



JOHN W. GARDNER CENTER
for Youth and Their Communities

Early Playworks Implementation in Six Bay Area Elementary Schools

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Executive Summary

Playworks is a national nonprofit organization that aims to provide safe, healthy, and inclusive play and physical activity to elementary school students at recess and throughout the entire school day. Playworks' practices are also intended to bring about positive change for youth in developmental areas other than physical activity. These include connectedness to adults and peers at school, leadership skills, and an enhanced school climate, all of which are associated with improved academic success.

The report is the first from the study of Playworks implementation in the San Francisco Bay Area conducted by the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The study aims to understand the ways that Playworks affects students' recess and classroom experiences, school personnel, and school climate overall, as well as document and understand the implementation process with a focus on varying school experiences in the context of different school environments. It uses mixed methods – including interviews, focus groups, observations, student and teacher surveys, and teacher diaries – and includes six newly implementing schools as well as two mature schools located in the San Francisco Bay Area.

This report focuses on the early implementation experiences of the six newly implementing schools. Overall, we find that at all six schools, Playworks' core components were implemented by the time we first visited each school in the fall, with some variation in schools' implementation experiences.

Key Early Implementation Findings

- **Principals' reasons for partnering with Playworks and expectations for the program aligned with Playworks' mission and goals.** Principals described bringing Playworks to campus in order to: introduce students to structured sports and games; help reduce conflicts and improve recess safety; motivate students; and improve school climate. Their expectations for the program were aligned with these goals and all principals were extremely hopeful that their expectations would be met during the school year.
- **Underlying school context played a key role in schools' implementation experiences.** The attitudes and ingrained behaviors of students, teachers, and principals, as well as existing school policies and structures, all affected how Playworks was implemented. Coaches thought that existing school policies and structures – including bell schedules, policies that allow recess to be used as punishment or to make up homework or schoolwork, and playground rules – were the most difficult to change.
- **Staff training and orientation was well received and if timed appropriately, led to strong integration of Playworks and its coach into the school culture.** Teachers at two of the schools we studied received staff training during the first few weeks of the school year



whereas teachers at the remaining four schools received their training later in the fall or even in early winter. Although all staff reported that the training was high quality, schools with earlier training experienced a stronger early implementation in nearly all aspects of the program. Coaches in the two schools with the earliest training also built relationships with staff and students by visiting classrooms to provide further orientation and attending Back to School Night, where parents meet teachers and learn about the year's curriculum and goals.

- **Students were engaged in constructive play and physical activity during recess.** Playworks coaches taught new games to students and at all six schools, students were seen to be engaged in games and activities requiring physical activity during recess. Principals and teachers reported that engagement in recess activities was higher than in previous years. Even as early as the first few weeks of Playworks implementation, recess was structured with a variety of games being played in distinct areas on the play yard and junior coaches checking out equipment or leading games.
- **Conflict resolution tools were making inroads into the school culture.** Playworks coaches taught students to use ro-sham-bo (rock-paper-scissors) to resolve conflicts on the playground, and students regularly used this technique when prompted by the coach or another adult. However, our observations indicated that most conflicts between students were still resolved by other means, including asking an adult to intervene or with one student acquiescing to another without ro-sham-bo. A total of 34% of fifth grade students reported using ro-sham-bo to resolve conflicts at recess in the fall.
- **Playworks coaches and teachers agreed that being a junior coach is an important leadership opportunity for students.** Playworks coaches noted that junior coaches were especially helpful at younger students' recesses. However, in two of the six schools, junior coaches were not released for younger recesses because of concerns over missing academic instruction. Junior coaches themselves reported having grown from their experience, especially in terms of working with younger students and becoming more familiar with peers who were outside their friendship circles. They sometimes had difficulty handling students' negative responses or disrespect, and several teachers reported that missing class time posed an academic challenge for a few junior coaches.
- **Class game time was highly regarded and served as a critical foundation for creating playground change.** Class game time was considered by teachers, staff, and students to be one of the most important (and enjoyed) aspects of Playworks. It was a critical opportunity for the coach to build relationships with students, expose them to core Playworks values such as inclusion and positive conflict resolution, and teach students games to be used on the playground independently. Even in the fall, it was noted that these skills were starting to be transferred to recess.

Implications for Future Playworks Implementation

- 1. Early training is critical.** Certain activities in the early implementation period appeared to be critical for establishing relationships between Playworks and the school in order to gain teacher, principal, and student buy-in for the program. The most important of these was staff training. The schools with early training experienced the smoothest Playworks implementation, including introduction of the junior coach program and class game time, as well as support for the coach and teacher understanding of and buy-in for the program. We were not informed of any specific principal training, but principals' investment in the program also had important ramifications because principals had discretion over many of the structural impediments to early implementation success, including the bell schedule, playground rules, and the timely purchase of playground equipment.
- 2. Adapting to school context requires flexibility and in some cases alters program operation.** Coaches reported that they were trained by Playworks in how to implement the model, but were also encouraged to be flexible as needed depending on school context. This flexibility led to both positive and negative adaptations of the program model. At one school, the coach viewed a lack of equipment as an opportunity to teach students to play together in order to share resources. In another, the coach actively worked with staff to reinstate the game "tag," which had been previously banned. However, two of the six schools did not allow junior coaches to be released for younger students' recesses, which both diminished the role of junior coaches and had ramifications for the structure of younger students' recesses. In all schools, one or more teachers conflated class game time with physical education (PE); teachers whose students did not have PE with a credentialed teacher were more anxious to sign up, whereas teachers whose students had PE with a credentialed teacher were less interested.
- 3. Changing the school culture takes time.** Some aspects of Playworks' influences were immediately apparent at the schools we visited – organized and separate areas for each game, junior coaches in purple shirts monitoring recess, and Playworks coaches present and engaged during recess. Other aspects, particularly those relating to conflict resolution and positive language, took more time. Changing ingrained school and recess cultures takes time, but students, teachers, and principals in all schools reported being eager to do so for the benefit of students and the school as a whole.
- 4. Play is an important context for introducing youth development concepts to students, teachers, principals, and schools.** Playworks embeds the promotion of youth development in its core programming in a seamless and effective way. Program components serve multiple goals, including the explicit – improving the structure of recess and quality of play – and the more subtle – such as improving students' sense that their peers and teachers care about them and that they are meaningfully connected to the school as a whole. Although we observed that the more subtle aspects of Playworks' programming were not fully implemented in the fall and winter, our fall interviews with coaches indicated that they all possessed a strong understanding of how a fully implemented Playworks model could create this kind of positive environment.

I. Introduction

Playworks is a national nonprofit organization that aims to provide safe, healthy, and inclusive play and physical activity to elementary schools students at recess and throughout the entire school day. Its mission is to improve the health and well-being of children by increasing opportunities for physical activity and safe, meaningful play.¹ Playworks provides a full-time coach to low-income schools who supports organized play and physical activity through five components: (1) games and activities during recess; (2) individual class game times; (3) a junior coach leadership development program; (4) an after school program focused on tutoring and physical activity programs; and (5) after school developmental sports leagues.² The core of Playworks' programming is aimed at supporting a high-functioning recess, which is a key opportunity in the school day to not only get students active, but also to help them to learn about conflict resolution, self-regulation, inclusiveness, and good sportsmanship. All of these have the potential to improve students' own school experiences and the school climate as a whole.

Although Playworks is explicitly about increasing opportunities for play, its practices are also intended to bring about positive developmental change for youth in other areas. For instance, Playworks' focus on inclusiveness and positive language (e.g., "good job, nice try" instead of "you're out!") is intended to create a safe and caring recess environment so that students feel confident in learning and practicing new skills. Encouraging adults to play alongside students at recess, in class game time, and in the classroom is intended to create an environment where students feel that the adults know them and care about them. Both of these strategies are related to a sense of school connectedness, which generally refers to the belief by students that adults and peers in school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. Also key to Playworks is the junior coach program that focuses on developing early leadership skills among nine- and ten-year olds to support a structured recess. Research has shown that youth who demonstrate positive developmental assets such as these are more successful in other aspects of their lives, including in their physical and mental health³ as well as their academic work.⁴ Moreover, if the adults at a school support youth development in these ways, they create positive climate for learning that will reverberate into greater academic success.⁵

This report is the first report from the study of Playworks implementation in the San Francisco Bay Area, conducted by the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities. The study, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, aims to understand the ways that Playworks affects students, school personnel, and school climate as well as document and understand the implementation process, with a focus on varying school experiences in the context of different school environments.

¹ For more information, see the Playworks website at: www.playworks.org.

² This study focuses on the first three of these components.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009).

⁴ Eccles and Gootman (2002); Durlak and Weissberg (2007); Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, & Mielke (2005); Battistich, Solomon, Watson & Schaps (1997); Lee & Smith (1999).

⁵ Center for Social and Emotional Education (2010).



The project's four key questions are:

- In what ways does Playworks affect students' recess and classroom experiences?
- In what ways does Playworks affect school personnel?
- In what ways does Playworks affect the school climate overall?
- In what ways does Playworks implementation vary across the newly implementing schools and what factors contribute to this variation?

As is shown in Exhibit 1, the study uses mixed methods – interviews, observations focus groups, surveys, and diaries – and includes six newly implementing schools as well as a comparison to two mature Playworks schools (which have had Playworks for three or more years), all located in the San Francisco Bay Area. The JGC worked with Playworks to identify the eight schools. Data were collected during the fall, winter, and spring of the 2009-2010 school year. The present report relies only on data collected during the fall and winter, noted in the exhibit with shaded boxes. We do not use the mature schools' data in this report, but will include this information in future reports. Interview, focus group, and observation data were transcribed and analyzed using qualitative data analysis software. Survey and teacher diary data were imported into a quantitative data software package for analysis. For more information about data collection and analysis methods, see the Data and Methodology Appendix.

Exhibit 1. Data Collections in Newly Implementing and Mature Schools

	Fall		Winter		Spring	
<i>At each of six newly implementing and two mature schools:</i>	<i>New schools</i>	<i>Mature Schools</i>	<i>New schools</i>	<i>Mature Schools</i>	<i>New schools</i>	<i>Mature Schools</i>
Interview with principal	X			X	X	
Interviews with 3-4 teachers	X			X	X	
Interview with Playworks coach	X			X	X	
Observations of 3 or more recesses and lunch recesses	X		X	X	X	
Observations of 2 or more class game times	X		X	X	X	
Observations of 3-4 classrooms before and after recess or lunch	X		X		X	
Focus group with 3-10 jr coaches	X			X	X	
Fifth grade student survey	X				X	
Teacher survey (online)					X	
Teacher weeklong diaries	X				X	

Note: Shaded boxes indicate data used in this report.

The report begins with a discussion of the Playworks theory of change – the ways the program is intended to affect student, teacher, and school outcomes – developed by the John W. Gardner Center in collaboration with Playworks. It then describes the problems facing the newly implementing schools and principals' motivation for bringing Playworks to their campuses. We also describe the underlying school context and principals', teachers', and coaches' views of play at school. We next focus on early implementation experiences and findings. We conclude and provide a brief discussion of suggested topics to be included in the final study analyses, which will be reported in a series of issue briefs.

II. Playworks Theory of Change

The Playworks theory of change (Exhibit 2) describes the components required to bring about the program's long-term goal of healthy child development in several domains. It is not intended to show the actual impact of the program, but rather the building blocks that must connect in order for these impacts to be observed. The theory of change was developed mid-way through the study and incorporates themes discerned through research activities at the six newly implementing schools.

Pre-Conditions for Playworks to Launch at a School

Before being considered for the program, Playworks requires that schools meet several criteria, outlined in the brown box at the bottom left of the diagram. These include residing within an active Playworks region, serving a student body where half or more of students are eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch, providing funding for half the cost of a full-time Playworks coach and play equipment, and a willingness to commit to Playworks' emphasis on organized and meaningful play at recess and during other times, both during and after school.

Playworks Components and Inputs

The Playworks model includes the following components, represented in the far left column of the diagram: recess, class game time, junior coaches, after school program, sports leagues, and school staff training. Recess is at the heart of the model, with coaches fostering students' play by encouraging involvement in a variety of healthy and inclusive activities. Recess is enhanced by both class game time, during which students and teachers learn the rules to a variety of games, and the junior coach program, which trains older students in leadership and conflict resolution skills so they can act as role models and facilitators on the playground. Playworks also includes an after school program, a sports league, and school staff trainings. These activities are important to the model, but are represented by dotted lines because they are not a central part of the current study.

Playworks' success starts with a well-trained coach who believes strongly in the Playworks model and philosophy, works well with students and school staff, and implements the inputs (listed in the green column) in a structured and consistent way. The coach introduces a common set of rules to games as well as conflict resolution tools and positive reinforcements in order to reduce the number of conflicts that arise, enable youth to resolve their own conflicts, and create an environment of positive play. Additional inputs include fostering youth leadership, consistent messaging about the importance of play, and encouraging adults to play alongside youth.

Playworks Outcomes

The long-term outcomes, represented by the orange column, are possible if certain school conditions (shown in the brown box in the bottom right corner) are met: support for Playworks



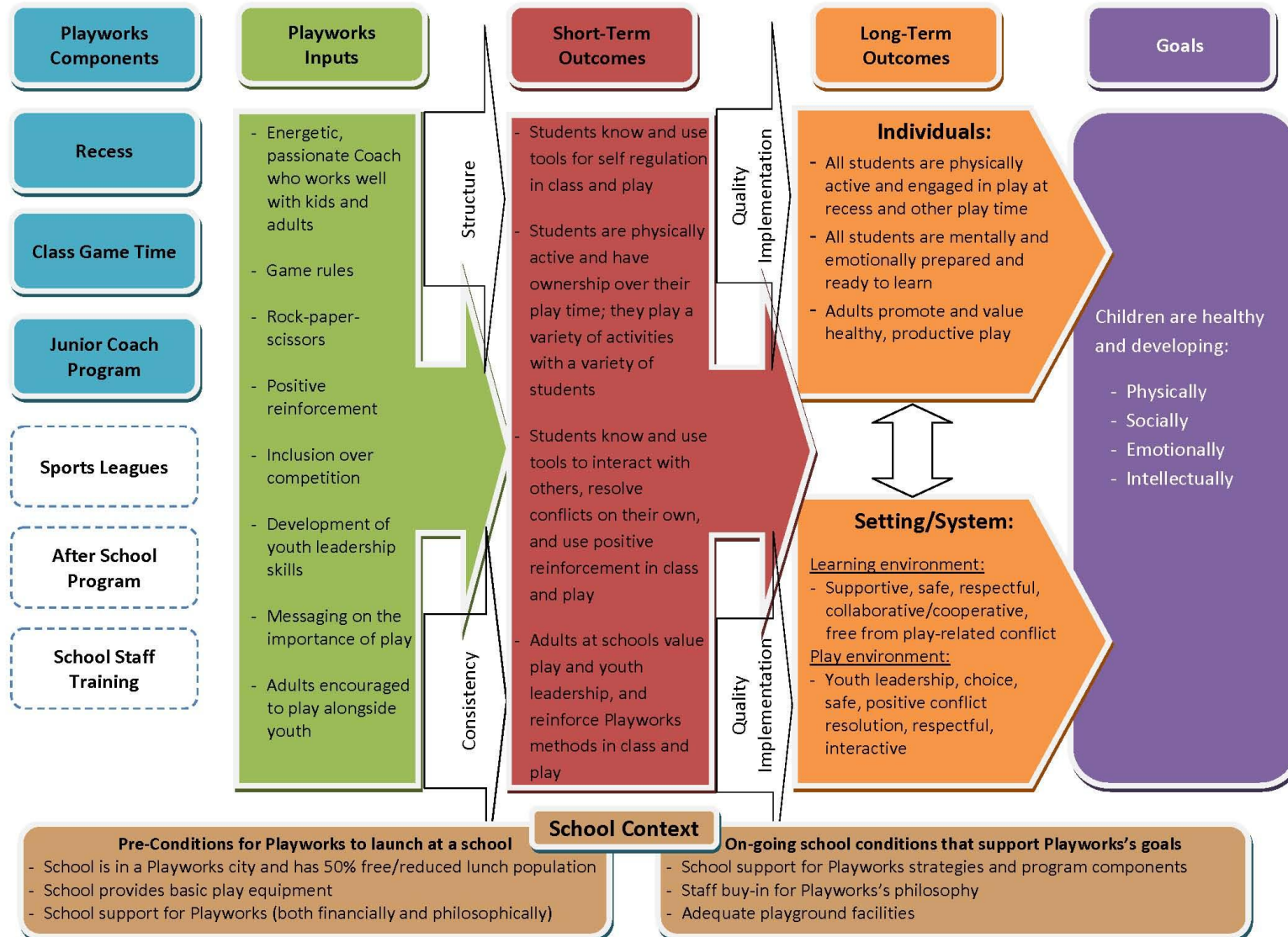
components, philosophy, and required facilities. This support includes full and faithful implementation of the Playworks program components; building time into the curriculum for class game time; teachers who are eager to participate; letting the Playworks coach organize the playground environment as he or she sees fit; and finally, coaches working with teachers, yard monitors, or other adults who supervise play time so that all adults are providing the same consistent structure and message to students about play and so that recess is run in a routine manner, even when the coach is absent or when turnover in coaches occurs. These conditions are critical if schools are to experience long-term school-wide changes, including more physically active students engaging in positive play during recess, and students who are mentally and emotionally prepared to learn upon returning to the classroom at the end of recess.

Ultimate Goals

Playworks expects that the long-term outcomes will lead to the goals (listed in the purple column on the right side) laid out by experts in child and youth development: that children are physically healthy and experiencing positive social, emotional, and intellectual development within their schools.



Exhibit 2. Playworks Theory of Change



III. The Problem: What Playworks Was Intended to Address

School and Student Characteristics

Playworks targets schools with a 50% or higher Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) participation rate in order to serve students and neighborhoods with fewer resources and more needs. As is demonstrated in Exhibit 3, the elementary schools examined for this study served precisely the students whom Playworks intends to target. In five of the six schools, more than 70% of students received FRPL, including one school where all the students received the program. In addition, more than half the students in each school were not yet proficient in English. Each school served a majority of non-white students, predominantly Latinos, but several schools also had large populations of Asian, Pacific Islander, or Filipino students.

Exhibit 3. Demographic Characteristics of Students at Six Newly Implementing Elementary Schools (2008-09)

	Clyde Arbuckle	Bishop	Horace Cureton	Ernesto Galarza	Monta Loma	San Miguel
Female	45%	49%	45%	47%	48%	46%
Ethnicity						
Latino	84%	70%	82%	81%	52%	66%
Asian/Pacific Is/Filipino	15%	14%	12%	5%	13%	26%
White	1%	12%	4%	4%	27%	5%
African American	1%	3%	2%	8%	4%	2%
Other/No Response	0%	1%	1%	3%	5%	1%
English Learner	64%	54%	62%	58%	55%	65%
Free/Reduced Lunch	100%	74%	78%	83%	61%	73%
Number of Students	478	625	567	503	498	458

Source: California Department of Education Dataquest, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/>.

These schools also faced academic challenges. As is shown in Exhibit 4, two schools were in program improvement (PI) status, indicating they had not met the requirements of No Child Left Behind in the year prior to Playworks implementation. Two schools had truancy rates of 25% and four schools had major disciplinary problems that escalated to the suspension of elementary students; although the percentage suspended was low, even a 4% suspension rate equates to 22 suspensions during the course of the year.⁶ These schools also faced substantial challenges in educating their students to be proficient in basic subjects. In the year prior to Playworks implementation, most of the schools had about half their second to fifth grade students reach grade level proficiency in math, but none of the six schools had even half its students reach proficiency in English language arts.

⁶ These could be 22 different students or one or more students suspended 22 times.

Exhibit 4. Academic Characteristics of Students at Six Newly Implementing Elementary Schools (2008-09)

	Clyde Arbuckle	Bishop	Horace Cureton	Ernesto Galarza	Monta Loma	San Miguel
In Program Improvement	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Truant	7%	2%	25%	24%	12%	2%
Suspended	1%	0%	4%	9%	0%	3%
Proficient Math	44%	50%	50%	50%	59%	54%
Proficient ELA	35%	42%	42%	38%	48%	47%
Number of Students	478	625	567	503	498	458

Source: California Department of Education Dataquest, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/>.

Notes: (1) Truancies include unexcused absences or tardies on three or more days. (2) Proficiency in Math and ELA (English Language Arts) as determined by the California Standards Test (CST) for second to fifth graders.

Why Playworks Came to School

“I’m really hoping that I’ll be able to walk out on that playground and see every child fully engaged in play and having fun. That’s my overall goal.”

Principal, fall 2009

Given the student populations served at the six schools, principals described a variety of reasons for bringing Playworks to campus, specifically:

- To introduce students to structured sports and games,
- To help reduce conflicts and improve recess safety for students, and
- To motivate students and improve school climate.

Most important among these is the first as all six principals cited a lack of structure at recess time as a key problem, but beyond this, principals were concerned that students were simply not learning the rules to common games. Lack of family and community resources to support sports programs was a key reported challenge as families did not have the resources to enroll students in sports programs outside of school, schools did not offer physical education programs to younger students, and school districts did not offer extramural sports for elementary students. Beyond this, existing facilities and supports at the elementary schools were not sufficient for students to learn sports or games during recess, in part because principals felt that recess monitors could not both supervise and play with students and because teachers did not have time to teach games to students in class.

This lack of structure at recess was especially problematic, explained one principal, because students also lacked structure in their home lives, “I believe that if we could give them structure in the sports arena, it’s really going to transfer to the classroom and to their lives.” This was also a factor for principals who wanted their students to make more use of existing resources. In one school, there was an important play yard facility at the school (a basketball court) that was going unused because there was no recess support to engage students in playing.

Reducing conflicts and improving recess safety for students was also a key reason for bringing Playworks to the schools. One principal noted that it was important for students to have an agreed upon set of rules because, “It was always the student who had the loudest voice or who could really be a leader kind of dominating the play...unless [other students] really wanted to challenge them, [they] went with that, even though it wasn’t fair.” Others also expected that with a common set of agreed upon rules, student conflicts would be reduced.

Principals also reported bringing Playworks to their schools in hopes of better connecting students to their schools and improving school climate. For instance, one principal reported wanting a program that would motivate students to come to school in order to improve attendance. This same principal felt that the junior coach program might encourage students to do well in their classes so that they would be chosen as coaches. Another principal reported that Playworks aligned with the school’s already existing goals of improving school climate, particularly in terms of character development and creating a safe recess space.

Four of the six principals embarked upon Playworks implementation based on a colleague’s recommendation. These principals had heard about the program from other schools, and in one case even seen a demonstration in a former position; they were compelled by the way others talked about the changes they had seen in their own school environments. This word of mouth is a potentially important way to recruit other schools into the program.

Each of the issues that principals identified as reasons for bringing Playworks to their schools aligns well with Playworks’ own mission and goals: to provide structure at recess in order to get more students playing, to reduce conflicts, and to improve school climate overall.

Expectations for Playworks During the 2009-10 School Year

Not surprisingly, principals’ expectations for the program aligned with the reasons they brought Playworks to their campuses. Foremost among their expectations was that Playworks would bring structure to recess, resulting in:

- Students learning the rules to and proper way to play games and sports, and
- Improved conflict resolution skills so that students can take responsibility for resolving the smaller problems that get in the way of their recess enjoyment.

Two of the principals reported they believed this would benefit children both in and out of school, and even throughout their lifetimes. Another two principals specifically mentioned the importance of these two results for both recess and classroom engagement, including improvements in children’s overall health and happiness. One principal even mentioned an expectation of improved teacher stress levels as a result of the program.

In short, at the beginning of the school year, principals were hopeful that Playworks would fulfill the program’s own goals of improving recess structure, students’ conflict resolution skills, and students’ classroom experiences and that this would be beneficial to their students and schools.



IV. School Context

"We go through this training from Playworks and they tell us exactly how to roll out the program. And then when I got here, the principal had a different idea for how we were going to do it. And I think [the principal] eventually realized, too, it just really complicated everything."

Playworks coach, fall 2009

Playworks was designed to be implemented with consistency across schools in the core components of recess, class game time, and the junior coach program. Fidelity to the model, both within and across schools, is an essential assumption of the Playworks theory of change. This section describes how school context, including attitudes and beliefs of adults and students, and policies relating to play and recess, affected the implementation of Playworks at the six study schools. For the purposes of this discussion, school context includes the attitudes and beliefs of the school community in existence prior to the introduction of Playworks, including feelings about play, and the policies and structures already set up at the school, for example the playground layout and bell schedule.

Students' Attitudes and Behaviors

Even as early as fall 2009, students at the six schools had embraced Playworks, were eager to learn new games and be more active, and had responded to the additional structure and opportunities that Playworks provided. This eagerness aided the coaches as they introduced program components. Despite this enthusiasm, we found some students' attitudes and behaviors frustrated implementation, requiring the coach to re-think his or her implementation strategies.

In the fall, fifth graders took a survey asking them to rate their agreement with statements on their feelings about school, including their relationships with adults and students and their feelings about play. As is shown in Exhibit 5, students overwhelmingly reported that they felt there was an adult who cared about them at their school, that they were happy, and they felt safe at school. The average for each of these measures was 4.7 or 4.8 on a five-point scale. Students were less likely to report that they felt other children cared about them at their school; their responses were more than a point lower, on average, for this measure than the others. We found no significant differences in these responses across schools, or between boys and girls.

These findings highlight a key area for growth through Playworks implementation. Playworks focuses a great deal on the interactions between children – through inclusion, positive language, and teamwork – in an effort to improve individual and school climate outcomes. In future reports, we will re-assess student care using the spring survey to examine whether any changes occurred during the year.

Although boys and girls had similar feelings about school climate, we observed that differences in their attitudes toward play greatly affected students' engagement in recess games. We found that many games, including tetherball, wall ball, and four-square, were popular with both boys and girls. Some games, particularly soccer, appeared to be popular among boys almost exclusively, and some activities, including playing on the play structure or walking around with a group of friends, were much more popular among girls. Though most Playworks coaches talked

about gender differences and promoted equity in play and among junior coaches, differences in what and how boys and girls played persisted and may have acted as hurdles to the equity and inclusion Playworks promotes. One coach noted that it was hard to get girls more involved, saying students thought, “We’re girls, we’re not supposed to be playing; we’re not supposed to sweat.” One female coach speculated that she might have been more successful with students if she had been male.

Exhibit 5. Students’ Perceptions of School Connectedness and Safety

	All Students	Boys	Girls
<i>How much do you agree with the following statements?</i>	<i>Level of Agreement on a 1-5 Scale 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree</i>		
Adults at school care about me (scale)	4.7	4.7	4.8
Students at school care about me (scale)	3.4	3.4	3.5
I am happy at school	4.8	4.7	4.8
I feel safe at school	4.7	4.7	4.7
<i>Number of fifth grade students</i>	<i>448</i>	<i>204</i>	<i>195</i>

Source: JGC tabulations from the fall fifth grade survey.

Notes: (1) Adult care question scale is comprised of the following statements. There is an adult who: cares about me; tells me when I do a good job; wants me to do my best; listens to me. (2) Student care question scale is comprised of the following statements: Students care about each other; Students don’t seem to like each other very well; Students are willing to go out of their way to help someone; Students are mean to each other; When I’m having a problem, another student will try to help. (3) Averages on these scales are created by summing the responses to the questions and averaging for each student.

Some teachers reported that another impediment to productive play during recess was simply the development and age of the students. Two first grade teachers at different schools reported that students were still learning to play together and share, which could make organized play difficult. Older students, fifth graders in particular, reportedly thought they were too old to play and preferred less active and more social activities during recess. We observed this to be especially true for girls.

Finally, we saw that although most students had no problem remaining active for the full period of recess or lunch, some students may not have been able to sustain activity due to their low fitness levels. Indeed, one teacher described that few of her students were able to complete the mile run due to their lack of fitness. Students’ abilities and desires to sustain physical activity and active play are key areas where Playworks intends to make a change.

Attitudes of Teachers, Principals, and Coaches

Although students generally made their own decisions about play during recess, teachers and other adults had a great deal of influence over the types of interactions students had with the coach and Playworks components. In particular, teachers decided how often to sign up for class game time, a Playworks component designed to give coaches more intimate interactions with students and teachers and to reinforce the rules and expectations he or she set for recess, as well as to promote tools for conflict resolution (ro-sham-bo) and positive reinforcement (high fives or “good job, nice try”). The extent to which teachers participated in class game time or otherwise promoted play for their students had to do with the degree to which teachers themselves valued



play in the school setting and the extent to which they felt it was not detracting from instructional time. We found this commitment to be more individualized to each teacher than school wide.

When asked what they saw as the importance of play for their students, adults reported a variety of values including health and exercise, socialization and socializing, taking a break from academics and burning off energy. Some saw a direct correlation between play and academics or development, but many did not mention this connection. Every teacher, principal, and coach reported seeing at least some important value in play.

School Policies and Structures

Existing school policies and structures in place prior to Playworks implementation also influenced program implementation. In most cases, these structures and policies had unintended consequences (both good and bad) for the Playworks program, and were not expressly designed to impact the program's implementation.

For instance, coaches reported being limited by recess policies, such as restrictions on where and what students could play, and they sought to amend these limitations over the course of the year. One such limitation that several coaches discussed was the lack of play equipment. Two coaches reported that they had already discussed the issue with their principal and had solved the problem. A third coach thought the limited equipment forced students to play more cooperatively, and in the end promoted group play over isolated play. Coaches also discussed other limitations. One coach mentioned working with yard monitors to promote the Playworks model during recess and another planned to work with principals and teachers to reinstate the game "tag," which had previously been banned for being too rough. A third coach was trying to expand student access to previously restricted areas of the play yard.

Other school policies and structures were not as likely to be changed by the coach, including discipline policies that revoked recess time as a punishment, policies that required students to complete unfinished work during recess, and bell schedules that produced crowded recesses or made it difficult to implement the junior coach program as intended. These types of policies interfered with Playworks' implementation strategies and core goals. For instance, one school, in an attempt to maximize each class's time with the available reading coaches and volunteers, staggered their recesses so classrooms and resources were never going unused. This had the unintended consequence of creating a recess schedule that was not conducive for junior coaches to help during any recess but their own. At another school where the schedule was such that most students were at recess at the same time, the playground was crowded and it was difficult to find enough space to start games or to keep students engaged in play. One coach also reported that the school's block scheduling made it difficult to schedule class game times.

Overall, we found that most coaches had to adapt to the context of their school and make adjustments both to how they rolled out the program and how the core elements were structured. These contextual issues ranged from minor issues that the coach could easily overcome to major issues that the coach did not foresee being able to change. Coaches thought that structural and policy issues were the largest obstacles to implementing the program faithfully.

V. Coach and School Staff Playworks Training and Orientation

Training is an important component of the Playworks model. It is intended to provide both coaches and school staff with a solid understanding of the Playworks philosophy, an overview of program components, and exposure to key strategies and techniques through both didactic and experiential learning.

Coach Training and Support

“The training was really, really good. It was a full week of just hearing constantly how they talk. And they actually did a full “fake” day of after school program and everything, made us be the kids....I was really impressed with the training I was getting.”

Playworks coach, fall 2009

All six coaches reported that they received strong training and supervisory support from Playworks this fall. The coaches appreciated, were impressed by, and enjoyed the intensive week-long training they received in August before school started. They thought it was well organized and believed it gave them a good opportunity to meet other coaches from across the Bay Area. They particularly enjoyed the experiential aspects of the training – learning new games and techniques by playing them instead of simply learning about them in a classroom setting. Coaches also reported that the training exposed them to specific strategies to engage students in games, check for listening and understanding, and help students develop skills to resolve conflicts. One coach commented that it was useful to learn more about the student populations with whom they would be working and the challenges these students face.

All of the coaches agreed that the week-long training gave them a good overview of Playworks’ philosophy and components, including how these components should be implemented at schools. Although the training introduced a framework for implementing the program, the coaches unanimously reported that they were encouraged to be flexible and adapt the model to meet the needs of their particular school. In some schools, an ability to be flexible became essential as program implementation did not go as planned.

In these cases, as well as when things went more smoothly, coaches consistently reported that their Playworks supervisors were available and responsive to requests for help and advice. Phone calls and emails were almost always returned promptly, with useful support provided. Coaches also said that supervisors made regular visits to their sites, offering technical support and feedback, participating in games with students, and modeling techniques for the coaches. Two coaches also said that their supervisors quickly delivered needed equipment at the beginning of the school year, before their schools had submitted equipment orders.

Coaches also reported that they attended the Playworks all-staff trainings every other Friday and found them useful. In fact, one coach said, “The trainings are very important. I think that’s their biggest asset...the trainings they do with us.” However, some first year coaches did not find the additional AmeriCorps trainings to be a good use of their time and were anxious for that obligation to be completed.



Teacher and School Staff Training and Orientation

“When we had the training, they made us play all the games, and that was really powerful because we saw how much fun we had as adults. And I think...when you do the games, then you feel more comfortable about leading them.”

Teacher, fall 2009

The timing of teacher and staff orientations to Playworks, provided by Playworks supervisors, varied significantly and this may have had broad implications for how successfully the program was implemented in the fall. The six schools received training at three different points in time:

- Two schools were trained early, during the first two weeks of the school year;
- Two schools were trained in mid-fall, during October;
- Two schools were trained late, one in late-fall and one in the winter.

Staff at the two schools that were trained early reported that this training was a good introduction to Playworks and an opportunity to learn new games by playing them. All feedback about the training from these schools’ teachers and principals was positive and reportedly led to strong teacher buy-in and quick integration of the coach into the school community.

Although staff at the schools receiving training in mid-fall also reported that the training was high quality and informative, both they and the coaches reported that it would have been more useful if it had taken place earlier in the school year. There was a general feeling that an earlier orientation to Playworks may have facilitated teacher and principal support for both class game time and the junior coach program and facilitated the coach’s integration into the school.

It is unclear why the last two schools were trained much later, especially given the importance of the training to the Playworks model. This scheduling had a significant effect on teacher buy-in and support for the program. One teacher reported that, “With training we would have understood the program better.” It seems clear that earlier training, especially in the first few weeks of school when components like class game time and the junior coach program are introduced, is important for teacher buy-in, coach integration, and Playworks acceptance overall.

Staff at two of the six schools – those who were trained first – also reported another introduction to Playworks that went beyond the initial staff training. Both of these schools had experienced coaches who visited every classroom during the first few weeks of school, introducing themselves and the program to both teachers and students. According to school staff, this strategy generated interest and support for Playworks and was an important step toward integrating the coach and Playworks into the school culture. These two schools also showcased Playworks at their Back to School nights; at one school the coach volunteered to play games on the playground with all of the students while the parents visited classrooms and met teachers. These were important ways to gain early teacher and parent support for the program.

VI. Coaches: The Heart of Playworks

“He’s a big presence; he’s like a rock star.”

Teacher, fall 2009

“The kids love coach; he’s really connected with the kids.”

Principal, fall 2009

Coaches are the key ingredient to successful Playworks implementation. Interviews with teachers and principals indicated that the most important qualities of a successful coach were: energy and enthusiasm, charisma, empathy, good listening skills, and a positive and encouraging attitude. Great coaches were described as having a genuine respect for children and, in return, garnering student respect. They acted as mentors and role models and often came from similar backgrounds as the students. They were patient, flexible, and seen by students as safe. In a nutshell, the most revered coaches were socially and emotionally intelligent and genuinely enjoyed working with children.

While teachers and principals generally had positive regard and appreciation for their coaches, staff at three of the six schools described their own coach as especially high quality and possessing many of the above characteristics. Two of these three coaches were also regarded as well integrated into their schools in even the earliest stages of implementation. Interestingly, both of these coaches were experienced Playworks coaches and their comfort engaging with their schools may have been an additional factor contributing to their quick integration and strong initial program implementation. A principal from one of these two schools said, “The kids view the coach as...one of the teachers. Everyone knows the coach as an adult that should be here.”

In contrast, two of the six schools’ coaches were initially seen as weaker by teachers and principals. Although they were reportedly liked and a welcome presence on the playground, staff at these schools were less familiar with their coaches, and cited fewer examples of student enthusiasm for the program and toward the coach.

Good communication between the coach and principal was reported by both parties as critical to strong implementation of Playworks. Where principals worked collaboratively and had trusting relationships with their coaches, the program components were introduced quickly and effectively. There were reports, however, that principals at three schools were not fully supportive of the program. For example, one principal refused to allow the coach to present at a staff meeting, preventing an early introduction to the program and diminishing the coach’s ability to build relationships with the teachers. This made it difficult for the coach to become integrated into the school and foster teacher buy-in.

Across the board, junior coaches (the only students with whom we spoke) from every school said that the coaches could be counted on to help students at recess with both games and conflicts. Teachers also almost unanimously reported that their students had positive relationships with their school’s coach. They believed that their students felt connected to the coach and described the students as very enthusiastic about class game time.

VII. Playworks at Recess

“My first day here, it was amazing. I saw kids who were grazing the field like cattle...You’d just see them walking around. And then, slowly, I would start gathering them and we’d play a game. Once I get a game going and then people see it happening, then they want to come join [in].”

Playworks coach, fall 2009

Student Enjoyment of Recess

Fifth grade students overwhelmingly reported enjoying recess (92.9%), with nearly the same number (92.3%) stating that they liked to play games and sports. In both cases, boys enjoyed these activities slightly more than girls. There are many reasons students might report enjoying recess – for instance because they like the break from school work – and we are not able to link this recess enjoyment specifically to Playworks implementation. Although most students reported enjoying recess, fewer reported they could join in a game on the playground (72.5%), with girls less likely to feel they could join in than boys. Playworks aims to promote inclusion and increase students’ comfort trying new games; we will continue to examine this issue with the spring student survey.

Exhibit 6. Fifth Grade Students’ Recess Enjoyment

	All Students	Boys	Girls
<i>How much do you agree with the following statements?</i>	<i>% Responding “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” on a Five-Point Scale</i>		
I enjoy recess	92.9	95.6	90.8
I like to play games and sports	92.3	96.5	88.7
I can join in a game on playground	72.5	77.6	68.6
<i>Number of Fifth Grade Students</i>	448	204	195

Source: JGC tabulations from the fall fifth grade student survey.

Providing Structure on the Playground

As noted previously, principals brought Playworks to their schools at least in part to provide students with opportunities to engage in constructive play during recess. As such, one of the first tasks confronting the Playworks coaches at the start of the school year was to implement the recess component of the program. Coaches reported taking it slow at first, spending their initial days at the schools monitoring the play yard to understand the culture and the games students typically played. According to one coach, “The first week I was here, I looked at where they play games, where they don’t play games, and how they play games...I [asked] myself, okay, where should I organize things?”

A key focus for coaches during the initial weeks was on creating structure on the playground so that there would be a designated area for students to play each game. Some coaches created maps for students to refer to so that they would know where each game was to be played. One coach

reported handling the check out of equipment so that as students selected a piece of play equipment, she could ensure that they knew where they were supposed to go to play with it.

Within the first two months of the fall, at four of the six schools, there was a clear structure to the playground area, with each game taking place in a separate and distinct part of the play yard. One student commented that the junior coaches had worked with the Playworks coach to structure the playground, such as by moving the jump rope area away from the basketball court so as not to interfere with basketball games. Teachers had also already noticed a difference, with one stating, “It’s more of a structured, fun environment out there, I think. And you know what’s going on everywhere on the school yard. You can see whether they’re playing soccer, whereas, before, you weren’t sure what they were playing.”

The remaining two schools did not achieve a high degree of structure and order on the play yard early on. At one of these schools, the coach reported intentionally having a slow roll out. Consequently, during our fall observations, we noted that this play yard did not seem as well organized. At another school, the circumstances of the school’s bell schedule made bringing order to the play area difficult; rather than having separate recesses for older and younger grades, recesses were overlapping and students sometimes expressed confusion about whether the bell they were hearing was the signal for their grade to go back to class or was meant to signal another grade to go back to class. In the fall, this play yard was more chaotic than at other schools. At both schools, boundaries between game areas seemed unclear, and indeed games were noted to overlap with each other (e.g., tag players ran through the area where students were playing soccer).

Setting Rules

Another early task for the coaches was to lay down a common set of rules for all the games played at recess. This was especially challenging because previously students set the rules to the games, and these were noted to be inconsistent and changed depending on who was playing. For coaches, getting involved in the games students were already playing provided an easy way to begin the process of setting rules. One coach described how she approached students after getting involved in their games in order to change the rules, “I slowly started making suggestions, like, ‘Oh, what do you think about that? Do you think that’s fair?’ ‘Oh, I’ve noticed that no one has been getting out for the last five minutes; do you think we should maybe change the rules so more people get to play?’” Not all coaches reported such a warm reception from students when they tried to change the rules, however. In some schools students were resistant to having an outsider change the rules on them. One coach explained, “Going in and trying to organize the games was also tough. They don’t want anyone changing their rules, changing how they’ve been organizing it.”

Teaching New Games

Along with setting the rules, coaches began to teach new games to students early on. This occurred in two ways. One was through class game time (which will be discussed in more detail

later), in which coaches spent about half an hour with each class and taught them several games. A second way was by approaching a group of students that was not engaged in a game during recess to ask if they wanted to play. It was clear from interviews with a variety of stakeholders that student engagement in games during recess had increased dramatically at all of the schools. “I can see the difference, that more children are involved in playing. They’re not sitting around. They’re not chasing. They’re just really involved in some constructive play,” explained one teacher. Across the six schools, there were several games that students were repeatedly observed to be engaged in, including soccer, tetherball, four-square, wall ball, basketball, dodge ball, and jump rope. These core games were generally available for students at any time, but coaches would also feature a game of the day or game of the week.

Results from the student survey reported in Exhibit 7 suggest that there was still room to increase student engagement in games during recess. Although three-quarters (78.1%) of fifth grade students reported frequently playing games or sports with other students during recess, more than half (52.9%) also indicated that they often stood or sat someplace during recess as well. Gender differences were apparent here, as girls were less likely than boys to report playing games or sports (72.1% vs. 83.4%) and were more likely to report standing or sitting (58.0% vs. 47.0%).

Exhibit 7. Fifth Grade Students’ Recess Activities

	All Students	Boys	Girls
<i>At school, how often do you...</i>	<i>% Responding “A Lot” or “Sometimes” on a Five-Point Scale</i>		
Stand or sit someplace during recess	52.9	47.0	58.0
Read during recess	27.9	21.6	35.2
Play a game or sport with other students during recess	78.1	83.4	72.1
Stay involved in games during recess	72.6	80.9	64.3
Feel confident trying a new game during recess	68.9	69.0	68.1
Invite another student to play a game during recess	77.1	76.5	77.5
<i>Number of Fifth Grade Students</i>	<i>448</i>	<i>204</i>	<i>195</i>

Source: JGC tabulations from the fall fifth grade student survey.

Several teachers were particularly impressed with the way that Playworks managed to draw in some of their socially-isolated and overweight students. In the past, teachers explained, these students had rarely gotten involved with games at recess. But by providing an organized structure with facilitated games that everyone was invited to play, many of the outlier students had become more involved.

Encouraging Physical Activity

Because the games that Playworks teaches mostly involve physical activity, students, teachers, principals, and coaches all reported that students were physically active during recess. Our observations also bore this out, as the majority of students at all six schools were observed engaged in some kind of physical activity during recess. Teachers especially noted that students were more physically active than they had been in the past. And, although students exerted more

physical effort than before, they did not seem to experience it as dreary exercise, but rather as just a part of enjoying themselves. One junior coach summed up this position, stating “Kids at [our school] do get exercise because [the coach] will have a game and they can play games. They’re...all sweating because they have fun, and they’re just exercising.” At one school, we observed significant differences in activity level among students engaged in the Playworks games versus students who were at the play structure. Students seemed to use the play structure as more of a place to hang out or sit around rather than as a way to engage in physical activity. The Playworks games, on the other hand, encouraged movement.

Importance of Play Equipment

As part of schools’ contracts with Playworks, they committed to providing equipment for students to use on the playground. At two schools, coaches reported struggling at the beginning of the year because they did not have enough or the necessary equipment, including cones to mark off fields and different kinds of balls. In one case, the coach managed to find various pieces of equipment around the school to use. In the other case, the school administration ordered equipment, but it did not arrive until about a month after school started. This situation was challenging because, according to the coach, if the right supplies had been available earlier, implementation would have been faster and easier. Even several months into the school year, there were still some minor complaints about not having sufficient equipment.

Regardless, teachers in three schools expressed satisfaction with changes in the amount of equipment at their schools and in how equipment was handled. Where Playworks was in charge of checking equipment out to students, the equipment was reportedly more likely to come back at the end of recess. Three teachers told us that equipment had constantly disappeared in previous years, but having Playworks in charge of the equipment seemed to have mitigated these issues.

Conflicts at Recess

A key reason why principals reported bringing Playworks to their schools was to help reduce conflicts during recess time. Both interviews and our observations suggested several consistent issues that caused conflict on the playground, including who got to be on which team, which team got to go first, whether or not someone was out, not sharing equipment, and not following the rules. Several teachers also reported more serious social conflicts like bullying and cliques that led to severely hurt feelings in past years. Only a small number of teachers in older grades reported that their students got into physical fights.

Exhibit 8 shows that many fifth grade students reported experiencing some types of conflict at recess. Nearly half (48.5%) of fifth graders at the six schools said they often felt bothered or annoyed by other students at recess. Fewer fifth graders reported that they were often teased by other students for not being good at games or sports (37.2%), although this occurred somewhat more frequently among boys (40.2%) than among girls (34.4%). About one in five (21.5%) fifth graders reported frequently getting into arguments or fights during recess, with boys having more arguments and fights than girls (26.5% vs. 16.2%).

Exhibit 8. Fifth Grade Students' Conflicts and Conflict Resolution at Recess

	All Students	Boys	Girls
<i>At school, how often do you...</i>	<i>% Responding "A Lot" or "Sometimes" on a Five-Point Scale</i>		
Get teased by other kids about not being good at games or sports	37.2	40.2	34.4
Feel bothered or annoyed by another student during recess	48.5	48.5	49.0
Get into an argument or fight with other students	21.5	26.5	16.2
Can work out problems with other students w/o arguing or fighting	67.4	66.2	67.9
Ask the Playworks coach or adult to resolve argument or fight	58.1	52.3	63.0
<i>Number of Fifth Grade Students</i>	<i>448</i>	<i>204</i>	<i>195</i>

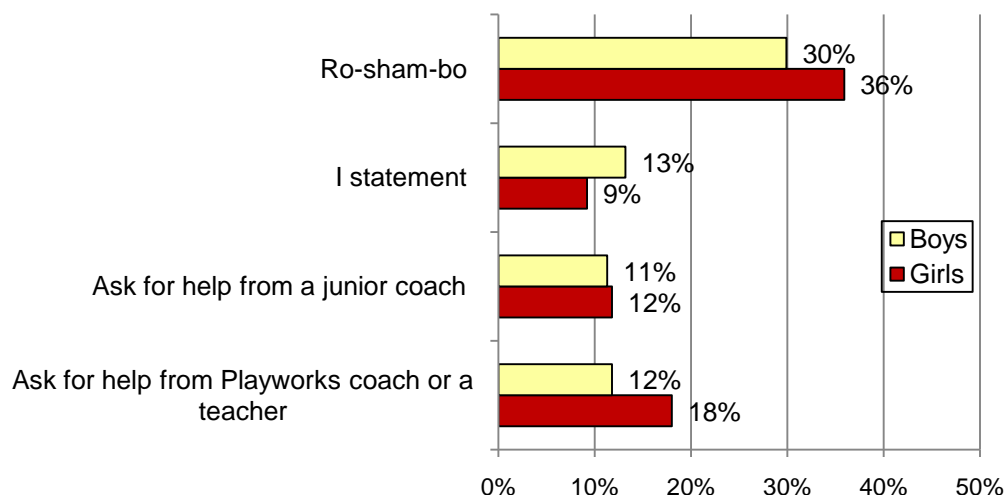
Source: JGC tabulations from the fall fifth grade student survey.

Although conflict was evident at all schools, school staff members commented that playground conflicts had decreased since Playworks had come to their schools. Playworks' main conflict resolution strategy is the use of ro-sham-bo, or rock-paper-scissors. As several coaches explained, the idea behind ro-sham-bo is that conflicts on the playground waste valuable time that students could be investing in playing games.

According to one coach, students knew how to play ro-sham-bo but had never been taught to use it to resolve conflicts. That coach first introduced it as a tool for determining which team would go first during a game, and then began to use it to resolve other conflicts, stressing that it was a way to quickly move on from disagreements so that they could spend more of their energy playing rather than arguing.

Just a few months into the school year, it was clear that the use of ro-sham-bo had made inroads into all schools. Coaches reported resolving disputes between students with ro-sham-bo, and indeed our observations confirmed this. Junior coaches had also been trained in the use of ro-sham-bo for resolving conflicts and were seen on several occasions to use it to mediate between students. However, students did not always spontaneously use ro-sham-bo to resolve their own conflicts. At four of the five schools where conflicts were observed, students either used ro-sham-bo on their own to resolve their disagreements or brought their disagreement to a coach or yard monitor first, and then used ro-sham-bo at their behest. Exhibit 8, above, indicates that the majority (67.4%) of fifth grade students reported generally being able to resolve conflicts on their own without having to resort to arguing or fighting. On the other hand, more than half (58.1%) of fifth grade students also frequently sought help from the Playworks coach or another adult in order to resolve their conflicts. Exhibit 9 shows that about one-third of fifth grade students reported using ro-sham-bo to resolve conflicts in the fall. Use of ro-sham-bo was a more popular conflict resolution strategy than "I statements," asking a junior coach for help, or asking the Playworks coach or a teacher for help.

Exhibit 9. Fifth Grade Students' Use of Playworks' Conflict Resolution Strategies at Recess



Source: JGC tabulations from the fall fifth grade survey.

Note: (1) Responses indicate percent of students who reported having used the strategy this year.

(2) A total of 448 students responded to the survey.

Not all conflicts can be resolved using ro-sham-bo; that strategy was ineffective when students simply did not want to play by the rules or were acting out. A junior coach noted that occasionally students would refuse to adhere to the results of ro-sham-bo and would continue fighting over who was in and who was out. During observations, students were seen in some cases to simply move on from their disagreements, and in at least three schools, we saw conflicts that were settled by students acquiescing to the demands of the most dominant child.

Use of Positive Language

Playworks also sought to prevent conflicts in the first place by changing the competitive nature of the playground to be more inclusive. As one coach explained, “We’re not going to yell, ‘You’re out,’ or, ‘He’s cheating,’ we’re going to say... ‘good job, nice try,’ and things like that.” The key tools for changing the atmosphere on the playground seemed to be the use of statements such as “good job, nice try” as well as giving high fives. We observed coaches on several occasions giving high fives to students who had gotten out during a game. This modeling also affected the junior coaches, who reported that they tried to use positive language as well – although some admitted they sometimes forgot. This type of positive language did not seem to have deeply penetrated the school culture yet, however, as we observed students on the playground more often telling others “you’re out” than “good job, nice try.”

The focus on inclusion and positive language are important ways that Playworks seeks to promote positive youth development outcomes. These strategies are explicitly about good sportsmanship, but inclusion and positive language also promote a sense that students care about each other and that the play yard is a safe place, both of which will ultimately improve overall school climate and students’ schooling experiences and outcomes.

VIII. Playworks in the Classroom

“It’s because of recess, having those games where there are set rules...and [the students] follow them. It’s the same thing in the classroom, they know the rules for the table and they follow them...having that structure out there helps them keep a positive relationship on the playground so they can have a positive relationship in the classroom.”

Teacher, fall 2009

In the fall, we interviewed and observed the classrooms of 20 first through fifth grade teachers at the six schools. Most teachers reported that their students tended to get antsy or lose focus prior to being excused for recess and lunch, and that they returned from lunch and recess with excess energy and needed to settle down. But teachers reported that these were expected behaviors among children who were hungry, needed a break, or were looking forward to recess. Our classroom observations confirmed that students sometimes became restless prior to recess and lunch, and in many cases they took extra time settling down upon their return.

We also observed that the vast majority of teachers employed classroom management techniques to help refocus or settle their students, and that teachers who had strong classroom management skills were able to mitigate any negative impact on the classroom and learning. Some of the strategies we heard about or observed for staving off pre-recess restlessness and promoting a smooth post-recess transition included: creating a routine and setting up supplies beforehand; stretching, other physical movement, or singing; or disciplining students or the class by taking away points, revoking recess, “re-doing” the transition, usually by lining up again to leave or re-enter the classroom.

A number of teachers reported in the fall that they had already seen a reduction in the number of conflicts lingering in their classrooms from recess. Two teachers from different schools said that they were relying less on some of their prior tools for addressing these conflicts. Teachers at three schools reported seeing their students use ro-sham-bo in the classroom, both to resolve conflicts and to make decisions, such as who would do which component of a group assignment.

Four teachers at three different schools also mentioned thinking that there was a connection between what happened at recess and what happened in the classroom. These connections included having additional opportunities to learn how to follow directions and rules as well as a reduction in the negative feelings and anxiety “that were not good to [students’] well-being.” One teacher thought she had regained some class time saying, “[When] we come in and someone is in tears, you can’t just say, ‘Well, go to your seat and we’ll deal with it later, and page three now.’ You can’t do that when someone’s crying, you need to address it. [Now] we get right to work and it gives us more instructional time.” Conversely, three teachers at two different schools said that they thought the improvements in their classroom had to do with things other than Playworks, including their own improved classroom management skills. Although many teachers in the fall were already describing the significant changes they were witnessing due to Playworks on the playground, far fewer were willing to ascribe any differences they saw in the classroom to Playworks.

IX. The Junior Coach Program

Junior Coaches at Recess

“The role of junior coaches is...a role model to show others that they should follow in our footsteps, to do good things in the future, so they can succeed.”

Junior coach, fall 2009

Playworks’ junior coach model involves having fourth and fifth grade students work at both their own recesses and younger students’ recesses supporting the coach, leading games, and helping students to resolve conflicts. At all six schools, junior coaches were operating and the coach had conducted one training with them when we visited in the fall. At four of the six schools, junior coaches were working at their own and younger students’ recesses and at two schools, junior coaches were working at their own recesses, but were not dismissed from class to work with younger students. At one of these two latter schools, this was the decision of the fifth grade teachers because of concerns about students missing academic instruction. These teachers also did not sign up for class game time for a similar reason and declined to participate in interviews for this study. The coach at this school believed that the principal did not emphasize enough the importance of these components with the teachers (this was also a school that did not have teacher training until later in the fall). In the other school, it was the principal’s decision. She described her dilemma saying, “It would be great to have those children out working with first and second graders and really the whole buddy system, the bonding, the leadership skills, but does that mean that we pull them out of math or reading?” One might speculate that the academic pressures of being in program improvement (PI) status could lead to such decisions, but neither of these schools was in PI status. There are broader ramifications for these decisions. One coach reported that without junior coaches at the younger students’ recess, “I can’t roam around the playground as I would like to, leading activities during recess.”

Despite this, in all six schools we found overwhelming support for the junior coach program from the Playworks coach, teachers, the principal, and the junior coaches themselves. Reports from all groups, as well as our own recess observations, indicated that even in the fall when the program was first being implemented, junior coaches were already engaged running games and helping students resolve conflicts at recess. The coaches were particularly pleased, reporting that the junior coaches were extremely helpful because their presence allowed the coach to be part of multiple games during the recess. In the schools that did not release junior coaches for younger students’ recesses, the coaches reported being limited in how many games they could support for younger students. Overwhelmingly, respondents said that the purple shirts were a huge draw for the program – that students were empowered by having uniforms that identified them as leaders. One teacher reported, “They’re easily identifiable; they have on a purple shirt, and they’re out there really monitoring, and it’s good.”

Even in the fall when the program was new, adults at the schools were noticing changes in their students as a result of the junior coach program. One teacher reported, “I’ve seen from them...a strong sense of leadership, a sense of school pride, and a sense of being a role model, being someone who can teach somebody else how to play something.” Several coaches and teachers said they reminded off duty junior coaches of their role model status on the playground and in the classroom in order to elicit improved behavior, a tactic they reported worked very well. One



teacher reported, “When I see them out there...when they’re not on duty and...they’re arguing... [I say], ‘You’re a leader, junior coach...the shirt’s always on, pretend like it’s always on.’” Several teachers also reported using the incentive of being a junior coach in the future as a way to encourage students to improve their grades.

Junior coaches themselves also noted their successes, especially with the younger students. One junior coach reported, “The first and second grades have recess at the same time we do, except they’re all the way over there at the other playground, and occasionally I see them giving high fives and doing rock-paper-scissors. [That’s good] because the kids, when they’re in third, fourth and fifth, they’re still going to have manners and they’re going to be good.” Several junior coaches reported changing their own feelings about inclusion at recess as a result of being junior coaches. One stated, “Since we’re junior coaches...we play a lot with different kinds of kids, we know their name and then we talk to them more.” She went on to describe how she’s learned that students can play with others who have different ethnic backgrounds from their own. These are important lessons and point to the critical role that leadership programs can play in promoting not only leadership skills, but also inclusion and empathy.

Despite these successes, there were many initial challenges to the junior coach program. Foremost among these is the difficulty implicit in having 9- and 10-year old students step into a formalized leadership role. One coach reported problems with junior coach follow through and consistency. Several coaches and teachers reported that it was especially challenging for junior coaches to learn to deal with negative reactions from other students. One coach believed that this was an important lesson, “It’s going to teach them a lot of responsibility and realizing that having a responsibility has challenges with it.” Junior coaches also reported feeling disrespected at times and ignored, especially by their peers, which made their jobs more difficult. “Sometimes, you tell the kids to do something, but they don’t listen, so you really only have one more choice but to threaten them. But to do that, it’s not your duty or coach job, so I can’t think of any more ways to get them to stop,” explained one junior coach.

A second challenge, reported by one teacher, was that students sometimes took advantage of their leadership role. In that classroom, two students feigned junior coach duty in order to skip a math test. The teacher suspended them from the program for two weeks as a consequence. Two other teachers reported that what seemed like a good idea for a student at the beginning of the year became more challenging as the year went on and the curriculum became more difficult. Struggling students missing class meant there was more work for the teachers to help them catch up. One of these teachers solved the problem by talking with the student to make her aware that she was falling behind when she left for recess. The teacher reported that after this, the junior coach seemed more on top of her schoolwork.

Junior Coach Recruitment

“I’m glad [the coach] picked [the junior coaches]...because I may have said, ‘No, not her, she’s just going to cause more problems out there; she loves drama.’ I was so glad he chose her...because now [she] is amazing!”

Principal, fall 2009



Coaches worked with students and fourth and fifth grade teachers at their schools for junior coach recruitment. At three of the six schools, coaches relied solely on teacher recommendations for students based on three main criteria: (1) students who would be on top of their schoolwork enough to be able to leave class and work in the younger students' recesses, (2) students who could model the behavior needed to be a leader, and (3) students who have or would be capable of developing the leadership skills necessary to carry out the junior coach duties. Schools emphasized these three criteria in different ways. For example, in one school where model behavior was not a key criteria in the selection of junior coaches the principal stated, "Some of the kids that I saw who were on there at first, I thought, 'Oh, God, really? You want him?' But I get the point of, yes, that's exactly the kid I want."

At the other three schools, coaches relied on a combination of teacher recommendations based on the above criteria and student applications for the program. Interested students were encouraged to apply and then either teachers recommended students or coaches checked with applicants' teachers to make sure they were a good fit for the program. An advantage of this dual-pronged recruitment style, according to two coaches, was that although teachers selected students who could handle the job in terms of academics and leadership, they did not necessarily select students who were leaders on the playground or who were interested in being a Playworks junior coach. One coach stated that students with good behavior can sometimes be shy and lack confidence or interest in playground games and sports. Another coach specifically asked teachers to recommend students who might not seem ideal for the job, but who could benefit from being a junior coach. He told teachers, "I want kids that might have problems talking to other kids, and I'll try to work with them. This is what the junior coach program is about, getting them to interact with other kids and it helps them benefit in the long run."

A particular recruitment challenge arose at one school where teachers – who had not yet been trained by Playworks – were asked by the principal to recruit for both the junior coach and the after school program simultaneously (this school did not rely on student applications for the junior coach program). Because of this, the two programs were inadvertently conflated in a way that confused both the teachers and the students. The coach reported that it took some time to disentangle the two Playworks components and find students to fill each. As a result, the students who were recommended for the junior coach program did not all understand what they were signing up for, which affected the implementation of this component.

All coaches reported that in the end, they had a good group of students as junior coaches. However, at the schools that used a two-pronged recruitment, there were both enough students recruited to be junior coaches and, according to coaches, a wider variety of students represented, including both those who were already leaders and those who had leadership potential. One school that relied only on teacher recommendations had not recruited enough junior coaches at the time we visited. A school that allowed student applications recruited 200 potential students and ended up with a rotation scheme to allow more students to participate.

X. Class Game Time

“I love the class game times. It’s really good to build a classroom culture and a safe environment where all the kids are included, everybody wants to play. It’s been really, really, really great for my class.”

Teacher, fall 2009

Class game time is an important component of the Playworks program. Its main function is to teach students basic sports and cooperative playground games in order to provide them with the tools they need to initiate and sustain play with others at recess. Ideally, coaches work with each classroom several times a month outside of recess time and provide students with a positive and inclusive environment where, in addition to learning games, they learn to support one another, resolve conflicts independently, and gain confidence in their physical and social abilities. Class game time is an important opportunity for students to develop a relationship with the coach as well as with one another.

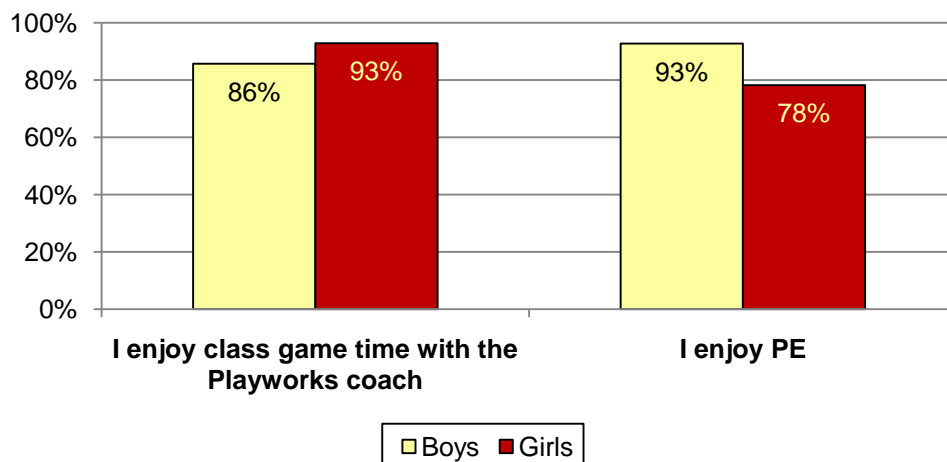
Within a month of the school year starting, coaches at all of the schools were implementing class game time. Start up was somewhat challenging for most schools because of complicated bell schedules, academic leveling needs, and, in one case, the large number of classrooms needing to be scheduled. However, nearly all schools reported that with persistence from the coach, class game time was successfully launched and ultimately one of the most appreciated components of the Playworks program. In the schools where teacher training happened later in the fall or winter, implementation of class game time was slower and more challenging. At these schools, the coaches and some teachers suggested that a lack of understanding of the program and limited staff buy-in slowed things down.

Scheduling class game times was done primarily by leaving a sign-up sheet in the staff room at the beginning of each month. Teachers and coaches agreed that this method worked well. Nearly everyone reported that students had the opportunity to participate in class game time once every two weeks for 25-30 minutes, with the exception of the upper grades in two schools. Though teachers were typically satisfied with the amount and frequency of participation, some expressed an interest in signing up more often, with one stating “I wish we could see the coach more often...that would be one thing that I would change. But other than that, it’s *fantastic!*” Coaches indicated that they tried to accommodate these requests when time allowed.

Overall, principals, coaches, and teachers agreed that students loved class game time and were eager to participate. Fifth grade students from all six schools confirmed that both boys and girls alike enjoyed class game time with their coach (Exhibit 10). Girls particularly liked it as compared with their attitudes toward physical education (PE).

Teachers also appreciated and supported class game time and, in the fall, were already beginning to talk about its benefits. Referring to class game time’s impact on recess, one teacher commented, “The coach teaches a handful of classes every week, and introduces new games. So, the kids have more in their toolbox of games.” Another teacher said, “It’s teaching the kids in separate classrooms how to play some of the games that they can use during recess.”

Exhibit 10. Fifth Grade Students' Enjoyment of Class Game Time and PE



Source: JGC tabulations from the fall fifth grade survey.

Notes: (1) Percents include those who responded “strongly agree” or “agree” on a five-point scale. (2) A total of 448 students responded to the survey.

At each of the six schools, the coaches had a similar formula for implementing class game time. The routine was consistent across grade levels with minor variations based on the age of the students. It generally started out with a fun ice breaker, often something silly to get the students engaged. Coaches often followed this with a stretching exercise before introducing a game. Most coaches modeled inclusiveness by asking volunteers to help with game demonstration, tested for listening and understanding consistently, and played alongside the students expressing their own enjoyment for the games they were teaching. Class game times consistently involved sustained physical activity and, typically, most, if not all, students were actively engaged. When children had some difficulty keeping up physically, the coaches were usually very encouraging and gathered a group to cheer them on. One coach said, “I always try to end with something that just exerts a lot of energy, so when they go back to class they feel like they’ve just done something and now it’s time to learn.” Across schools, class game time always ended with a group cheer, reinforcing inclusiveness and good sportsmanship.

Although the Playworks model has teachers playing alongside students, there were only a few reports of teachers playing during class game time. However, some teachers did suggest that they were learning new games and techniques to use on their own when doing physical education with their classes and expressed appreciation for the new ideas they were getting. One coach confirmed this, saying, “After the first week, I had teachers already playing the games I had taught them in class game time on their own. So, that was a good indication that it was received well.” Several schools reported using class game time as an incentive to reward good student behavior, threatening to take it away as a privilege if needed. Coaches at these schools said they supported this, expressing a desire to reinforce teacher expectations of student behavior and academic performance.

Our initial analysis also found that attitudes across and within schools toward PE affected the reception and acceptance of class game time. This conflation of class game time and PE was not

introduced or perpetuated by Playworks, but was prevalent. At five of the six schools, at least one respondent reported viewing class game time as a viable alternative to PE. None of these schools had a PE program taught by credentialed teachers for the primary grades (K-3). As a result, primary teachers especially viewed class game time as a PE substitute, which meant they did not need to teach PE that day. Indeed, a number of teachers even mistakenly referred to class game time as PE during our interviews. On the contrary, at two schools, the upper grade (4-5) teachers considered class game time a duplication of the formal PE their students were already receiving twice weekly. These teachers thought that adding class game time took too much time away from academics and their students ended up only receiving class game time once a month or not at all. Not surprisingly, many of the teachers who were concerned about giving up instructional time with their students were also reluctant to have their junior coaches miss class time. As far as we know, coaches and their supervisors did not attempt to disentangle class game time from PE in communications with school staff.

XI. Implications and Conclusions

Overall, we find abundant evidence showing that Playworks coaches had implemented core program components in each of the six schools, even as early as our fall visits. Specifically, coaches had put into place – to varying degrees – recess game structures, conflict resolution tools, inclusive and positive language, class game time, and the junior coach program. Principals and teachers were generally pleased with the program, particularly with changes they were seeing at recess. But for the most part, they did not see effects on classroom learning or behavior, though some expressed that they hoped this would happen during the school year. In the fall, fifth grade students overwhelmingly reported enjoying recess and junior coaches reported that their schools were better off because of Playworks.

Early Implementation Themes

There are several themes that stand out from the analyses in this report.

- 1. Early training is critical.** There were certain activities in the early implementation period that appeared to be critical for establishing relationships between Playworks and the school in order to gain teacher, principal, and student buy-in for the program. Schools whose staff were trained right at the start of the school year had stronger implementation of all program components than did those whose staff were trained later on. In the two schools that had training at the start of the school year, the coaches went room to room to introduce themselves and the program to teachers and students (both had previous coaching experience at other Playworks schools in the prior year). The combination of these two introductory processes led to strong teacher buy-in for the program at these two schools, promoting their assistance with selecting junior coaches, agreement to release junior coaches to participate in younger students' recesses, and agreement to sign up for and participate in class game time. In schools where teacher training occurred later in the year, especially where it occurred toward the end of the fall or even early winter, teacher buy-in was not nearly as strong and the coaches were unable to fully implement Playworks' core components as intended.

We were not informed of any specific principal training, but principals' investment in the program also had important ramifications. Because principals had discretion over many of the structural impediments to early implementation success – including playground rules that limit play areas, access to equipment, and access to teachers at staff meetings – his or her early buy-in was essential to a smooth early implementation.

- 2. Adapting to school context requires flexibility and in some cases alters program operation.** Coaches reported that they were trained by Playworks in how to implement the model, but were also encouraged to be flexible as needed depending on school context. This flexibility was critical in the early implementation period, and led to some variations in how Playworks was ultimately implemented at the schools, including both positive and negative adaptations. For instance, in one school the coach viewed a lack of playground equipment as an opportunity to teach students to play together in order to share resources. In another, the coach actively worked with yard monitors, teachers, and the principal in order to reinstate the game “tag,” which had been previously banned. However, at two of the six schools junior

coaches were not released for younger students' recesses due to concerns over lost academic instruction. This response both diminished the role of junior coaches and had ramifications for the organization and structure of younger students' recesses. There was also variation in how class game time was implemented and even variation among different grade levels within schools. Some of this variation reflected a conflation of class game time and physical education (PE); teachers whose students did not receive PE with a credentialed teacher (all students K-3 in the schools we visited) were more anxious to sign up for class game time, whereas teachers whose students had required PE with a credentialed teacher (grades 4-5) were less interested in participating. These challenges may also be related to the timing of training, and also perhaps training content. Where there was strong teacher buy-in, which was directly correlated to the timing of training, implementation of the junior coach program and class game time were more complete.

3. **Changing the school culture takes time.** Some aspects of Playworks' influences were immediately apparent at the schools we visited; organized and separate areas for each game, junior coaches in purple shirts monitoring recess, and Playworks coaches present and engaged during recess. Other aspects, particularly those around conflict resolution and positive language, took more time to appear. Although students had learned to use ro-shambo to resolve conflicts, even by winter they were not always using that tool on their own, but either needed to be reminded or found some other way to resolve conflicts that was not always positive. Students were similarly challenged to remember to use positive language, like "good job, nice try" or to give high fives instead of calling each other "out" during a game. Even junior coaches reported to us that although they knew these Playworks practices, they sometimes forgot to use them. In the same vein, it was not yet apparent that Playworks had permeated the classroom in terms of either conflict resolution or recaptured class time resulting from fewer recess conflicts. Changing long-ingrained school and recess cultures take time, but students, teachers, and principals all reported being eager to do so for the benefit of students and the school as a whole.
4. **Play is an important context for introducing youth development concepts to students, teachers, principals, and schools.** Playworks embeds promotion of youth development in its core programming in a seamless and effective way. The junior coach program is not simply about having helpers to create a more structured recess, but creates leadership opportunities for students who are both already leaders and those who are not. The structured recess is intended to increase play and decrease conflicts, but embedded deeply is the promotion of inclusion and the creation of a safe environment so that all students feel confident engaging in play. Class game time is both about teaching students games and engaging teachers in play with students. These, in turn, can promote a positive school climate where students are connected to adults and each other. And, these aspects of positive youth development have been linked to improved health, mental health, and academic outcomes for students.

Although we observed that these more subtle aspects of Playworks' programming were not fully implemented in the fall and winter, our fall interviews with coaches indicated that they all possessed a strong understanding of how a fully implemented Playworks model could create this kind of positive environment at the schools.

Future Publications

There will be two other main types of reports from the study:

- School-Specific Reports: We will produce a short report for each of the six newly implementing schools that describes the key aspects of Playworks implementation using interview, observation, and student and teacher survey data. Reports will be shared with Playworks, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and each of the six schools individually by August 31, 2010.
- Topical Issue Briefs: We will produce a set of four issue briefs on different topics using all of the fall, winter, and spring data collections. These will be released no later than December 31, 2010. We anticipate working with Playworks and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to finalize the topics, which may include:
 - Recess play and physical activity,
 - Recess conflict and conflict resolution,
 - Junior coaches and leadership,
 - Playworks and youth development,
 - Playworks and school climate,
 - Playworks and classroom experiences, and
 - Playworks staffing and training.

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Appendix: Data and Methodology

This study of Playworks implementation relies on data collected at three points in time (fall, winter, spring) at the six newly implementing study schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. These schools were selected in collaboration with Playworks and needed to meet just two basic criteria: that they were newly implementing Playworks in 2009-2010 and that they were willing to participate in the study. We strove to obtain variation in school district, and ultimately found the six schools in four different districts. During the 2009-2010 school year, we conducted the following data collection activities:

- *In-person interviews with principals, three to four teachers, and the Playworks coach at each school.* We used standard interview protocols to guide the conversations, but relied on respondents to identify the most important issues in their settings. Interviews with principals and coaches lasted about 60 minutes and teacher interviews were closer to 20-30 minutes. Teachers were selected in conjunction with Playworks staff and principals and represented different grade levels. At each school we made a special attempt to interview at least one teacher who had a junior coach in his or her class. Interviews took place in the fall and spring.
- *In-person observations of recess, lunch recess, class game time, and classrooms before and after recess or lunch.* At each school, we observed three to four classrooms during the 15 minutes prior to recess or lunch recess, followed the students and observed their recess time, and then followed them back into class and observed the classroom for 15 minutes after recess. We also observed at least three class game time periods. All observations were recorded in an observation guide intended to be reliable across observers. Observations occurred in the fall, winter and spring.
- *In-person focus groups with junior coaches.* We conducted focus groups with three to ten junior coaches at each school. Focus groups concentrated on recess experiences as a whole and specific leadership experiences associated with Playworks involvement, motivation for becoming a junior coach, experiences helping students resolve conflicts and lessons learned from participating as a junior coach. Parents were required to sign an informed consent form in order for students to participate and students signed assents prior to the start of the focus groups. Focus groups took place in the fall and spring.
- *Fifth grade student survey.* We designed and conducted surveys with fifth grade students at each school, which were administered by Playworks coaches during class game time. Surveys captured students' views of recess time, conflict and conflict resolution on the play yard and in class, perceptions of school climate, and view of Playworks overall. Surveys were administered anonymously to students to maintain privacy, were available in both English and Spanish, and were collected in the fall and spring.
- *Teacher survey.* All teachers in the six newly implementing schools were surveyed at the end of the 2009-2010 school year. Surveys focused on teachers' experiences with the program, the consequences of the program for their students, their classroom

management practices and school climate more generally. The teacher survey was conducted through a confidential web-based questionnaire and was administered in late spring.

- *Teacher diaries.* We asked each of the interviewed teachers to complete a week-long diary that detailed the amount of time they spent settling students after each recess and lunch recess and a short set of questions about students' behaviors before and after recess and lunch recess. Teacher diaries were completed in the fall and spring.

In addition to these data collections, we also gathered information at two additional schools that had been implementing Playworks for several years during the winter of the 2009-2010 school year. These mature schools were included as comparison sites for the newly implementing schools and future reports will include these comparisons. We selected schools that had Playworks for at least three years and served a roughly similar demographic to students in the six study schools. One of the mature schools was in Silicon Valley in a district that also contained one of the six schools. The other was in Richmond, CA, north of Silicon Valley, and served a slightly different demographic, including more African American students. Visits included interviews, observations, and junior coach focus groups. Visits focused on lessons learned and best practices in the mature schools. Observations and interviews in these schools provided a way to understand a variety of sustainability questions, in particular those associated with program adaptation in different contexts.

We audiotaped and transcribed most interviews and focus groups for analysis using qualitative analysis software. In a few cases, we relied on extensive notes taken by a second interviewer instead of transcripts. We recorded observation data manually and then revised observation notes to be consistent across schools and observers.

We manually entered students' paper/pencil surveys into analysis software. Fall and spring student surveys will be individually linked using identifiers such as classroom, gender, ethnicity, and birth date. We also manually entered teacher paper/pencil diaries into analysis software. Web-based teacher surveys did not require additional data entry.

The first step in the qualitative analysis was to use qualitative analysis software to code the interviews, observations, and focus groups for key concepts and findings. Together, the research team agreed on a set of descriptive and analytic codes and sub-codes that represented the experiences of the schools broadly and individually. Four members of the team coded transcripts and notes from interviews, observations, and focus groups in two rounds for both descriptive and analytic themes. Analytic themes fell roughly into three categories: program implementation, program effects, and school context. From these a variety of sub-codes were developed for more detailed analyses. The coders worked first by pairing off and coding in teams of two, each team coding two different types of source data. Next, the team worked through six additional documents, with all four members coding each. After each round of coding we calculated our inter-rater reliability using percent agreement and Cohen's kappa coefficient, a statistical measure of inter-rater reliability. We also discussed any discrepancies in coding and amended our coding book. In the end, the team achieved an average percent agreement of 87% and

Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.63. In total, approximately 13% of our fall data collection was coded by at least two coders.

We then analyzed the data to learn how schools shared implementation experiences and where experiences diverged. We compared experiences within and across schools, grouping findings by stakeholder (teacher, principal), by school or student characteristic and by other means.

A central element of the study is to understand how Playworks affects students. For this analysis we combined data from observations, the student survey and teacher interviews to document the ways that youth experience the program and its consequences for them. By combining different voices in the same analysis, we were able to assess similarities and differences across reported experiences in an effort to align specific practices and contexts directly with specific youth development outcomes. We similarly combined data sources to examine program influences on teachers, other personnel and the school climate.