

2016-2018 Evaluation of the Playworks TeamUp Model in Philadelphia

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BACKGROUND

- Playworks is a national nonprofit recess program that seeks to improve students' emotional health, social behavior, and school climate through organized and enhanced play.
- The TeamUp model of Playworks, currently being implemented in eight District schools, places coaches at schools for one week every month with the goal of training school-based staff to run a Playworks recess model at their school.
- The Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) is in the second year of a two-year evaluation of the Playworks TeamUp model in School District of Philadelphia schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is the TeamUp model being implemented as intended (with fidelity) at each school?
- Do school staff feel adequately prepared and supported?
- What factors contribute to implementation with fidelity?

METHODS

- ORE is using qualitative methods, including observations and interviews.
- Each participating school is observed multiple times, both with and without a Playworks Coach present. Observers take extensive field notes, which are then examined for emerging themes.
- The principal and one recess staff member at each school is interviewed about their experience with TeamUp. Interviews for Year 2 are in progress.
- Observers look for fidelity to the measures which Playworks has indicated are important to the model in their Great Recess Framework.

INTERIM FINDINGS

Playworks has developed a "Great Recess Framework" (GRF) rubric that includes indicators that schools can use to assess the recess environment. ORE used the GRF to inform their observations at the eight TeamUp schools. These findings address selected GRF indicators.

Are students engaged in structured games and activities?

- Most students (when allowed recess) are actively playing most of the time at TeamUp schools.
- The Playworks practice of dividing play yards into different activity areas or "zones" occurs at every school
- Most schools use at least one Playworks-specific game (e.g. "Switch") regularly during their recess

Do adults intervene in a positive, constructive way?

- Playworks coaches consistently model positive, constructive interventions
- Recess staff implementation of Playworks-style interventions varies widely across schools.

Do all students have access to recess and all recess activities?

- At several schools, recess is withheld either in part or entirely for behavioral or academic reasons.
- Recess or recess activities are frequently segregated by gender, either by policy or in practice.

How are conflicts resolved?

- Whether conflicts evolve in the first place and how they are resolved (verbally and independently vs. physically and then with adult intervention) varies across schools

Are there clear expectations and structures?

- Most schools use some Playworks transition techniques (e.g. attention-getters in the form of whistles, clapping, counting), with varying effectiveness.
- Most schools state recess behavior expectations at least once during recess. Enforcement of expectations varies across schools.

Staff and principal perspectives from interviews:

- Principals and staff often express a wish for more staff assigned just to recess, and they indicate that under-staffing is an obstacle to implementation.
- Recess staff members generally report satisfaction with Playworks coaches and activities but find consistent implementation difficult.
- In 2017 interviews, principals stated that they did not think that recess should be withheld, but acknowledged that it does happen.

EMERGING THEMES

- Schools are generally satisfied with the Playworks TeamUp model and with the training and support they receive.
- However, many schools indicate a preference for a full-time Coach model over the TeamUp model of Playworks.
- Consistency in implementation is reported as a challenge.
- Policies regarding recess withholding and recess segregation by gender are not clearly articulated across or within schools.
- Implementation of a Playworks recess with fidelity varies by school and may be dependent in part on recess staffing and in part on pre-existing school climate.