

Harnessing the Power of Play

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The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children six years and older participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day. Active play is not only critical for physical health but can actually increase children’s social competence and emotional maturity, which has been proven to have a positive impact on academic success and overall well-being. Our two organizations – Playworks and Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition (RIHSC) – help schools create environments that support the development of children’s optimal physical, social, and emotional health.

The power of play

Many habits are learned when we are young, and the formation of a healthy lifestyle shouldn’t be an exception. Children who are more active are more attentive, process things at a greater cognitive speed, and perform better on standardized tests than children who aren’t as active.

RIHSC and Playworks, through our Recess Rocks in RI program, choose to partner with schools because they are the perfect place to teach and model health and wellness to young people. We also seek to help adults understand the value of healthy play and teach them to recognize the signs of unhealthy play, such as exclusion or bullying. The benefit of partnering with schools is that the Playworks model can be available to all children, no matter their school location or socioeconomic composition. The fundamentals and the concepts of healthy play can be implemented in an urban or rural setting.

Primrose Hill Elementary: A success story

A wonderful example of a local school harnessing the power of play is Primrose Hill School in Barrington, Rhode Island. After experiencing a number of playground issues and frustrated adults who felt unable to help, Principal Pat Tolento’s research led her to the Recess Rocks in RI program. A Primrose team participated in the RRIRI program trainings and learned inclusive playground games that teach conflict resolution and cooperation and group management strategies that encourage successful group behavior.

Thanks to the training, Principal Tolento has seen increased value in recess time. Teachers and students now engage in a new and more positive way. Not only are more kids physically active on the playground, in 2016-2017 there was a decrease of 100 disciplinary incidents over the previous year and there have been fewer recorded incidents compared to this time last year.

Power in Numbers

With success stories like Primrose Hill’s, we’re inspired to spread the word about the power of play. But we know we can’t do it alone. We are grateful for the support of organizations like Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI), which understand the importance of creating healthy habits early on in life. BCBSRI generously funds the Recess Rocks in RI program which made it possible for Primrose Hill and other schools across the state to participate in training free of charge.

Helping children establish healthy habits through play goes a long way to ensuring that they can grow up at a healthy weight which in turn leads to lower healthcare costs in the long term for all Rhode Islanders.

We encourage other schools in the Ocean State to harness the power of play, thus ensuring a healthy future for all Rhode Islanders.

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