

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF CHILD-DIRECTED ACTIVITIES AND TEACHERS' AUTONOMY FROM MASSACHUSETTS' KINDERGARTENS



According to a survey of 189 kindergarten teachers in the wealthiest and poorest school districts in Massachusetts, schools have reduced the amount of time that kindergartners have for child-directed activities (CDA) such as free play, rest, recess, snack, and lunch. At the same time, school administrators with limited or no knowledge of early childhood education have placed increasing restrictions on kindergarten teachers' control over curriculum and instruction.

- Schools have reduced the time kindergartners have for child-directed activities.

- Children in high-socioeconomic status (SES) schools have more time for child-directed activities.

- Kindergartners in Massachusetts get much less time for free play and recess than three provinces in Canada recommend for kindergartners.

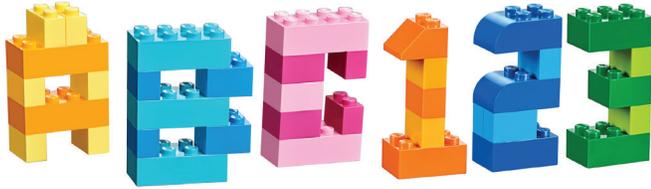
- The scheduling of child-directed activities in some low-SES kindergartens is minimal or non-existent.

- Schools have reduced kindergarten teachers' control over curriculum.

- Most elementary principals are inexperienced in early childhood education.

In far too many public school kindergartens in Massachusetts, children are experiencing educational conditions that prepare them, not for a career in the creative economy, but rather for settings where creativity, personal agency, and a sense of purpose are not necessary. Advocacy is required at both the state and local level to persuade or, if necessary, compel schools to adopt practices that address the needs of children rather than the needs of child-blind administrators in their pursuit of higher test scores.

Children need to have frequent opportunities to engage in self-selected, child-directed activities, especially play.



In far too many low-SES kindergartens in Massachusetts, children are being prepared, intentionally or not, for workplaces and institutions where personal agency and a sense of purpose are not necessary.

It is time for policy makers and administrators in Massachusetts and across the nation to heed this lesson: to cease treating children as data points, and to design responsive educational environments, led by empowered early educators, that nurture the whole child.

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Defending the Early Years (DEY) was founded in 2012 to rally educators to take action on policies that affect the education of young children. DEY is committed to promoting appropriate practices in early childhood classrooms and supporting educators in counteracting current reforms which undermine these appropriate practices. DEY is a non-profit project of the Progressive Education Network, Inc., a 501 (c) 3 organization.

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