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ANNUAL
REPORT



PLAYWORKS



Dear Friends,

When Playworks started up in two elementary schools back in 1996, it was a simple idea born in response to a principal's plea. Our idea was to create a fun, safe and inclusive recess that could engage any child that wanted to play. It worked.

More than 16 years later that simple idea still works — and in ways that go far beyond what we first imagined when we began sending our coaches out to make the magic happen on the playground. Every year we hear from teachers and principals, parents and students about the positive impact of our efforts. And this year we got scientific validation when Mathematica Policy Research released its evaluation results. *Play works.*

Mathematica's study showed that Playworks has a significant impact on reducing bullying, creating a safer and more positive learning environment, improving transition time from recess to learning and helping students better focus in class.

We know that energetic, happy kids are more likely to grow into active, happy grown-ups. We also know that kids who understand how to resolve conflicts on the school yard are more likely to grow up into adults who can collaborate to get things done.

This year's annual report focuses on our founding understanding: whatever it is you want to achieve with kids, play works to get them there. Looking back over the past year offers a chance to see how far we've come; and, inevitably, it serves as a reminder of how far we still have to go. Please accept our great appreciation for your help in getting us here and for your willingness to join us on the ride.

Thank you for celebrating with us the wonderfully happy truth that *play works!*

All the best,

Jill Vialet
CEO and Founder
Playworks

"It's easy to dismiss play as an extra, but nothing could be farther from the truth. If you care about children's well-being, if you care about education, you should be investing in recess."

Jill Vialet

CEO and Founder

Playworks





Play Works Through Training

With about 300 kids out on the pavement playground at a time, recess at Burbank Elementary in Hayward, California was “scary.”

“It was chaos. Kids were everywhere. We have this blue game wall, but the kids didn’t really know what to do so they used it for soccer. They’d have one kid stand against it to play goalie, and everyone else would just pepper him with soccer balls,” explains Assistant Principal Peter Wilson. “It was a *Lord of the Flies* mentality and a lot of kids would get in trouble or get hurt.”

“You can’t get in front of the problem from behind the desk.”

Peter Wilson, Assistant Principal

Burbank Elementary

Hayward, CA

Then Wilson heard about Playworks, which was operating at a nearby school. “We really liked the program, but realized we weren’t going to have the money to sustain direct service long-term. So we made a strategic decision to implement Playworks on our own with training.”

Wilson and a core group of a dozen teachers and playground staff signed up for Playworks Training’s *Recess 360* program, which consists of monthly trainings supplemented by regular consultation services to help ensure the program is most effectively implemented.

According to Wilson, since the *Recess 360* program was implemented, suspension rates at Burbank Elementary have plummeted. “My first year here, students collectively lost 178 total school days due to suspensions resulting from discipline issues. That’s like a kid a day lost to suspension all year. The next year, through addressing issues with staff, it dropped to 118 days. But last year, after we added the Playworks training, our suspensions dropped to around 44,” he says.

For Wilson, the decision to be out in front of the problem has made all the difference. “I’d rather be present outside, active and involved, spending 15 minutes playing every day instead of spending 30 to 45 minutes suspending a kid. Now, part of my job is to play with kids and teach them how to play instead of laying down the law. And this works for us. We wouldn’t be doing it if it didn’t.”





Play Works to Prevent Bullying

In 2012, Mathematica Policy Research and Stanford University released the first results of a two-year study examining Playworks' impact on schools and learning. The randomized control trial, considered the "gold standard" of scientific research, compared schools using Playworks to a control group of similar schools without the program in five US cities. Researchers found that at the schools with Playworks, there was *less bullying and exclusionary behavior*.

Teachers reported that Playworks reinforced positive behavior during recess, promoted *inclusive* behavior and provided positive experiences for students. Researchers also found that teachers perceived students to be safer during recess and engaged in more collaborative and inclusive play, learning new games and recess rules.

In addition, researchers reported that student transitions from recess to learning were easier at the Playworks schools, and allowed teachers to reclaim valuable teaching time. The Playworks schools spent 27 percent less time transitioning from recess to classwork. Teachers reported students were more likely to come to class ready to learn because fewer conflicts carried over from recess. Students at the Playworks schools also demonstrated better behavior and attention in class after participating in the games and recess activities, according to the researchers.

"I like recess time now, not dread it. I can interact, instead of police. Our school is more positive, with fewer random acts of meanness."

Teacher
Parkwood Elementary
Durham, NC



The study is one of the most rigorous trials to find an effect on bullying in schools, and one of the first to evaluate a recess- and play-based school program as a promising solution to bullying.



Play Works to Shape Leadership

For Natalie Habib, a fifth grader at Joseph P. Manning Elementary in Metro Boston, the skills she's gained from becoming a junior coach are working for her on and off the playground.

"As a junior coach, I am a leader to a lot of young kids who look up to me and respect me. I love leading games and seeing people work together," she says. "I realize there are different ways to teach and learn. I didn't notice this before, but you see it a lot more as a junior coach. When I'm with friends outside of school, I've learned new ways to deal with problems."

Natalie says that a few years ago, for instance, she would never play kickball. "I was afraid I'd mess up," she confesses. "Now I realize that if I make a mistake there's always another chance. And I can tell others that as well."

"This experience has given Natalie more confidence and enthusiasm for school. It's really helped prepare her for middle school and beyond," says her dad, Josh. "Being responsible for others has taught her to be more patient. She's learned to balance her priorities and organize and manage her time better so she can leave class to be a junior coach and a good team player."

"I have a student who did not like to speak because she was extremely shy. I recommended her as a student coach. Now, she is not only working well with others, she is also participating in class — whole group and small groups!"

Teacher, Global Village Academy,

Denver, CO



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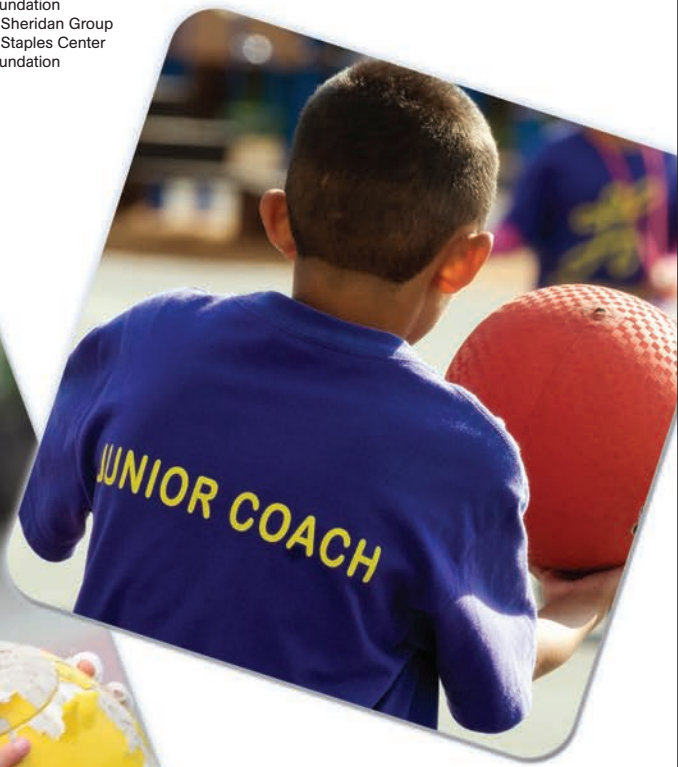
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Play Works to Support Teachers and Social Emotional Learning

"As principal, I get pressured to get test scores up. We forget that students require time to be physical and socialize. Playworks has restored some balance to developing the whole child."

Principal
St. Paul, MN

Liz Cantu of Houston's Stepping Stone Elementary School has always valued play. But as school counselor and special education coordinator, she also understands the *challenges* of recess.

"It's hard enough for teachers to keep kids in their seats during class," she laughs. "But then you send them running wild at recess. You give up if you don't know to manage the playground. Sometimes you just want it to rain so you don't have to deal."

That's changed since Playworks became part of the Stepping Stone community in 2010, bringing games and conflict resolution skills to recess.

"The kids feel more supported and more secure," says Cantu. "They've learned to resolve their small conflicts and to take time before interacting verbally and physically. They've learned to be proud of themselves for the way they play, the way they get along with other kids. And they feel good."

This has helped teachers more quickly transition students back to class after recess, she explains. "Kids don't come in with all sorts of residual anger left over. They resolve conflicts outside and it saves time transitioning back to work and learning."

For Cantu, this translates into more time to focus on her job. "The issues don't escalate as much anymore. As a counselor, it frees me up so I can look deeper into the other problems that affect our kids academically, behaviorally and emotionally."





"I believe the presence of Playworks has created a more active, kind and pleasant atmosphere amongst the students. I see happier and healthier children."

Teacher

Dolores Gonzales Elementary

Albuquerque, NM

“Playworks has helped to close the loop of school climate here, extending the learning from the classroom out to recess, and from recess back into the classroom.”

Teacher

Bancroft Elementary

St. Paul, MN





"Playworks has taught the students to be problem solvers. They have learned how to play in a safe environment by applying rules and structure. Students have also learned a variety of games they can choose from in order to be physically active."

Teacher

William T. Machan Elementary

Phoenix, AZ



“Playworks makes our school a more positive, team-oriented place. Students participate in games with peers they might not typically engage with, promoting unity and lessening the impact of cliques.

Teacher

Mary Gage Peterson Elementary

Chicago, IL



Play Works to Build Community

For Principal Christine Pittam at Salt Lake City's Lincoln Elementary School, recess was the pain point of the school day. She would often see six or seven students daily in her office for disciplinary infractions that took place on the playground.

"We had a lot of bullying and behavior issues at recess," she explains. "Kids didn't know rules to the games, and often had fights over rules. They didn't know how to innovate and come up with new games, and there was lots of wandering around. It was easy to get into trouble."

But after her school experienced Playworks' Recess Roll-Out, the weeklong pilot program to introduce prospective partner schools to Playworks, Pittam saw the potential for change. "I was out of town for the first few days. When I came back it was like a totally different school. In just two days kids were playing games and interacting and having fun."

Now in its second year at Lincoln, Playworks has become an integral part of the school community. Pittam credits the structure of a high-functioning recess for dramatic improvements in the school environment. Office referrals for disruptive behaviors fell 35 percent in Playworks' first year there. Out on the playground, the formerly active "time-out" squares are no longer needed. Nearly every child is engaged during recess, and rock-paper-scissors has become a school-wide norm.

A more positive sense of community is also tangible at the highly diverse school.

"Kids are more supportive of students in other grades because they see them in the morning and at recess," explains Pittam. "They are more willing to befriend or accept kids from other grades. They recognize they can be friends."

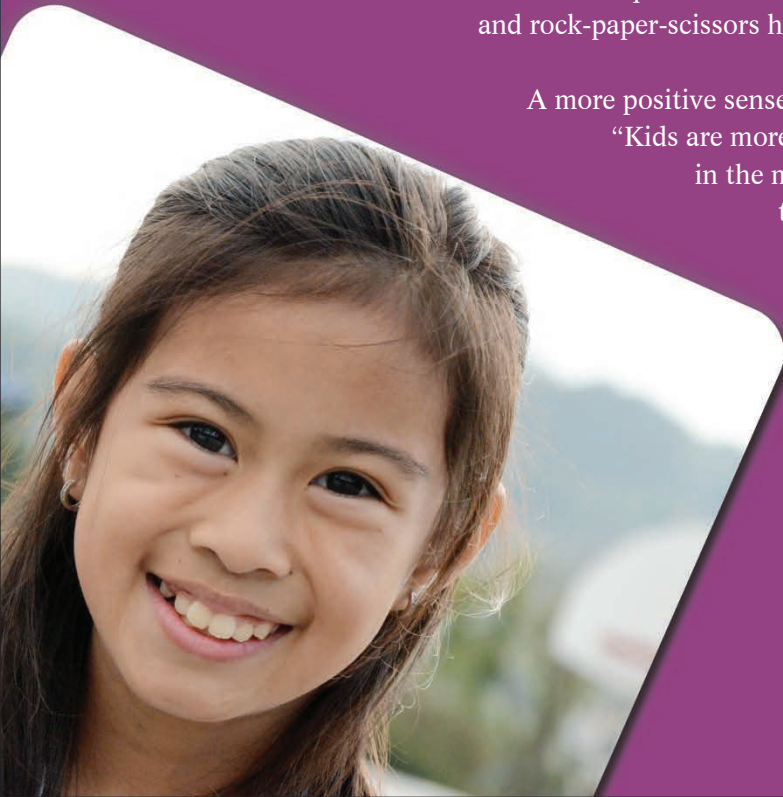
"Recess used to be chaotic and borderline dangerous.

I used to spend time resolving conflicts. Now, students are ready to learn and conflict-free when I pick them up from recess."

Teacher

Harrington Elementary

Denver, CO



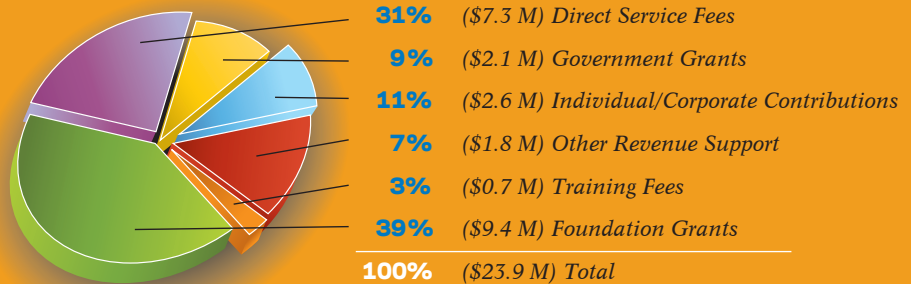
Playworks Around the Country 2011-2012

Baltimore, MD - est. 2005
 Chicago, IL - est. 2011
 Denver, CO - est. 2010
 Detroit, MI - est. 2010
 Durham, NC - est. 2011
 Greater New York, NY - est. 2011
 Houston, TX - est. 2010
 Jackson, MI - est. 2011
 Metro Boston, MA - est. 2006
 Milwaukee, WI - est. 2012
 Newark, NJ - est. 2009
 New Mexico - est. 2010
 New Orleans, LA - est. 2008
 Oakland/East Bay, CA - est. 1996
 Philadelphia, PA - est. 2010
 Phoenix, AZ - est. 2011
 Portland, OR - est. 2009
 Salt Lake City, UT - est. 2011
 San Francisco, CA - est. 2003
 Silicon Valley, CA - est. 2006
 Southern California - est. 2009
 Twin Cities, MN - est. 2010
 Washington, D.C - est. 2006

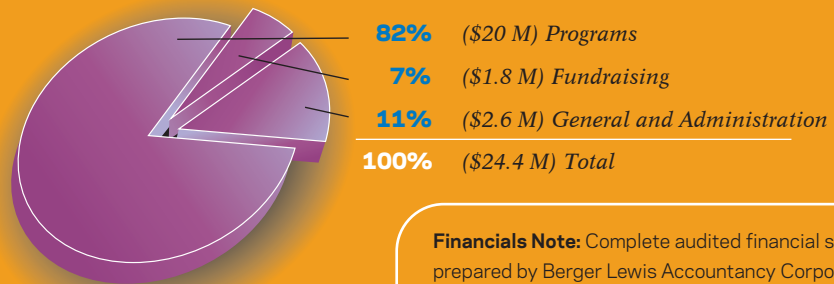
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