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**Expanded community recess partnership aims to increase physical activity and support learning through the power of play**

*Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island, Playworks and Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition include twice as many local schools in recess partnership with \$100,000 grant*

**PROVIDENCE, RI (January 25, 2017)** – [Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island](#) (BCBSRI), [Playworks New England](#) and the [Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition](#) (RIHSC) announced today an expanded second-year recess partnership to increase physical activity and bolster social-emotional skills in local students. The Playworks Recess Implementation program has grown from its initial work with 18 schools during 2016 to doubling the size of the program to 36 schools from all over the state this school year.

The expanded partnership, made possible through a \$100,000 grant from BCBSRI, comes as state lawmakers passed a bill in 2016 requiring at least 20 minutes of recess per day in all Rhode Island elementary schools. The partnership’s goal is to change school culture and improve the health of children by leveraging the power of safe, fun, and healthy play at school every day.

“Evidence continues to mount that engaging kids in effective free play in a school environment improves their physical and mental health and can set a foundation for a lifetime of wellness,” said Kim Keck, president of BCBSRI. “By doubling-down on this partnership, we are expanding our reach to empower more schools to develop fulfilling recess experiences for students, helping to create healthier school cultures and ultimately healthier, more active children.”

“Our expansion effort into Rhode Island is integral to our regional aim of serving 200,000 children in 400 elementary schools by 2020,” says Jonathan Gay, Executive Director of Playworks New England. “We are lucky to have BCBSRI and RIHSC as established partnerships in Rhode Island to make this expansion possible. Playworks knows that every child deserves the opportunity to have safe and healthy play in school every day. Our continued work in Rhode Island is the first step to make this possible.”

“Schools have been incredibly grateful for this unique training opportunity, shares Karin Wetherill, Wellness Coordinator for the Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition. Bringing teachers, principals, PE teachers and recess aides together to learn strategies to get all kids active and engaged during recess has really worked. We’ve witnessed some amazing transformations on the playground as a result of this investment and partnership!”

The partnership includes the 18 schools that participated in the program during the 2015-2016 school year as well as 18 new schools that will be selected from an application process in February and coordinated

through RIHSC. The new cohort will receive Recess Implementation training, a specialized professional development program designed to help schools create a high-functioning recess and increase daily physical activity. The returning schools will receive specialized workshops on implementing indoor recess during inclement weather months. They will also receive ongoing support through follow up consultation and technical assistance to continue to build upon their success.

In a survey following last year's initial Rhode Island training, more than 88 percent of participant respondents said that they would recommend Playworks training to a colleague. Other national survey results show Playworks curriculum leads to increased cooperation on the playground and in the classroom and decreases in bullying and other disciplinary incidents.

BCBSRI's expansion of the partnership marks another milestone in the company's ongoing efforts to combat the issue of childhood obesity. Since 2014, BCBSRI has provided more than \$1.4 million towards wellness initiatives in local communities, with a focus on healthy eating and physical activity for children and families. "A Healthy Weight for the Next Generation" is a primary focus of BCBSRI's philanthropy.

#### **About BCBSRI**

*Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI) is the state's leading health insurer and covers more than 450,000 members. Our mission is to improve our members' health and peace of mind by facilitating their access to affordable, high-quality healthcare. BCBSRI is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. For more information, visit [www.bcbsri.com](http://www.bcbsri.com), follow us on Twitter [@BCBSRI](https://twitter.com/BCBSRI), and like us on Facebook at [fb.com/bcbsri](https://fb.com/bcbsri).*

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