

WBEZ – 91.5 Chicago Public Radio
Recess is back at Chicago Public Schools
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Monday marked the first day of school for about a third of Chicago public school children. It also was the first time many of them experienced recess. After almost three decades, recess is back at all CPS schools.

Alondra Nino is an eighth grader at Caesar Chavez Elementary School.

“For me, it’s always been a problem concentrating on work,” Nino said Monday. “And if it’s all work, work, work, it’s even harder. And now having an extra break, it’s actually going to be easier for me.”

Unfortunately, Monday’s recess at Chavez was dampened by the rain. Chavez principal Barton Dassinger said they’re still ironing out the kinks, including plans for bad weather. At William King Elementary, students spent their free time in the gymnasium instead of on the playground.

Treyonda Towns is a parent of three children at King. She is part of POWER-PAC, Parents Organized to Win, Educate and Renew--Policy Action Council, which advocated to get recess back for several years.

“Just staying contained for long periods of time is very challenging for them,” said Treyonda Towns, a parent of three children at King. “So I’m excited about the recess because maybe that’ll cut down some of the calls and the frustration... because they’ll have time to release.”

Bringing recess back is part of the longer school day implemented by Mayor Rahm Emanuel and his schools team. Grammar school is now 7 hours long and high school is 7 and 1/2 hours long. In the past, elementary schools were in session for 5 hours and 45 minutes and high schools were in session roughly 7 hours.

Emanuel pushed for a change in state law last year that would allow him to unilaterally lengthen the school day. It became a flashpoint with the Chicago Teachers Union. After unsuccessfully pressing the union to add time last school year, Emanuel and school leaders tried to circumvent the union by offering teachers at individual schools bonuses if they voted to lengthen the day last year.

The teachers’ contract expired on June 30, and the district and the union are still negotiating a new one.

The CTU has said it continues to bargain, but is also having its members prepare for a strike. At the end of last school year, 90 percent of teachers voted to authorize a strike.