

Case Study: Every Student, Every Recess

How THINK Academy in Rudolph, Wisconsin channeled a school community's love of play into something every student could be a part of.

Recess has always been a big deal at THINK Academy in Rudolph, Wisconsin. From kickball to football, students love to get active and compete, and that energy is a genuine strength of the school community. But high-energy play isn't for everyone, and without defined play zones or a wider range of game options, some students could not find activities that matched their interests on the playground.

THINK Academy partnered with Playworks Wisconsin to expand the recess experience for its school. Staff gained a consistent framework for leading recess, students had more ways to play, and time outside became something more children looked forward to.

HOW IT HAPPENED

ZONES THAT GIVE THE PLAYGROUND SHAPE

Before Playworks, THINK Academy had defined areas for kickball, football, swings, and basketball, but little in between. Adding more play zones for cooperative and imaginative play, along with a rotating game schedule, gave students more variety and staff a consistent framework for supervision.

SHARED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

A member of the Playworks team visited several times per school year, strategically timed for moments when games needed a refresh and staff could use more support. School staff were on the playground during visits, so they heard and saw everything alongside students.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION THAT STUCK

The Deal Wheel and Rock Paper Scissors became school-wide tools, printed on lanyards so staff could reference them anywhere. Junior Coaches used them to help younger students move past small disagreements and get back to playing.



ABOUT THINK ACADEMY

THINK Academy is a Pre K - fifth grade school in Rudolph, Wisconsin, serving the rural communities of Rudolph and Vesper as part of Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools.

- Location: Rudolph, Wisconsin
- Students served: 200
- Grade levels: Pre-K - 5th grade

"When we started, we had kids who knew exactly what game they were going to play, and then we had kids who weren't sure what games to play or weren't sure how to ask, 'can I play?'"

Some were worried about the level of competition. Some just needed help building those social skills.

Playworks gave us a way to meet the needs of all of those kids."

Christine Slattery

Principal, THINK Academy

THREE AREAS OF TRANSFORMATION

ROOM FOR EVERYONE



Defined play zones, a wider variety of games, and consistent rules gave every student a clear path to recess, whether they preferred high-intensity games or more imaginative activities.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE



The Junior Coach Youth Leadership Program gave fourth- and fifth-grade students a chance to step into a leadership role their peers had not seen them in before. For some, it allowed them to find their footing at school and build confidence that will last a lifetime.

TOOLS THAT TRAVEL BEYOND THE PLAYGROUND



Conflict resolution strategies like rock paper scissors spread across the entire school day and into classrooms, hallways, gym class, and even lunch, giving students a shared language for working through disagreement anywhere.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT



More students were engaged at recess, including those who previously stayed on the sidelines.



Staff confidence grew, with recess supervisors equipped to lead and manage play independently between Playworks visits.



Conflict resolution tools learned at recess were used throughout the school day.



A stronger school culture took shape, with Junior Coaches changing how peers see and support each other.

THE RESULTS

THINK Academy's experience reflects what Playworks has seen across thousands of school communities. When students have more ways into play and the tools to navigate conflict on their own, the benefits not only show up on the playground but also in the classroom and in the relationships students build with one another.