

# An Evaluation of the Playworks Relay Program in Aurora Public Schools

## Executive Summary

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## Overview

Researchers have established evidence that recess provides cognitive and academic benefits, social and emotional benefits, and physical benefits to children during the school day. Over the past two decades, Playworks has been instrumental in working with schools to actualize these benefits, with study findings that show support for the effectiveness of Playworks, or indirectly maintaining Playworks mission by confirming the benefits of a high-quality recess. For example, previous research indicates that access to equipment (Erwin et al., 2012) and levels of cooperative play (Leff et al., 2004) at recess have a positive effect on children. Moreover, adult engagement can increase levels of play at recess (Massey et al., 2018a) and be an important moderator for physical activity of girls during recess (Massey et al., 2020). Recent data also showed that a high quality and organized recess can benefit children's executive function, emotional resilience, and classroom behavior (Massey et al., 2021). Evidence from research conducted directly with Playworks has shown that implementation of Playworks increases adult engagement and positive interactions on the playground, as well as decreases conflict (Massey et al., 2017); Playworks helps with conflict resolution skills (Forston et al., 2013; London et al., 2013); Playworks increases physical activity levels of both girls and minority groups (Bleeker et al., 2015; James-Burdumy et al., 2016); and Playworks can help improve school culture (London et al., 2015). Additional data from Playworks evaluations have also evidenced direct benefits for children enrolled in the Junior Coach Program (Massey et al., 2017; Massey et al., 2018b).

Previous evaluations of Playworks have focused on their "Coach" program, in which a full-time employee is assigned to one-school in which they: (a) work full-time at the school to lead and organize games and activities that empower students and school staff to take control of the recess environment in a positive way; (b) work directly with teachers and students during "Class Game Times" which promotes more physical activity and helps to establish rules, boundaries, and expectations that extend to recess; (c) provide student leadership opportunities through a Junior Coach program, in which students are recruited and trained to become leaders amongst their peers; and (d) provide after-school programming and physical activity opportunities through sport leagues.

In consideration of new service models there is a need to examine both the effectiveness of Playworks services that deviate from the original Coach program, and the nature of variations in service delivery effect outcomes amongst certain demographics. Given this, the purpose of this evaluation was to investigate/explore the impact of the Playworks Relay Program in Aurora

Public Schools (Colorado), as well as examine factors that can enhance the program's fidelity and favorable impact. The Playworks Relay model provides comprehensive support delivered by a trained Playworks Site Specialist on site up to 10 days per month who implements strategies, games, and systems to develop and sustain a positive recess culture.

To learn more about the study, please contact Playworks ([info@playworks.org](mailto:info@playworks.org)).