

Narrative for Play-Based Learning

CABE does not view play-based learning and academic achievement as an either-or proposition. Instead, play is a fundamental aspect of childhood and a powerful tool for learning, development, and well-being.

In the 2023 legislative session, the general assembly included language in two Public Acts (23-101 and 23-159) requiring schools to provide play-based learning for kindergarten and preschool students and requiring school boards to permit a teacher to utilize play-based learning for grades one to five. Public Act 23-159 includes language adding professional development in play-based learning for teachers in a preschool program or grades kindergarten to five.

Under section 5 of Public Act 23-159, the general assembly requires that professional development be “a comprehensive, sustained and intensive approach *to improving teacher and administrator effectiveness in increasing student knowledge achievement*, focus on *refining and improving various effective teaching methods* that are shared between and among educators, including, on and after July 1, 2024, play-based learning, as defined in section 4 of this act.

Adding to the general assembly’s requirements for professional development, section 5 adds that professional development “shall foster collective responsibility for *improved student performance*, be comprised of professional learning that is *aligned with rigorous state student academic standards*,” and “includes a repository of best practices for teaching methods developed by educators for comment and updating.”

Contextualizing play-based learning and including it in this section referencing professional development seems to emphasize its importance – its relevance to academic outcomes and the need to approach this strategy with a solid theoretical background, training and intentional planning and oversight.

A sample policy to consider.

Instruction

Play-Based Learning

Play is a fundamental aspect of childhood and a powerful tool for learning, development, and well-being. The _____ Board of Education recognizes the importance of play in the educational process and is committed to supporting and promoting play as an integral component for engaging students in all areas of the district's curricula. Strategically aligning play-based learning with curriculum standards can help meet the Board's goal to realize increased academic gains while improving executive function or self-regulation among all students.

Along with supporting the Board's recognition of the educational value of play-based learning, the purpose of this policy is to ensure compliance with a law passed in 2023 requiring schools to provide play-based learning for kindergarten and preschool students and to permit a teacher to utilize play-based learning for grades one to five.

Teachers are permitted to utilize play-based learning during the instructional time of a regular school day for all students in grades one to five. The teacher's role in play-based learning is to create an appropriate learning environment, ask questions, set up investigations and challenges, offer ideas, and provide feedback. While children engage in play-based learning, teachers are expected to observe, document, assess learning, and plan for the next day's experience.

Beginning in the 2024-25 school year, play-based learning must be incorporated into annual professional development programming for pre-K through grade five teachers.

Definitions

"Play-Based Learning" means a pedagogical approach that emphasizes play in promoting learning and includes developmentally appropriate strategies that can be integrated with existing learning standards. "Play-based learning" does not mean time spent in recess or as part of a physical education course or instruction.

"Free Play" means unstructured, voluntary, child-initiated activities that are performed by a child for self-amusement and have behavioral, social and psychomotor rewards except "free play" may be structured to promote activities that are child-directed, joyful and spontaneous.

"Guided Play" means learning experiences that combine the child-directed nature of free play with a focus on learning outcomes and adult guidance.

"Recess" means the time during the regular school day for each student enrolled in elementary school that is devoted to physical exercise or not less than twenty minutes in total pursuant to section 10-221o of the general statutes.

"Mobile Electronic Device" has the same meaning as provided in section 10-222d of the general statutes.

"Instructional Time" means the time of actual school work during a regular school day.

Instruction

Play-Based Learning (continued)

Guidance for Pre-K and Kindergarten

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 *shall be provided*. Such play-based learning must be incorporated and integrated into daily practice, allow for the needs of such students to be met through free play, guided play and games, and be predominantly free of the use of mobile electronics.

Guidance for Grades 1-5

Teachers are permitted to utilize play-based learning during the instructional time of a regular school day for all students in grades one to five, inclusive. Such play-based learning may be incorporated and integrated into daily practice, shall allow for the needs of such students to be met through free play, guided play and games, and shall be predominantly free of the use of mobile electronic devices.

Any play-based learning utilized under this policy must comply with the individualized educational program (IEP) or plan pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended from time to time, for any student.

A school employee may only prevent or otherwise restrict a student's participation in play-based learning if such prevention or restriction is in accordance with this policy pursuant to section 10-221 of the general statutes.

Legal Reference: Public Act 23-101 (An Act Concerning the Mental, Physical, and Emotional Wellness of Children), § 20
 Public Act 23-159 (An Act Concerning Teachers and Paraeducators), §§ 4-5