



Media Contact: Kyrie Perry
(401) 459-1714
kyrie.perry@bcbsri.org

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island Partners with Playworks, Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition to Increase Physical Activity in Schools

Grant, collaboration bring programming to Rhode Island for first time, positively impacting 7,300 students

PROVIDENCE, RI (September 19, 2016) – The start of the 2016-2017 school year marks the full launch of a new partnership between Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI), Playworks and the Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition (RIHSC) to increase physical activity in local schools through the power of play. Using skills and curriculum developed through a series of trainings earlier this year, 18 schools across the state have implemented or will implement new recess programming to improve the physical health and emotional well-being of 7,300 elementary-age students.

A \$77,500 grant BCBSRI awarded to Playworks, the leading nonprofit creating successful recess curriculums around the country, in January 2016 launched this work in Rhode Island. The RIHSC, a network of local organizations advocating for healthy change in schools, developed and managed an important link between Playworks and the local community. The proactive partnership provided training for 102 Rhode Island educators across eight districts including principals, physical education teachers, grade level instructors, behavioral specialists and para-professionals.

In convening Playworks and the RIHSC, BCBSRI took another step in its ongoing efforts to combat the issue of childhood obesity. Since 2014, BCBSRI has provided more than \$700,000 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.

“This innovative partnership demonstrates that keeping our kids healthy and active can be fun and also support efforts to combat childhood obesity,” said Kim Keck, president of BCBSRI. “By jump starting this work of Playworks and the Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition locally, Blue Cross is able to positively impact not only the physical health of Rhode Island’s children, but also their social relationships and academic success.”

“Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island is a great Playworks partner” said Jonathan Gay, Executive Director of Playworks New England. “Our programming and results align perfectly with the organization’s vision to improve the health of all Rhode Islanders. Playworks has proven that by focusing on building students’ social and emotional skills through recess and play, we can create a healthy school community where every child gets to play and be active. We look forward to partnering with Blue Cross to enhance and transform recess and play into a positive experience during the 2016-17 school year.”

As part of the partnership, Playworks evaluated and consulted with each participating elementary school to assist with *Recess Implementation*, the training curriculum designed to help schools create a high-functioning recess and increase daily physical activity. *Recess Implementation* produces tangible health and social-emotional benefits: a 2013 study by Stanford University and Mathematica Policy Research found that Playworks programming results in students engaging in more vigorous physical activity and feeling safer at school and recess, and leads to a decrease in bullying.

In selecting the schools to be included in the initiative, BCBSRI and RIHSC recruited participants from a pool of 32 schools that had completed a 2015 training meant to test recess as a school-based intervention to increase physical activity. BCBSRI selected the following 18 elementary schools to participate in the collaboration:

Bristol Warren

Rockwell Elementary

Central Falls

The Learning Community (Charter School)

Coventry

Blackrock Elementary

Tiogue Elementary

Cumberland

Ashton Elementary
Cumberland Hill Elementary
BF Norton Elementary

Lincoln

Lonsdale Elementary

North Kingstown

Fishing Cove Elementary
Hamilton Elementary
Stony Lane Elementary

North Providence

Greystone Elementary

Providence

Bailey Elementary
Fogarty Elementary
Kennedy Elementary
Kizirain Elementary
Reservoir Ave Elementary
Veazie Elementary

About Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island

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, follow us on Twitter [@BCBSRI](https://twitter.com/BCBSRI), and like us on Facebook at fb.com/bcbsri.

About PLAYWORKS

Playworks is the leading national nonprofit leveraging the power of play to transform children's social, emotional and physical health. Playworks currently serves more than 1,300 schools in 23 U.S. cities, and reaches more than 700,000 students directly and through professional training services. We create a place for every kid on the playground to feel included, be active, and build valuable social and emotional skills. Playworks partners with schools, districts, and afterschool programs to provide a service or mix of services including on-site coaches, professional training for school staff who support recess, and consultative partnerships.

-###-