Dear Friends:

The school playground is something many of us take for granted. Kids go to recess, they run around and then they come back to class ready to start learning again. That’s what I remembered. Then one day in 1996 when I was visiting an Oakland elementary school, I had a chance encounter with a frustrated principal who gave me a dose of recess reality and asked for my help in changing the recess dynamic. And just like that, Playworks was born.

But while Playworks began as a response to the challenges of recess, what we’ve learned is that recess has the promise and potential to be one of the most powerful tools of the school day.

It’s now 15 years since Playworks launched on our first playgrounds. We have grown and learned some important lessons along the way. For the staff, recess has been an amazing teacher, and one we want all our children to have as they grow. Here are some of the lessons the playgrounds have taught us:

• A school that gives children the opportunity to learn and prove themselves beyond the classroom creates an environment that not only lifts those who most need it, but elevates all in its learning community.

• When kids are given the tools to “play it out” when they have minor conflicts, not only do they go back to class ready to learn, they continue to use these tools in other areas of their lives.

• When children are given the opportunity and support to be playground leaders, they will wear that mantle proudly and make a difference to others.

• When a game is introduced that everyone can play, more children get physically active and move beyond the sidelines.

Play is a great reminder that our children want the same things that we want as grown-ups — they want a challenge, a chance to succeed, some measure of control over the world around them and a chance to know and be known by others. These are the very components of a game, the experiences that ultimately help a person develop the skills of empathy, teamwork and leadership.

This year’s annual report, celebrating our 15th anniversary, is a great reminder of the lessons that recess has to teach us. Many thanks to all of you for learning and playing alongside us. It is an honor and a pleasure to be on your team.

Jill Vialet
CEO and Founder
Playworks

“In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior. In play it is as though he were a head taller than himself.”

Lev Vygotsky
Russian psychologist
1896–1934
Perla Gallegos Leads the Way

For Perla Gallegos, a fifth grader at Denver’s Harrington Elementary, wearing the purple junior coach shirt is a responsibility that transcends the fun and games she leads. For her, and others like her, it’s an opportunity to make a difference and be a leader on the playground.

As a Playworks junior coach, Perla is tasked with helping to set up the playground, hand out equipment and most importantly, play with the younger kids.

“I like being a junior coach because when kids have problems I can be an example and show them what to do,” she says. “I also help keep them safe and get them interested in playing games so that they are excited to go to school.”

The benefits follow her from the recess yard and back into class. “It’s fun to be a junior coach because you are a leader for kids. You feel better in class during math and writing and learn more because you are active,” she explains.

“Before I was a junior coach I was exhausted in class and I didn’t get much work done. I didn’t feel happy about myself. Now as a junior coach I do my work better and I am happier and excited to be in school.”
For Bennett Elementary Principal Jossette Buendia, the key to student success is keeping them on point both academically and behaviorally. And Playworks is helping her do both. In a low-income, high-need Detroit community challenged by high unemployment and crime, creating a positive school culture is a priority.

Buendia believes that behavior in elementary school determines success in middle and high school, so it is important to her to create a positive school climate that allows kids to play and learn skills such as conflict resolution and teamwork.

“We need to get those behavior issues in check and their bad habits off to the side so that the day has the greatest portion spent on academics rather than refereeing,” says Buendia.

In an urban environment, where people are so accustomed to looking out for themselves, she explains, there’s more of an edge around disrespect. “When a child feels disrespected, out come the balled fists, thrown chests and ‘bring it on’ posture. In the past I’ve broken up fistfights between kids that have started as a simple accident that escalated. With Playworks we use positive words and it helps them. The kids use Rock-Paper-Scissors now and work it out.”

Staff surveys at Bennett last year support Buendia’s point. Staff who responded to the annual Playworks survey reported an increase in the level of cooperation and the use of conflict resolution strategies and a decrease in the incidents of bullying at recess. They also unanimously reported an increase in the level of participation in academic activities, an increase in cooperation with others during class and an increase in students’ abilities to focus on class activities.

“They’ve learned new skills. I’ve seen an improvement in procedures, in the manner students interact with each other. There’s more teamwork in the classroom, more conversations when there are conflicts and rock paper scissors instead of that menacing posture. It’s nice to see a little more return to innocence for these kids.”

“A school-based youth development program can be especially powerful by supporting students’ feelings of connectedness to school – a critical protective factor for reducing risk behaviors in youth.”

*Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Resnick, et al. 1997*

“Effective schools seek to develop and reinforce character traits, such as caring, citizenship, fairness, respect, responsibility, and trustworthiness, through a systematic approach that includes adult modeling, curriculum integration, a positive school climate, and access to comprehensive guidance and counseling services.”

*Elementary Makes the Grade! (California Department of Education, 1999)*
Playing it Forward with Playworks Training

As Playworks moves forward to realize our vision that every child will get to play every day, training is taking a front seat role. Last year, Playworks Training helped make playgrounds more fun and manageable by training adults to make them safer and more inclusive. Playworks Training conducted an average of two workshops a week (125 total), training more than 2,500 adults in 237 different schools and organizations that serve nearly 80,000 youth.

Playworks Training enjoys tremendous success with schools and districts. We also provide training and technical support around the country to reach youth beyond school hours. In Georgia, for instance, the Atlanta Falcons Youth Foundation contracted with Playworks to provide after-school providers and other youth workers with valuable tools, group management skills, and instructional resources to better serve youth during out-of-school time.

“Our grant partners describe Playworks’ training as the best professional training they have ever received,” notes John Baro, vice president of The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation and Atlanta Falcons Youth Foundation. “Through extraordinary expertise in game facilitation, conflict resolution, youth development principles and program modifications, Playworks trains teachers and after-school counselors to re-imagine recess and recreation time. The Playworks approach creates a fun, respectful and inclusive environment to engage youth in healthy, active lifestyles.”
Last year, teachers and principals surveyed at Playworks partner schools around the country reported reclaiming more than 24 hours of teaching time per classroom — time formerly lost to resolving issues brought in from the playground.

COMMUNICATION AND TEAMWORK REPLACE FIGHTING AND CHAOS

For Claire Stubbs, before Playworks, recess at Edward Gideon Elementary in Philadelphia was the toughest time of the day. The fourth grade teacher dreaded picking her students up after recess. “Once the soccer balls and kick balls went flying over the fence, that was the end of that. The kids were bored and had nothing to do. They were fighting at recess, not doing much of anything constructive and it continued into the classroom.”

As a result, she would spend 15 minutes after recess every day getting her students back on target. “I’d pick them up from the yard and someone would try to tell me about the fight. Or we’d have to go visit the school nurse,” she explains. “Then, once I got the kids to the classroom, I’d have to spend time trying to get them together enough to settle down.”

But when Playworks came to Gideon, she began to see a change. “Kids learned teamwork, sportsmanship and how to play together without fighting,” she explains. “You could see the difference. The problems were not brought back into the classroom. Students would come back from recess with all the energy out and they were ready to focus.”

The benefit extended beyond the weekly hour or more of reclaimed teaching time, says Stubbs. “One of the most positive things about Playworks was it helped the kids learn to communicate better with one another through play. And from there, students learned to talk to each other and solve problems without getting into fights.”

“Before Playworks, I spent so much time trying to resolve conflicts over nothing. When students learned to play games and cheer each other on and play as a team and be good sports, it translated into their every day communication with each other.”

Principals report that the majority of discipline-related problems occur outside of class time (87%) with the majority of those occurring during recess or lunch (89%). When asked what would improve recess at their schools, they prioritized an increase in the number of staff to monitor recess, better equipment, and playground management training, in that order.

“The biggest change is during recess. I see students learning to solve conflicts on their own, and in a positive way, which is very empowering, and allows their play time to be mostly about playing and having fun.”

Michelle Rodriguez, Teacher
Edison Charter Academy, San Francisco

“Before Playworks, our recess yard was a continual battle as we tried, short staffed, to get kids involved and keep them from having conflict. With our struggling kids who are constantly being pushed in academics, I worry about them losing the fun of school. Playworks helps put the fun back in.”

Lana Penley, Principal
Marysville K-8 School, Portland

“Playworks has allowed our children to share leadership in a positive way. Coach Antoine has offered training for students that is powerful and positive. This has been one of the best programs that has come to Garfield School in the past decade.”

Jan Nuno, Principal
Garfield Elementary School, Oakland

“With more than 800 students, it was very difficult to keep our students safe and orderly. Teachers reported that many of the problems that began on the playground spilled into the classroom, affecting academic time. With Playworks, the school transformed – almost completely eliminating bad playground behavior.”

Cesar Torrico, Principal
Shirakawa Elementary School, San Jose

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Shirakawa Elementary School, San Jose
“...Since the Playworks program, the instances of bullying have diminished to a remarkable degree. Children not only enjoy a well organized cooperative play experience, they are gaining life skills in problem solving, peer negotiation and leadership.”
Simon Ho, Principal, Josiah Quincy Elementary School, Boston

“Before Playworks, it was a nightmare to pick my kids up from recess and try to continue a day of teaching. There had always been intense fights or just random running around, and they were exhausted, angry, and stressed. Trying to calm them down and de-escalate them took forever.”
Teacher, Potter Thomas School, Philadelphia

“I have several students who were having problems communicating with others, which caused classroom disruptions. Since the Playworks program started, the numbers of classroom disruptions from these students has decreased significantly.”
Teacher, Harford Heights Elementary School, Baltimore

“Students have learned how to settle disputes and they come back to class ready to work rather than with conflicts for the teacher to solve.”
Teacher, Intercultural Charter School, New Orleans

“Playworks is helping our school become more cohesive as a community of parents, staff and students. Our Playworks coach has played an integral role in bringing parents and students together in the spirit of play and fitness. Our kids seem more active in general and happier.”
Teacher, Lincoln Elementary School, Newark

“...The students have grown as leaders as well as playmates. Fairness and problem solving in social situations has also improved. Students are more able to work through disagreements. They even say: ‘Remember how Coach Akita told us about this?”
Teacher, West Education Campus, Washington, D.C.

“...Since the Playworks program, the instances of bullying have diminished to a remarkable degree. Children not only enjoy a well organized cooperative play experience, they are gaining life skills in problem solving, peer negotiation and leadership.”
Simon Ho, Principal, Josiah Quincy Elementary School, Boston
“We’ve invested in Playworks since 2005 because it offers a practical but revolutionary solution to the challenge of recess. Before Playworks began to work with schools, we heard time and time again that recess had broken down into chaos. We’ve seen how the program transforms the school climate, improving outcomes in kids’ health, behavioral wellness and readiness to learn.”

Jane Lowe, Team Director, Vulnerable Populations Portfolio, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

2010-2011 PLAYWORKS FINANCIALS

Playworks relies on a diversified funding model for sustainability. Schools pay about 31 percent of the cost of the program, contributing to a sustainable funding base and growth. The remainder of funding comes from a combination of private foundation, government, corporate and individual supporters.

![Sources of Funds Pie Chart]

- 31% ($6.4M) Revenue from School Fees
- 9% ($2.0M) Government Grants
- 7% ($1.4M) Individual/Corporate Contributions
- 10% ($2.1M) Other Revenue
- 43% ($8.9M) Foundation Grants

![Uses of Funds Pie Chart]

- 83% ($17.6M) Programs
- 7% ($1.4M) Fundraising
- 10% ($2.2M) General and Administration

Playworks is especially grateful for the continued support of our national partners:
PLAYWORKS AROUND THE COUNTRY

Albuquerque, New Mexico 2011
Baltimore, Maryland 2005
Boston, Massachusetts 2006
Chicago, Illinois 2011
Denver, Colorado 2010
Detroit, Michigan 2010
Durham, North Carolina 2011
Houston, Texas 2010
Jackson, Mississippi 2011
Los Angeles, California 2009
Newark, New Jersey 2009
New Orleans, Louisiana 2008
New York, New York 2011
Oakland/East Bay, California 1996
Portland, Oregon 2009
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 2010
Phoenix, Arizona 2011
Salt Lake City, Utah 2011
San Francisco, California 2003
Silicon Valley, California 2006
Twin Cities, Minnesota 2010
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