

Case Study: A Level Playing Field

How Greenfield Public Schools used play to build conflict resolution skills, empower staff, and create a more connected school community.

For students and families in Massachusetts' Greenfield Public Schools district, local schools are more than places of learning. They are important community hubs that provide stability, connection, and support.

School leaders and staff saw recess as an important part of that experience, but it wasn't always living up to its full potential. Students came to the playground with different expectations and experiences, making disagreements difficult to navigate in the moment, and often followed students back into the classroom. Through a partnership with Playworks New England, the district strengthened its approach to recess to create opportunities for every kid to join in, and developed conflict-resolution strategies for use on the playground and throughout the school day.

Building on its existing approach to recess, this created conditions where more students could participate fully and build the shared skills needed to keep small disagreements from becoming bigger ones.

HOW IT HAPPENED

TEACHING SKILLS, NOT JUST GAMES

Staff and students learned simple, practical strategies to keep play moving and resolve conflicts independently. Because the tools were easy to remember and use, they became part of the school's culture even when the Playworks trainer was not present.

STARTING FROM A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

With consistent rules in place, students could spend less time at recess guarding against uncertainty. Energy that used to go into conflict went into play, connection, and building friendships.

COACHING THAT BUILDS CAPACITY

The Playworks team modeled strategies and followed up with feedback after each school visit, equipping staff with tools they could use independently.



ABOUT GREENFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Greenfield Public Schools is a public district in western Massachusetts committed to supporting every student on their path to success.

- Location: Greenfield, MA
- Students served: 1,300
- Number of schools: 6
- Grade levels: Preschool through 12th grade

"Once we've identified and established a consistent set of rules, students fall into that structure pretty easily because then they know what to expect. They're not working with their guard up all the time. And I see some of these things happening in classrooms too, where students now have strategies they can use to problem solve rather than escalating the situation."

Stephen Sullivan

Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Greenfield Public Schools

THREE AREAS OF TRANSFORMATION

FRAMEWORK FOR PLAY



Students often brought different rules and expectations to recess. Playworks created a shared framework that gave students and staff a common language and set of expectations for what recess should look and feel like every day.

SKILLS BEYOND RECESS



Students applied conflict resolution skills beyond the playground, using them in classrooms, in the hallways, and throughout the school day. By solving problems independently, they spent more time learning and playing.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS



Through consultative visits, Playworks helped staff identify challenges, strengthen recess practices, and build solutions that fit their school. Together, they created lasting improvements for students.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT



Fewer conflicts followed students back into the classroom



Shared language for resolving disagreements spread across the school day



Confident staff who could lead recess independently between Playworks visits



More students found their way into games, regardless of experience or confidence level

THE RESULTS

Greenfield's experience reflects what Playworks has documented across thousands of schools over three decades. Independent research from Mathematica and Stanford consistently shows that when students have consistent frameworks for play and conflict resolution, the impact reaches far beyond the playground and into classrooms, attendance, and school climate.