recess can vary dramatically from one school district to another to the detriment of impacted students. This bill will address these inconsistencies and expand access to recess across Massachusetts by:

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- Requiring at least 30 minutes of unstructured, free-play recess per school day for all public school students in grades K-8, with exceptions for early closings, delayed openings, field trips and other unique circumstances. This would bring Massachusetts in line with several other states, including California, that have guaranteed recess above and beyond the CDC's minimum recommendation.
 - Clarifying that, to the fullest extent possible, recess should be held outdoors whenever weather and air quality permits. Should recess be held indoors, it should be held in space that allows for and promotes physical activity.
 - Ensuring that recess is not excluded from the state's structured learning time requirements and, in doing so, affirm the critically important role that recess plays in supporting students' academic, social and emotional learning.

Please contact MTA Government Relations if you have any questions or require any additional information.
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