



JOHN W. GARDNER CENTER  
*for Youth and Their Communities*

# Playworks Implementation in Eight Bay Area Elementary Schools: Final Report

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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 school day. Its mission is to improve the health and well-being of children by increasing opportunities for physical activity and safe, meaningful play. 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) class game times in which coaches teach game rules and emphasize teamwork with individual classes; (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. The core of Playworks' programming is designed to support a high-functioning recess, which is a key opportunity to get students active and help them to learn about conflict resolution, self-regulation, inclusiveness, and good sportsmanship. All of these strategies have the potential to improve students' own social and academic experiences as well as the school climate as a whole.

This is the final 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 and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The study aimed to understand the ways that Playworks affected students' recess and classroom experiences, school personnel, and school climate overall, as well as document the implementation process with a focus on varying school experiences in the context of different school environments. It used mixed methods – including interviews, focus groups, observations, and student and teacher surveys – and included six newly implementing schools as well as two established schools located in the San Francisco Bay Area. This cumulative final report is accompanied by three briefs focused on Playworks as it relates to the following issues: play and physical activity, youth development, and school climate.

Overall, we found that each newly implementing school had put in place core Playworks components and as a result, recess was more organized and productive. Where the program was implemented most fully, respondents indicated that it had the desired effects on students, personnel, and school climate. However, there were several implementation challenges and where these were most difficult to overcome stakeholders were less certain that the program had fully achieved its intended effects. Below we detail key findings from the report and discuss considerations for continued roll out of Playworks nationwide.

### Implementation of Core Playworks Components: Successes, Challenges, and Variation Across Schools

- **Principals at all six newly implementing schools reported more structure and student engagement at recess.** 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. Principals and teachers reported that engagement in recess activities was higher than in previous years. However, teachers at schools that experienced coach turnover during the year (two of six schools) were only half as likely to report a *substantial improvement* in engagement as compared to those in schools that kept the same coach the entire year.



- **Playworks promotes conflict resolution and use of positive language.** Teachers and principals at newly implementing schools reported that Playworks had implemented a system of resolving conflicts, and even decreasing the number of conflicts, through both the use of ro-sham-bo (rock-paper-scissors) and the use of positive language and inclusive behavior at recess. Still, these results were not universal. Two-thirds of teacher survey respondents reported students using ro-sham-bo often or very often to resolve conflicts at recess, but 37% of fifth grade students in the spring reported using this tool.
- **Being a junior coach constitutes an important leadership opportunity for students.** Junior coaches were present at all six newly implementing schools and engaged in a range of activities including checking out equipment, leading games, acting as role models and helping students to resolve conflicts. In two of the six schools, junior coaches were not released for younger students' recesses because of concerns over missed academic instruction. Coaches felt that junior coaches provided important support to them at recess and those who did not have junior coach support at younger students' recesses felt this hindered their abilities to set up a variety of smaller games for the younger students.
- **Class game time was highly regarded and served as a foundation for creating play yard change.** Class game time was considered by teachers and students to be one of the most important (and enjoyed) aspects of Playworks. It provided an 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. Teachers responding to the spring survey reported overwhelming support for this component; however at some schools not all teachers signed up for class game time. Fourth and fifth grade teachers, whose students had PE with a credentialed teacher, were more reluctant to sign up, citing duplication to PE and a need to focus on academics.

## Key Factors Influencing Successful Program Implementation

- **Early staff training is important to teacher buy-in.** Staff training, conducted by Playworks staff, was critical for establishing relationships between Playworks and the school and gaining teacher buy-in for the program. Teachers who received it were highly complimentary of the training and felt it gave them a better understanding of the program and their role in it. However, in the two schools that received training late in December or January and the one school that did not receive training at all, teachers reported more frequently that they did not understand how Playworks components were intended to operate, and were less supportive of students participating in class game time and the junior coach program.
- **A strong coach was seen as key to Playworks' success.** Staff across all eight schools agreed that a coach's personality, commitment, and quality of interaction with students and teachers factored heavily in the success of the program. A coach's capacity to establish strong relationships with students and school staff was important to his or her overall ability to be effective in the role. Coaches received extensive training from Playworks both before and during their time at schools, but they may need more specific support in navigating the school environment and communicating with parents and families.

- **Coach turnover compromised implementation.** Two of the six schools had coaches transition out during the year, which is a higher rate than normal among Playworks schools nationally. Where this occurred, it created unavoidable gaps in programs, a perceived loss of progress in terms of recess structure and organization, and uncertainty about how the program would weather the transition. While replacing a coach mid-year presents challenges, with strong support and communication these transitions have the potential to go smoothly with minimal long-term negative impact.
- **Existing school factors influenced Playworks implementation.** Some of these – including access to equipment, rules regarding games allowed at recess, and access to school space – were areas where the coach was able to make positive changes that promoted Playworks’ values and goals. Other factors – such as school bell and recess schedules and school disciplinary policies that limited access to physical activity – were areas where coaches had little influence and led to implementation challenges.

## How Playworks Affects Students, Adults, and School Climate

- **Playworks had its largest effects on recess.** Respondents identified changes that they have experienced or observed at recess since Playworks was implemented, including increased student engagement in play, reduced conflict and improved conflict resolution, improved feelings of safety at recess, more positive language and inclusive behavior, and students better able to self-regulate. Where the program was implemented more smoothly, reports of these changes were greater.
- **Older students and especially girls were less likely to participate in Playworks games.** Teachers reported these students often felt too “cool” to play and preferred to spend recess socializing with friends. Reluctance to play affected students’ physical activity levels. Where respondents reported seeing an increase in physical activity as a result of Playworks, they attributed it to increased availability of organized games, access to appropriate equipment, increased inclusiveness, and reduced conflict.
- **Principals and teachers felt students were engaged in fewer conflicts as a result of Playworks.** Fifth grade students did not report many changes in the amount of conflict, but staff reported that students’ increased use of problem solving techniques helped to keep conflicts from escalating. Staff viewed ro-sham-bo as effective in resolving game-related conflicts, but less effective in addressing more emotional problems.
- **Many teachers agreed that there were fewer conflicts returning to the classroom after recess.** Most teachers surveyed in the spring reported an improvement or substantial improvement in the amount of conflict at recess since Playworks was implemented. Teachers were not in agreement about whether they spent less class time resolving conflict after recess. For some, their own classroom management practices were already strong and they observed no significant change in the amount of time it took to transition the students back to instruction. For others, a noticeable change had occurred.

- **Junior coaches gained important leadership skills as well as self-confidence and a sense of pride.** These are important positive youth development assets and teachers and coaches agreed that most students who participated in the program experienced positive development as a result. Many students were eager to be junior coaches and teachers used the position as an incentive for students to do well and behave, and also as a reminder to the junior coaches themselves to be on their best behavior at all times.
- **Playworks promoted positive youth developmental growth for students.** The most common of these were inclusiveness, self-regulation, and connectedness to students and adults at school. The extent to which respondents felt the program had achieved these goals depended on the quality of implementation; staff at schools with weaker implementation were less likely to note these changes in students.

## Considerations for the Future

- **Expand and time training for coaches and school staff.** Coach training could include more attention to “soft skills,” including how to best communicate professionally in the school setting. Teacher training should be timed for the very beginning of the school year to obtain early buy-in from staff and might be supplemented by additional training in the year. Communication with parents was not part of Playworks’ outreach at these schools, but integrating family and school potentially is an important way to promote the positive youth development goals Playworks embraces.
- **Identify and target games that meet a range of students’ abilities and competitiveness, as well as appeal to older girls.** Older girls were among the least engaged students at recess. Playworks might think about their developmental trajectory to design games specifically geared toward students their age and gender. Playworks must address the issue of competition on the play yard, as even in schools with strong programs, one or more highly competitive games continued that excluded other players.
- **Align discipline policies with Playworks’ values and goals.** All schools we visited had discipline policies that were not aligned with the philosophy that play is an important learning environment. These included using recess and class game time as individual and group punishments for misbehavior and failure to complete schoolwork. Playworks’ own policies also promoted sitting students out when they misbehaved. Playworks might identify other ways to discipline students and work with schools to roll these out.
- **Pay attention to coach turnover.** The biggest challenge facing schools was the loss of the coach. It disrupted all aspects of the program and left students feeling upset and let down. Playworks must work proactively with schools when this happens to improve communication with students, parents, teachers, and principals about how Playworks will proceed and quickly fill the position with a coach who is equally well-trained for the job. Replacement coaches were not uniformly ready for the position, which led to confusion, lack of organization, and ultimately a weaker program than had been in place previously.



## I. Introduction

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 school day. Its mission is to improve the health and well-being of children by increasing opportunities for physical activity and safe, meaningful play.<sup>1</sup> 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) class game times in which coaches teach game rules and emphasize teamwork with individual classes; (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.<sup>2</sup> The core of Playworks' programming is designed to support a high-functioning recess, which is a key opportunity in the school day to get students active and help them to learn about conflict resolution, self-regulation, inclusiveness, and good sportsmanship. All of these strategies have the potential to improve students' own social and academic experiences as well as the school climate as a whole.

Although Playworks is 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. This also can increase physical activity as children tend to be more active when adults are involved in directly structuring recess games and activities.<sup>3</sup> Both of these strategies are related to a sense of school connectedness, which generally refers to students' beliefs 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 to support a structured recess among nine- and ten-year olds. 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 health<sup>4</sup> as well as their academic work.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, if the adults at a school support youth development in these ways, they create a positive climate for learning that can reverberate into greater academic success.<sup>6</sup>

This report is the full final 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 to document and understand the implementation process, with a focus on varying school experiences in the context of different school environments. This report is accompanied by three

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see the Playworks website at: [www.playworks.org](http://www.playworks.org).

<sup>2</sup> This study focuses on the first three of these components.

<sup>3</sup> McKenzie & Kahan (2008).

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009).

<sup>5</sup> Eccles and Gootman (2002); Durlak and Weissberg (2007); Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, & Mielke (2005); Battistich, Solomon, Watson & Schaps (1997); Lee & Smith (1999).

<sup>6</sup> Center for Social and Emotional Education (2010).





research briefs focused on the ways Playworks influences: (1) play and physical activity, (2) youth development practices and outcomes, (3) overall school climate.

The research 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 shown in Exhibit 1, the study uses mixed methods – interviews, observations focus groups, and surveys – and includes six newly implementing schools as well as a comparison to two established 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. This report relies on all data collections in each time period. Interview, focus group, and observation data were transcribed and analyzed using qualitative data analysis software. Survey 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 Established Schools**

<i>At each of six newly implementing and two established schools:</i>	<b>Fall</b>		<b>Winter</b>		<b>Spring</b>	
	<i>New schools</i>	<i>Established schools</i>	<i>New schools</i>	<i>Established schools</i>	<i>New schools</i>	<i>Established 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	

The schools included in the study are described in Exhibits 2 and 3, which present demographic and academic-related characteristics for the six newly implementing and the two established schools. As seen in Exhibit 2, the elementary schools examined for this study served precisely the students that Playworks intends to target. In five of the six newly implementing schools, more than 70% of students received Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL), including one newly implementing and one established school where nearly 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. One of the established schools served more African-Americans than the others, and consequently had a lower proportion of English learners.



**Exhibit 2. Demographic Characteristics of Students at Six Newly Implementing and Two Established Elementary Schools (2008-09)**

	Clyde Arbuckle	Bishop	Horace Cureton	Ernesto Galarza	Monta Loma	San Miguel	Franklin	Verde
Female	45%	49%	45%	47%	48%	46%	48%	54%
Ethnicity								
Latino	84%	70%	82%	81%	52%	66%	49%	46%
Asian/Pacific Is/Filipino	15%	14%	12%	5%	13%	26%	46%	15%
White	1%	12%	4%	4%	27%	5%	2%	11%
African American	1%	3%	2%	8%	4%	2%	2%	23%
Other/No Response	0%	1%	1%	3%	5%	1%	1%	5%
English Learner	64%	54%	62%	58%	55%	65%	71%	59%
Free/Reduced Lunch	100%	74%	78%	83%	61%	73%	76%	98%
<i>Number of Students</i>	<i>478</i>	<i>625</i>	<i>567</i>	<i>503</i>	<i>498</i>	<i>458</i>	<i>750</i>	<i>321</i>

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

**Exhibit 3. Academic Characteristics of Students at Six Newly Implementing and Two Established Elementary Schools (2008-09)**

	Clyde Arbuckle	Bishop	Horace Cureton	Ernesto Galarza	Monta Loma	San Miguel	Franklin	Verde
In Program Improvement	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Truant	7%	2%	25%	24%	12%	2%	4%	62%
Suspended	1%	0%	4%	9%	0%	3%	4%	14%
Proficient Math	44%	50%	50%	50%	59%	54%	60%	38%
Proficient ELA	35%	42%	42%	38%	48%	47%	48%	27%
<i>Number of Students</i>	<i>478</i>	<i>625</i>	<i>567</i>	<i>503</i>	<i>498</i>	<i>458</i>	<i>750</i>	<i>321</i>

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.

These schools also faced academic challenges. As is shown in Exhibit 3, two newly implementing schools and one established school were in program improvement (PI) status, indicating they had not met the requirements of No Child Left Behind in the prior year. Two newly implementing 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. These schools also faced substantial challenges in educating their students to be proficient in basic subjects. In the 2009-10 school year, most of the schools had about half their second to fifth grade students reach grade level proficient in math, but none of the six newly implementing schools had even half its students reach proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA). One established school faced more challenges than the other schools, with a truancy rate of 62%, a suspension rate of 14%, and the lowest levels of math and ELA proficiency of any other school in the study.

This report proceeds as follows. Section II discusses 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. Section III focuses on implementation of key Playworks components at the six newly implementing schools and section IV discusses key factors that influenced implementation. Section V focuses on respondents' views of the effects Playworks has had on students, recess, and overall school climate. Section VI offers conclusions and discusses several areas for Playworks to consider as it continues to roll out nationwide. Data and methods are discussed in the appendix.



## II. Playworks Theory of Change

The Playworks theory of change (Exhibit 4) 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 realized. 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 at least half of the 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 throughout the day, 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

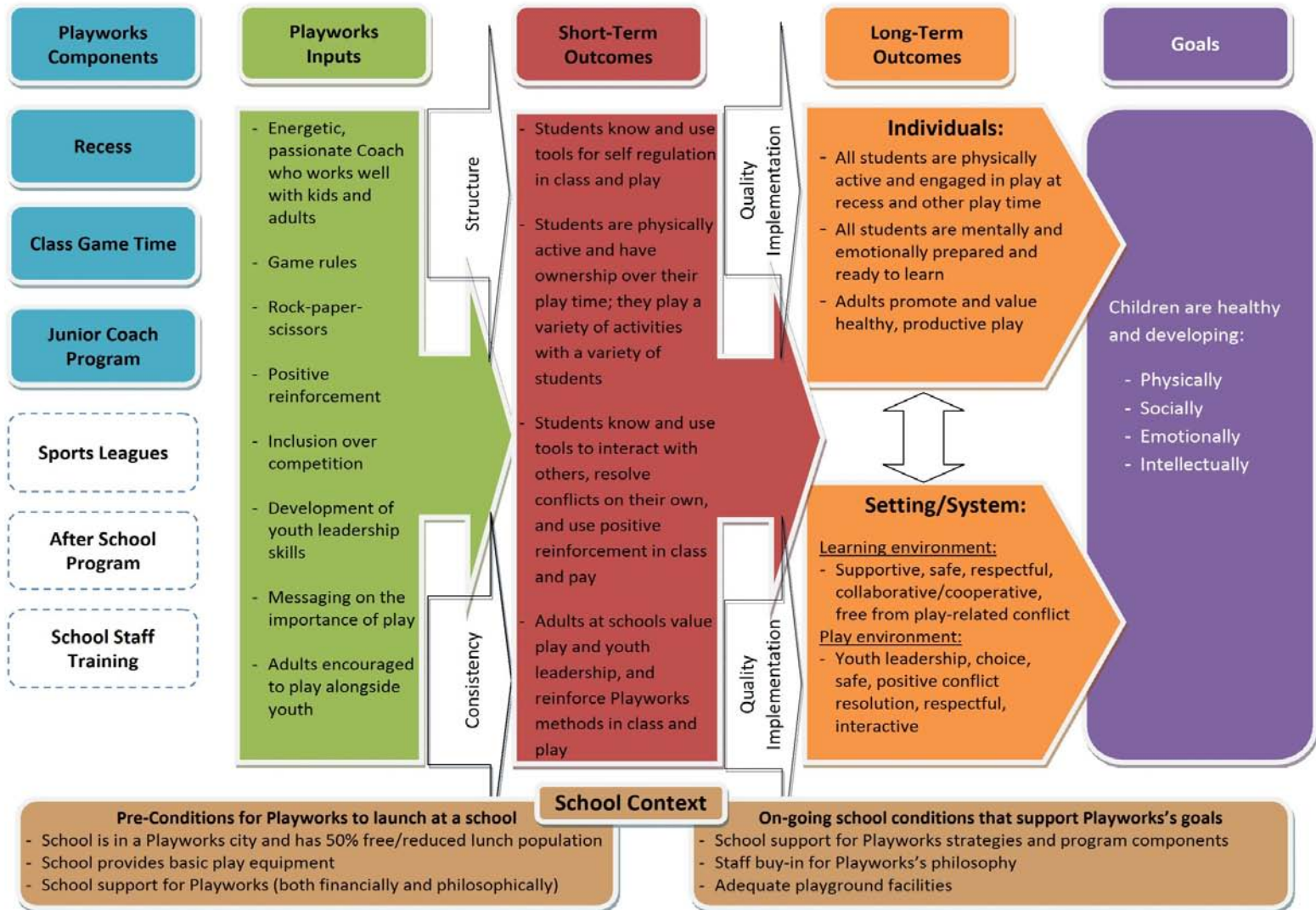
The long-term outcomes, represented by the orange column, are possible if certain school conditions (shown in the brown box in the bottom right corner) are met: support for Playworks components, philosophy, and required facilities. This support includes full and faithful implementation of the Playworks 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 4. Playworks Theory of Change





### III. Implementation of Core Playworks Components: Successes, Challenges, and Variation Across Schools

*“It’s more of a structured, fun [recess] environment out there... You can see whether they’re playing soccer, whereas, before, you weren’t sure what they were playing.”*

*Teacher, Fall 2009*

Playworks primarily focuses on creating a safe, organized, and engaging recess for students. Supporting this are two other components – junior coaches and class game time – but both provide value in their own right. In this section, we discuss the implementation of these three components at the six newly implementing schools.

#### Recess

Students at the six newly implementing schools had two recess periods each day, one at lunchtime and one either in the morning or the afternoon. According to principals and teachers, in past years recess had been marked by a lot of drama and discipline issues. Principals reported bringing Playworks to their schools in large part to change the recess climate by reducing conflict, improving recess safety, and introducing students to structured sports and games. This aligned well with the goals for recess reported by Playworks coaches, which included:

- Organizing games,
- Instituting school-wide rules for games,
- Making games fair,
- Decreasing conflict,
- Ensuring games were inclusive, and
- Making recess safe for students to play.

#### **Organization and Structure of the Play Yard**

Coaches began implementing Playworks by organizing the play yard, which included designating areas for each game and creating systems for checking out equipment. Four of the six newly implementing schools had a clear structure to their play yard within the first two months of the school year. At these schools there were five to seven different games available at recess and each game took place on a separate part of the play yard. Teachers and principals at these schools reported a more organized and accessible play yard at recess.

In contrast, the other two newly implementing schools did not achieve the same degree of structure on the play yard in the fall for several reasons. At one school, the principal felt that the coach was slow to roll out the program, which resulted in a more weakly implemented program in the fall compared to other schools. At the second school, the recess schedule, which overlapped for students in different grades, created chaos which interfered with the organization the Playworks coach was attempting to impose. Nonetheless, by springtime the organization of the play yard at this school had improved, especially with the opening of a previously closed play area.

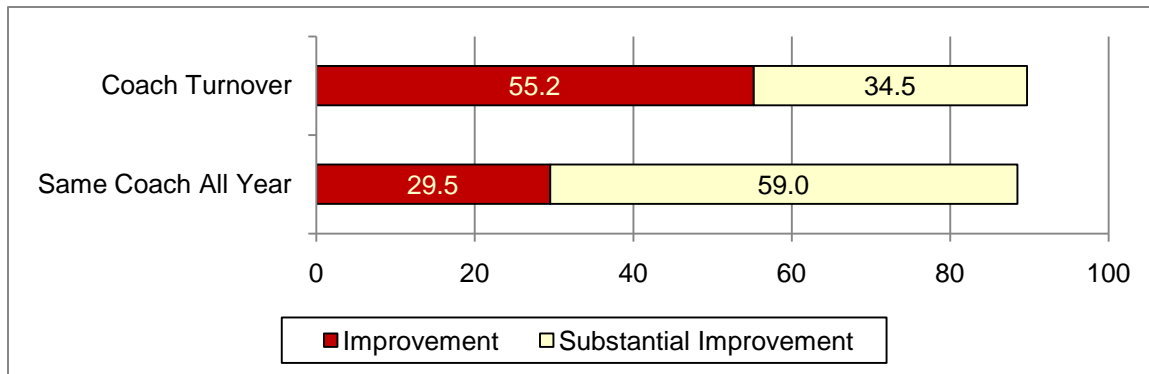
Early implementation of recess organization turned out to not be the strongest predictor of overall program implementation, however. The most critical determinant of play yard



organization and Playworks implementation overall was whether the original coach remained at the school for the entire school year. At two schools (one with a strong early implementation and one with a weaker early implementation), the original coach left mid-year and was replaced by a second, and in one case a third, coach. We discuss this transition process in section IV, but note here that the loss of the coach had detrimental effects on all aspects of the program, including play yard organization.

In the spring teacher survey, 89% of teachers across the six newly implementing schools reported there was improvement in recess organization from fall to spring. But opinions on the extent of the improvement differed at schools with and without coach turnover (Exhibit 5). A total of 35% of teachers at the two schools with coach turnover felt that there had been substantial improvement in recess organization, whereas 59% of teachers at the schools with the same coach all year felt there had been substantial improvement.

**Exhibit 5. Teachers’ Reported Improvements in Recess Organization**



Source: JGC tabulations from the spring teacher survey.

In the spring, principals at the four schools with the same coach all year reported that Playworks improved the structure of recess in the following ways:

- There were a variety of organized games available every day that were set out in different areas of the play yard,
- There was a coach to organize and lead games,
- Students knew and played by a common set of rules,
- There was equipment to support multiple games and activities,
- Students had learned a way to work out their minor conflicts using ro-sham-bo (rock-paper-scissors), and
- Students used positive language.

***Instituting Common Rules for Games***

An important strategy for improving play yard organization and engagement was teaching students a common set of rules to games they already knew and how to play new games. In the fall, coaches taught these rules and games during class game time and while playing alongside students during recess. By the time of our fall site visits, students had already learned the rules to most of the core games and were engaged in playing them during recess. Although many students accepted the commonly established rules, some did not. As one coach explained, “They don’t want anyone changing their rules, changing how they’ve been organizing it.” Coaches

needed to remain vigilant throughout the school year to ensure that students did not change the rules. One coach explained, “The rules of the games that they’re playing by now are not the rules they taught them at the beginning...unless you are watching them and you kind of make sure you’re floating through all the different games...they’re just going to make up rules.” Coaches agreed that maintaining the same set of rules to games throughout the school year was important to a well-run recess.

### **Equipment**

Having the right equipment for the play yard facilitated coaches’ abilities to teach new games. Teachers explained that the lack of appropriate equipment in past years prevented students from being able to play at recess. For example, students at one school had previously been unable to play dodgeball because “the equipment that we had really wasn’t conducive to them playing it...safely,” according to one teacher.

At two schools, coaches reported struggling at the beginning of the year because they did not have enough of the necessary equipment, including cones to mark off fields and different kinds of balls. One of these coaches felt that if the right supplies had been available earlier, implementation would have been faster and easier. Nonetheless, by the time of our fall observations these equipment issues had largely been resolved.

Equipment problems resurfaced later in the year at the two schools where there was coach turnover. During the transition between coaches, equipment was lost or scattered between classrooms and the new coaches were not always able to locate the right materials for the games they wanted to play. This affected the types and numbers of games that students could play, and according to one coach: “I think there [were] not as many people playing as...there were for awhile.” At this school, the principal agreed to order additional equipment toward the end of the year. At the other school where lack of equipment was a problem, the new coach reached out to coaches at other schools to obtain special equipment for a recess tournament.

### **Conflict Resolution Strategies**

A key reason principals gave for bringing Playworks to their schools was to address conflicts during recess. Both interviews and observations in the fall suggested that there were several consistent issues that caused conflict on the playground, including who got to be on what team, which person or team got to go first, whether or not someone was out, not sharing equipment, and not following the rules. By spring, the types of issues that caused conflict between students remained largely the same, but teachers and principals reported there were far fewer of these than there had been in prior years and that when they occurred they were more easily resolved.

Early in the year, coaches introduced ro-sham-bo as a tool for resolving conflict. They stressed that when there was a disagreement over something like which team should go first or whether a ball was inside or outside the line, students should use ro-sham-bo to decide the outcome so they could quickly get back to playing rather than waste their time arguing. Just a few months into the school year, the use of ro-sham-bo had made inroads into all six schools. Coaches reported resolving disputes between students with ro-sham-bo, and 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. At four of the five schools where

conflicts were observed, students generally utilized ro-sham-bo to resolve their conflicts only at the behest of a coach, junior coach, or yard monitor. By spring, students were more likely to use ro-sham-bo on their own. “At the beginning of the year it was like, ‘Alright, rock, paper, scissors.’ ...I kept reminding them and having to tell them but now the majority of them are doing it on their own,” explained one coach. We also observed students spontaneously using ro-sham-bo on the play yard, although this was not universally true. Only 37% of students reported using ro-sham-bo to resolve conflicts on the spring survey.

### ***Using Positive Language***

One other strategy for improving the recess climate mentioned at five of the six schools during our fall visits was to teach students to use positive language with each other on the play yard. When students got out in a game, teachers reported that they had been accustomed to yelling “You’re out!” or laughing at each other. Most of the coaches mentioned or were observed modeling more positive language, such as “Good job, nice try,” and giving of high fives to students who got out. However, this type of positive language was not widely heard among students in the fall. “They’re definitely not at the level yet of being like, ‘Good job, nice try,’ if somebody makes a mistake or doesn’t make a goal,” commented one coach.

By spring, the use of positive language on the play yard had spread, but was still far from universal. Just under half of teachers (49%) reported that students frequently encouraged each other with positive language. Junior coaches noted that they tried to use positive language on the play yard but that many other students did not. One coach felt that the positive language had made more inroads among younger students than older students. Nonetheless an upper grade teacher stated: “There’s a lot more collegiality...between the kids...They’re kind of ‘Hey, good job, nice try’ ...instead of ‘Ha ha, you’re out.’”

### **Junior Coach Program**

Playworks uses junior coaches, who are students in the upper grades, to assist the coach in providing a safe, structured and engaging recess for students. Junior coaches were a key aid to coaches at recess, and the program also provided students with valuable leadership experience.

#### ***Junior Coach Selection and Training***

All six schools served students in kindergarten through fifth grade, and in the fall, all of the schools recruited fifth graders to serve as junior coaches, and half the schools recruited several fourth graders as well. By spring, fourth graders were serving as junior coaches in five of the six schools, and one school even had a group of third graders regularly participating.

Junior coaches were selected through a combination of teacher recommendation, coach selection, and student interest. At one school, the coach first invited students to apply before asking for teaching recommendations. When over 100 students applied for the position, the coach selected an initial group of junior coaches based on teacher recommendations and then rotated a new group of students into the program every trimester. In the spring, teachers at this school expressed appreciation for the fact that so many students had the opportunity to serve as junior coaches. The coach, however, felt that rotating so many students through the program had not allowed students the chance to become experts at the job: “Having to go over the basics again

with each group was kind of hard. Instead of having a strong foundation for the junior coaches that could go throughout the year, you'd have to go and reiterate, 'Okay, remember rock-paper-scissors, and remember if there's any problems, you can go to a teacher, to myself if you can't handle it.'"

At the other five schools, coaches initially relied on teachers to recommend junior coaches and the selection criteria used across teachers and schools was not uniform. Some teachers recommended the best behaved and highest performing of their students. At one school where this occurred, the coach found that many of the students teachers recommended had difficulty asserting themselves with their peers on the playground. This coach then recruited other students who showed leadership on the playground, even though some had a history of behavioral problems. At another school, teachers seemed to apply their own criteria for selecting students, resulting in a diverse group of junior coaches. "One teacher...recommended their top students...Some of the teachers chose kids that maybe had potential but they thought that this would be a good opportunity to boost self-esteem. . . Some teachers chose kids that were behavioral problems because they thought that giving them that sense of responsibility would help them in the classroom," according to a teacher.

In the fall, two principals mentioned that they had been skeptical about how well some of the students with a history of behavioral issues would do as junior coaches, but they quickly saw the benefits of including such students. As one principal explained, "Some of the kids that I saw who were on [the list] at first, I thought, 'Oh, God, really? You want him?' But I get the point of, like, 'Yes, that's exactly the kid I want.'" In several instances, new students were added to the junior coach program during the course of the year in order to provide a leadership opportunity for students who were struggling behaviorally. In the spring, principals and teachers continued to be supportive of putting troubled kids into the leadership role, with one principal claiming that such students had "definitely risen to the occasion."

At least four of the five schools that planned to keep the same junior coaches for the entire year experienced junior coach attrition. In most of these cases, the junior coach was removed from the program either by a teacher – for misbehavior or failure to keep up academically – or by the coach – usually for not performing their duties on the play yard. In a handful of cases, junior coaches requested to leave the program, reportedly because they wanted to spend more time with their friends. In one school that experienced coach turnover, the new coach replaced every junior coach for failure to adequately perform their duties. School personnel felt that the junior coaches had enjoyed slacking off during the transition between coaches and were not willing to work hard again once the new coach came on board.

### ***Early Release and Missed Instructional Time***

At all six newly implementing schools there were separate recesses for lower and upper grades. In the fall, junior coaches were already working their own recesses at all six schools, but at two schools junior coaches were not released from class to work at younger students' recesses. At these two schools, either the principal or the fifth grade teaching team decided that releasing students would adversely affect their learning. At one of these schools, this policy was amended later in the year to allow junior coaches to leave class to assist with the younger students' recess one day a week. The principal at this school reported that teachers were not very enthusiastic

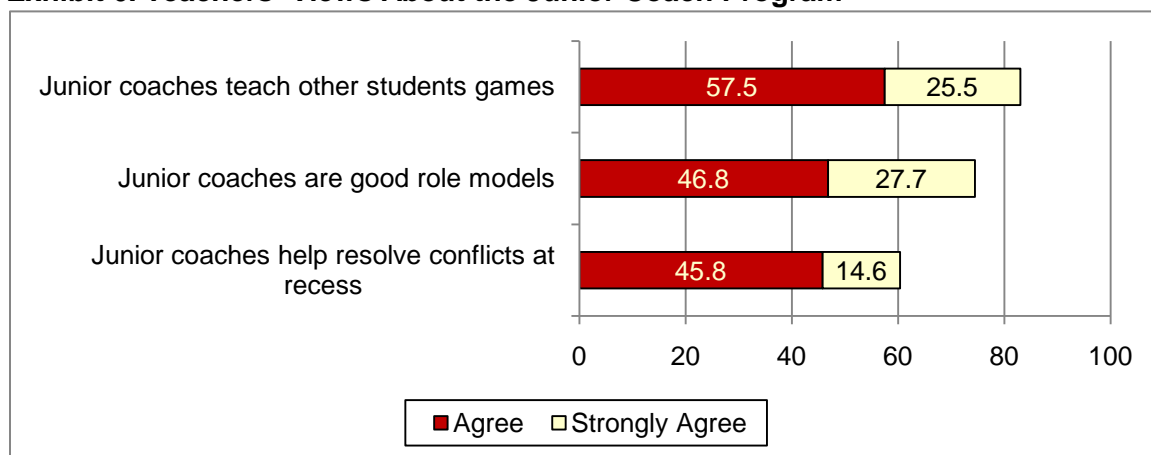
about this change but agreed to go along with it: “They want to help build the junior coach program. But I do believe there still is some hesitancy when it involves taking children out of class.” At the four schools where students were released early to serve as junior coaches, teachers and principals were mostly supportive of their early release over the course of the year, although several teachers expressed concerns about the effects of the missed instructional time on student achievement.

### **Junior Coach Role**

According to coaches, junior coaches played several roles on the play yard, including: organizing safe and inclusive games, acting as role models, assisting with conflict resolution, and handling equipment for games. To prepare them for these roles, coaches held monthly training sessions. At the beginning of the year, training was largely focused on teaching new games and how to handle conflict. Throughout the year, the topics changed to include leadership skills, discipline, and the use of positive language. Junior coaches generally seemed pleased with the trainings they received and felt they had helped them be better at their jobs.

In the fall, we observed junior coaches initiating games with younger students, playing games, resolving conflicts between students, and taking charge of equipment. Most junior coaches were taking their roles seriously, even if they had not yet gotten the hang of all aspects of the role. However, we also observed junior coaches at all schools not performing all their duties, including forgetting to use positive language and not stepping in to help resolve conflicts. One coach specifically mentioned that the junior coaches needed to get a better understanding of their roles and how to carry themselves on the play yard. By spring, junior coaches tended to know their jobs better but we observed varying levels of engagement. For example, we observed one junior coach at a school with otherwise strong implementation sitting with two friends who braided her hair. At another school with weaker implementation, we observed a junior coach sitting idly in the grass when it was not her turn to play tetherball. Coaches were not always watching their junior coaches because they were leading games themselves.

**Exhibit 6. Teachers’ Views About the Junior Coach Program**



Source: JGC tabulations from the spring teacher survey.

In both the fall and the spring, coaches had positive things to say about the junior coaches and felt they had made a difference at recess. Teachers were also mostly positive about the work of

the junior coaches. As shown in Exhibit 6, 83% teachers agreed or strongly agreed that junior coaches had taught other students games, 75% agreed that junior coaches were good role models, and 60% agreed that junior coaches helped to resolve conflicts at recess.

## **Class Game Time**

During class game time, the Playworks coach works with individual classrooms to connect with students, teach them new games, and demonstrate important Playworks concepts like inclusiveness and teamwork. Coaches also used class game time as an opportunity to model safe play, positive language, and conflict resolution strategies such as ro-sham-bo.

### ***Implementation of Class Game Time***

In the fall, coaches at all six schools had a similar formula for implementing class game time, with minor variations in activities based on the grade level of the students. It began with a fun icebreaker to engage students which was usually followed by a stretching exercise and then several games. Coaches modeled inclusiveness, tested for listening and understanding, and showed their enthusiasm for the games by playing alongside students. Class game time always ended with a group cheer, reinforcing inclusiveness and good sportsmanship. One teacher commented that class game time “helped with team building, with following directions...Some of those things naturally flow over into just their behavior and their attitudes throughout the day.”

At the two schools experiencing coach turnover, class game time in the spring was not implemented to the standards we observed in the fall. At one school, we observed the coach doing a dance activity during class game time that did not connect to what students could play at recess, although students nonetheless seemed to enjoy it. At the other school, we observed the new coach running class game time without the enthusiasm and conviction observed elsewhere. Students at this school seemed less engaged in class game time, and indeed fifth grade students reported less enjoyment of class game time in the spring (76%) than in the fall (98%).

### ***Scheduling and Participation in Class Game Time***

Factors such as school bell schedules, block schedules for academic enrichment, and the large number of classrooms needing to be scheduled posed some initial challenges for getting class game time up and running. Nonetheless, as early as the fall, coaches at all six newly implementing schools were running class game time for most classrooms. In general, class participated in class game time once or twice a month, but several teachers reported occasional scheduling conflicts that forced their students to miss class game time for a month or more.

Fifth grade teachers at three of the six schools were the least likely to have their students participate in class game time. The coach at one of these schools felt that recess had suffered for it: “These...classes do not know what’s going on at recess...So you know, when I...say, ‘I’m going to put out silver and gold today for recess,’ [they] don’t know what I’m talking about.” According to teachers and coaches, lack of participation was due to teachers’ reluctance to give up instructional time. This was reflected in the teacher survey, where a minority (20%) felt that class game time took away from students’ academic learning (Exhibit 7). Other teachers felt that class game time enhanced academic learning. “The skills that they’re learning outside with



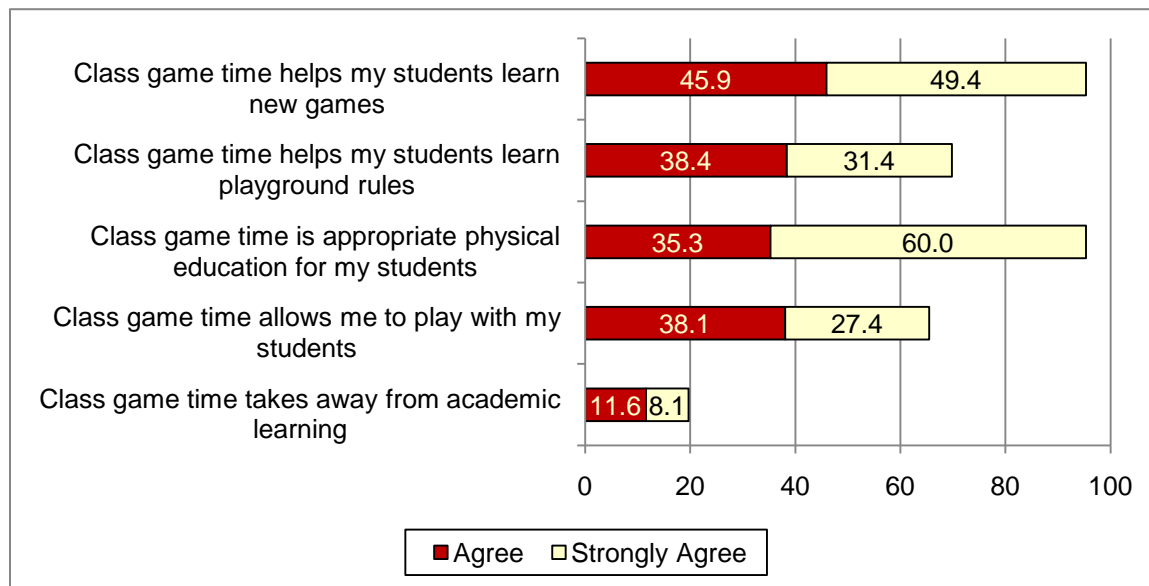
following...multi-step rules...they can transition that in math when they have a story problem,” commented one teacher.

Many teachers confused class game time with physical education (PE). This misunderstanding persisted throughout the year and may have contributed to some teachers’ unwillingness to participate. At all six schools, students in the upper grades had PE with a credentialed teacher and, as a result, many of their teachers felt that class game time was redundant. At the same time, teachers’ conflation of class game time with PE may have contributed to its popularity among teachers in the younger grades, who often did not have scheduled time with a credentialed PE teacher. As one teacher explained, “It’s an opportunity for...K, 1, and 2 teachers to give their kids a real PE.” In fact, 95% of teachers responding to the teacher survey agreed or strongly agreed that class game was an appropriate PE for their students.

### **Teacher Participation in Class Game Time**

Playworks encourages teachers to participate in games along with students, but our interviews and observations suggested that this did not occur regularly. Instead, teachers simply observed their class, disciplined their students when they were not listening or following the rules, or completed their own work during class game time. One teacher explained, “Mostly what I do is I walk around and I just make sure that they’re really listening to [the coach] and following [the coach’s] rules.” Still, 66% of teachers felt that class game time provided them with opportunities to play with their students. Teachers also suggested that they learned new games and techniques to use on their own when doing PE with their classes.

### **Exhibit 7. Teachers’ Views of Class Game Time**



Source: JGC tabulations from the spring teacher survey.

Only a handful of teachers seemed to understand the purpose of class game time as supporting a healthy, safe, and engaging recess. One such teacher explained, “They can practice some of the games and kind of see how fun they are, so that when they go out to recess and [the coach] is playing them, they know about them and want to play.” Others simply saw it as an opportunity for students to play.



## IV. Key Factors Influencing Successful Program Implementation

*He was [coach] from day one... First two minutes, he had 150 kids lined up doing whatever he asked. There was no... 'What do I do?' There was no warm-up time. He was just dynamic from the beginning.*

*Principal, Established School, Winter 2010*

As was discussed in section II of this report, there are inputs that Playworks provides that when implemented consistently and with appropriate structure, and combined with staff support for the program, are expected to lead to improved student and school climate outcomes. In this section we discuss the factors that are associated with a successful program implementation. Although there is not a formal rubric that defines strong versus weak implementation, we relied on the presence of the following in our assessments:

- Recess was structured and organized with students engaged and playing, coaches engaged with students, junior coaches doing their jobs, positive and inclusive language, and conflicts are resolved quickly.
- Teachers, principals, and other staff were knowledgeable about Playworks and supportive of its values and goals.
- School policies and structures supported Playworks activities and goals.

A number of factors influenced the extent of Playworks implementation across the study schools. Among the most important were: Staff training and introduction to Playworks, coach characteristics, coach turnover, school policies and structures that supported Playworks.

### Early Staff Training and Introduction to Playworks

Staff training at the implementing school is an important component of the Playworks model. It is intended to provide teachers and other school personnel with a solid understanding of the Playworks philosophy, an overview of program components, and exposure to key strategies and techniques. We found that an early training of school staff set the stage for a quick roll-out of program components, teacher buy-in and understanding of Playworks philosophy, and easy integration of the coach into the school culture.

The timing of this initial staff orientation to Playworks varied significantly across schools:

- Two schools received staff training early, during the first few weeks of school.
- One school received staff training in mid-fall, during October.
- Two schools received staff training late, during December or January.
- One school did not receive staff training at all.

In the two newly implementing schools with very early Playworks introduction, both coaches supplemented the training with additional outreach to teachers to introduce themselves and the program more fully. They also introduced Playworks to parents during back-to-school night. Teachers in these schools were quick to value the program, sign up for class game times, and integrate the coach into the staff. Both of these coaches had some previous experience with Playworks, which may have provided them the insight and confidence to reach out to school staff

in this way. Both gained teacher and parent support for the program early and effectively which laid the groundwork for comprehensive implementation.

Teachers in the three newly implementing schools where training happened very late or not at all indicated with much more frequency during spring interviews that they did not have a strong understanding of how the Playworks program components were intended to operate. In fact one teacher was very clear that earlier training would have better supported the implementation of the junior coach program and provided guidelines for how junior coaches should be selected.

Another teacher, from the school that received no training, commented, “I think it would have been nice to have (the coach) or someone come in at a staff meeting and really explain why they’re here...our principal told us that they...would help with playground conflicts and give kids things to do, but I don’t think we necessarily understand that much about the program.”

Playworks intends for this school training to be provided by Playworks staff and coaches early in the school year. Scheduling the trainings seemed to be the main challenge. However, interviewees disagreed some about whether the principal, the coach, or Playworks supervisor was responsible for taking the lead in making this happen.

Regardless of timing, where it occurred, teachers described Playworks’ training as high-quality, fun, and worthwhile. The trainings were primarily run by Playworks program managers, usually with the coach present. Nearly all teachers surveyed and interviewed reported that participation in the training provided them with a good understanding of the Playworks program (87%) and philosophy (92%), introduced them to new games (92%), and gave them an opportunity to get to know their coach (84%). To a lesser degree, the training also supported teachers in learning new conflict resolution strategies (52%), and techniques to help students be more inclusive (66%) and support one another (67%).

It is clear that early training supported the successful implementation of Playworks programs in a variety of ways. It facilitated the coach’s integration into the school culture, it built teacher understanding and support for the Playworks program components, and it provided a launching pad to get each of the programs up and running quickly. Schools that did not receive this orientation early in the school year were less likely to have teacher buy-in and support of critical aspects of the program such as participating in class game time and allowing junior coaches to participate in younger students’ recesses.

## **Well-Trained and Connected Coaches**

A well-trained and committed coach was universally seen as critical to the success of the Playworks program at all schools. Playworks was perceived to be thriving in schools where the coach was viewed as prepared, personally committed to the role, and well connected to the staff and students. The program suffered and was less likely to be supported by school staff in cases where the coach was seen as poorly trained and lacking charisma, enthusiasm, and communication skills.

### ***Training and Support from Playworks***

All of the Playworks coaches interviewed reported that they received strong training and supervisory support from Playworks. With the exception of two of the replacement coaches at schools with coach turnover, all coaches received the week-long intensive training at the beginning of the year. They appreciated, were impressed by, and enjoyed it. They particularly enjoyed the experiential aspects of the training – learning new games by playing them instead of simply learning about them in a classroom setting. Coaches also reported that the training taught them to use specific strategies to engage students, to check for listening and understanding, and to help students develop skills to resolve conflicts. Coaches agreed that the 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.

Coaches also had access to strong support and training from their supervisors. Five of eight coaches interviewed reported that they received positive, proactive supervision from Playworks. They indicated that their supervisors initiated regular visits to their sites, offered constructive feedback and support, participated in games with students, and modeled Playworks strategies. Nearly every coach reported that his or her Playworks supervisor was responsive to requests for help or advice. One coach summed it up by saying, “they’re here when you need them.”

The coach training and supervision provided by Playworks did not appear to adequately address the professional and interpersonal skills needed for working effectively in a school setting, things often new to a young coach first entering this type of job. Coaches were tentative about reaching out to teachers, parents, and the principal and were not always comfortable discussing the benefits of the program components. Several principals suggested that it would be beneficial for Playworks coaches to be trained in how to better communicate and interact with school staff.

Coaches could benefit from additional “soft skills” training as well. While we were visiting one school, a coach left for a doctor’s appointment without making arrangements in advance to cancel the after school program. At another school, there was tension between the all female staff and the coach, who was the only male in the school, which eventually destabilized the Playworks program. While some situations are unexpected or unavoidable, these examples illustrate the need for coaches to be prepared to handle themselves professionally and with maturity, and to know when to bring a problem to the attention of their supervisor to access support.

### ***Coach Charisma, Characteristics, and Commitment***

Teachers and principals cited the following characteristics as the key ingredients of a great coach: energetic and enthusiastic, charismatic, positive, flexible, and supportive of students. They also consistently described a strong coach as one who enjoys playing with children, knows students’ names, communicates well, maintains clear expectations of students, moves around the playground engaging as many children as possible, and teaches teamwork and sportsmanship.

Students in nearly all spring junior coach focus group interviews agreed that they liked their coach and had a good relationship with him or her. The majority of teachers surveyed (87%) and interviewed in the spring concurred, reporting that students in their schools felt connected to

their current coach. Most teachers (81%) also said that their coach communicated well with students and used appropriate techniques when working with the children.

The coaches who were most admired were also those who expressed their own commitment to the work, a desire to “give back to the community” and be a mentor, and came from a background similar to that of their students. In schools where coaches had many of these characteristics, the Playworks coach and program were reportedly well integrated into the school culture by the end of the year. In schools where coaches were lacking these qualities, relationships were not as strong with staff or students and implementation of the program was not as deep.

A coach’s capacity to establish strong relationships with school staff was important to his or her overall ability to be effective in the role. Principals at nearly all of the schools believed that regular meetings with the coach were important to be able to communicate effectively with their staff about the program and to provide the coach with the support needed to run the program well. In five of the eight schools, the principal and coach appeared to have an effective working relationship, but in the other schools, principals expressed a concern that their collaboration with the coach could have been better. Over three-quarters of teachers surveyed believed that their coach worked well and communicated effectively with staff. However, coaches had somewhat more challenging (or absent) relationships with fifth grade teachers who were often reluctant to engage in the class game time and junior coach programs.

The programs we observed at newly implementing schools did not have a plan for communicating with parents of all students. At one school the coach explained that her inability to speak Spanish prevented her from being able to communicate with some parents the way she wanted and the way Playworks encouraged. The principal at this school thought that the lack of communication with parents went beyond a language barrier and that there needed to be specific communication geared toward all parents, not just parents of junior coaches, about how recess had changed, about the after school program, and, where applicable, about coach turnover.

### ***Coach Turnover***

Coach turnover during the school year significantly altered the course of Playworks implementation. In two of the six newly implementing schools, coach turnover resulted in unavoidable gaps in programs, a perceived loss of progress in terms of recess structure and organization, and uncertainty about how the program would weather the transition. Some turnover is to be expected in a program such as Playworks which hires young coaches straight out of college. While replacing a coach mid-year presents challenges, with strong support and communication these transitions might go smoothly with minimal long-term negative impact.

Playworks was credited with quickly sending substitute coaches to both schools. In fact, nearly 75% of teachers surveyed agreed that Playworks provided a new permanent coach in a timely manner and was sensitive to their school’s needs during the transition. Still, during coach transitions there were noted gaps in services and the program’s momentum was at least temporarily stalled. In these schools, some teachers interviewed in the spring reported they had felt uncertain about when and how the junior coach program would proceed and confusion about class game time scheduling. More than half of the teachers surveyed at these two schools also

reported a change in how recess operated during the transition and less structure on the playground. One principal suggested that because the organization of recess had faltered, students' physical activity levels had "dropped back off." The other principal commented that, "Some old, bad, behaviors are resurfacing again (at recess)...we're needing more supervision than (the new coach) can give right now."

Spring interviews with coaches, teachers and principals confirmed that the new coach's initial transition into the school was at least temporarily challenging and required substantial support. As new hires, two of the three replacement coaches had not received the intensive week-long training at the beginning of the year (the one who did receive the training had only a brief stint as replacement coach before he resigned). As a result, these new coaches were less prepared when they arrived and needed additional support. Playworks supervisors and other experienced coaches provided on-site training during the first few weeks, but this was perceived as insufficient by the coaches and the principals at both schools. In fact, both principals contacted Playworks with concerns about their new coaches and requested additional training and support on the playground.

Principals and teachers at both schools reported that strong proactive communication was essential during coach transition. Students and parents were not formally notified that their coach had left and new coaches were not formally introduced to students and parents. This was challenging because students were upset to learn that their coach had left, even if they eventually bonded with the new coach. One teacher reported, "It was...difficult because the kids were pretty close to (the first coach), so they did miss him, you know, quite a bit. It was kind of hard on them for a while but...(the new coach) is just as good. They've really gotten to know him and he's kind of made his own place here."

The new coaches were faced with challenges when they arrived in their positions. They were confronted with establishing relationships with students and staff who were often surprised and saddened by the departure of the old coach. They met with some initial resistance by students and staff when they made changes to the program components or asserted their own style. And, they faced a steep learning curve, coming into a new position with limited training. These barriers were felt most acutely by the coaches themselves and noticed by the principals who were confronted with a major program and staffing change at their schools.

## **School Factors Influencing Implementation**

Existing school policies and practices influenced Playworks implementation in a number of ways. In the fall, three coaches identified aspects of recess that they hoped to change, including limited play equipment and policies about where and what students could play at recess. At one school, an entire section of the play yard was off limits because it was out of sight of the rest of the yard making it difficult to monitor. However, this space provided crucial play space as it had ground markings for four-square and other Playworks games. By the end of the year, the coach successfully negotiated to reopen this area at recess largely because he taught students how to play four-square and regulate their own games. Allowing some students to play on the previously off-limits space created a less crowded and less chaotic play yard overall.



At another school, the coach successfully reversed a ban on the game tag, which had been deemed as too violent. The coach was able to demonstrate that “butterfly hands” – light touches – could reduce the physical aspect of the game. At a third school, soccer had come very close to being banned in the previous year. As one student told us, “last year [we had] a severe problem with soccer...because people were acting very bad...they would call people bad words and tackle people and hit them.” With Playworks leading the game, soccer remained one of the most popular recess activities because the coach was able to keep the game running smoothly by teaching students to resolve their conflicts and keep the game going.

In other cases, coaches were unable to influence policies and practices that had significant implications for Playworks implementation. The two types of policies that were most difficult for coaches to change were discipline policies and school schedules. Discipline policies that affected Playworks implementation included yard monitor or teacher practices such as sitting students out of recess to complete school work or as punishment for poor in-class behavior. In some cases, teachers used participation in Playworks activities like class game time as a privilege that could be revoked as punishment. In the spring at all six newly implementing schools, we observed at least one discipline policy in use that prevented students from being active and engaged in play during recess or class game time. One coach described preferring teachers to use Playworks as an incentive for good behavior, “I want the teachers to use it to their advantage. I want them to use that as a power tool for them. I definitely work with the teachers to know who’s doing good and know who’s not doing good.” Other coaches were not as concerned with these policies and reported wanting to support teachers by going along with them. One principal spoke about encouraging teachers not to revoke recess as a punishment, saying teachers “may get more out of [their] kids now if [they] let them go out and run for the 15 minutes” than if they hold them in during recess. Still, some coaches and junior coaches also used the practice of sitting students out or “benching” as a threat to elicit appropriate behavior among students at recess.

School academic and recess schedules also affected Playworks implementation in a number of ways. In some schools, including the four in our study that were in Program Improvement status,<sup>7</sup> schedules were designed to provide large, uninterrupted blocks of time for instruction. This meant that coaches were only able to schedule class game times during certain times of the day, that teachers did not sign up for class game times because they could not spare the time away from instruction, that junior coaches were not allowed to leave their classrooms early to supervise recess, or that large numbers of students had recess at the same time resulting in crowded play yards. Two coaches were able to reach a compromise with the principal over scheduling and another negotiated re-opening a section of the play yard to reduce overcrowding. At several other schools, coaches navigated scheduling directly with teachers, including working with teachers to make sure junior coaches were on top of their class work so they were allowed to leave class early or offering additional time slots for class game times.

In two schools, junior coaches were not permitted to supervise younger students’ recesses for much of the year. However, in the spring, the principal agreed to let junior coaches out of class early on Fridays to do this. Because of the instrumental role that junior coaches played at recess,

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<sup>7</sup> In California, all schools that do not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) are identified for Program Improvement under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and subject to special requirements under state and federal law. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ti/programimprov.asp>

coaches at these two schools experienced more challenges at recess. Without junior coaches, younger students' recesses had fewer games available and one coach felt that this policy negatively affected what could be accomplished on the play yard. Rather than establishing multiple games for small groups of students, this coach played games with large groups of up to 30 students.

Other harder to measure factors also had important implications for the success of Playworks, including school leadership and core school values. At one established school, for example, teachers thought very highly of the principal and there appeared to be a great deal of cohesion and engagement among staff. As one teacher put it, "We work really together...we stand by each other...every kid's my kid...We don't really see it as anything less than a community." Playworks benefited from this unity; the program was embraced by staff and teachers reported that it supported the work they were already doing toward community building. We did not observe this same cohesion at the other established school, where staff did not talk about Playworks fitting into their broader school culture. Teachers and administrators seemed to know little about Playworks' strategies and values, despite its having been on campus for six years. Most staff at that school felt Playworks had led to some minor changes at the school, but that these were limited primarily to changes in how recess was structured and did not reach into the classroom or influence school climate.

Leadership and core values also influenced implementation at first-year Playworks schools. At two schools, Playworks was part of a school-wide effort to improve school culture and the program thrived because it shared a set of core values that the school community was already working toward. At another school, relationships between staff and the administration soured during the course of the year and distrust of the principal was high in the spring. Playworks was much less successful at this school and it was unclear whether it would be asked back for the subsequent year.

Adapting to school context requires flexibility and in some cases alters program implementation. Despite being trained to implement a very clear model of Playworks, coaches were also encouraged to be flexible, and to accommodate school policies and culture. By the end of the year it was clear that coaches had been creative, reaching compromises over school policies, and in some cases reversing policies that were impeding implementation. In these instances, Playworks successfully influenced school policy only after building trust and relationships with school staff. It was also clear that hard-to-measure school factors, like climate and culture, had large influences over Playworks implementation. Playworks was most successful in schools where it aligned with pre-existing efforts to improve or maintain specific school values and where strong principals and teachers promoted and valued the program. Playworks had difficulty in schools without clearly defined values, or without strong leadership even when those leaders advocated for the program.



## V. How Playworks Affects Students, Adults, and School Climate

*“We’ve just seen a really big change in the overall climate. The kids are really excited to go out to recess, and they’re doing things together, and they’re doing things that are organized. Resolving conflicts makes everyone just happier and happier to come to school.”*

*Teacher, Spring 2010*

In the spring, students, coaches, teachers, and principals identified six main areas as having changed during the course of the year, and attributed those changes to Playworks: recess, conflict and conflict resolution, junior coach leadership, classroom behavior, school climate, and adult behaviors and attitudes. It is important to note that this study was not intended to measure the specific impact of Playworks on student, teacher, or school outcomes. Rather, it explores the ways respondents feel the program has affected their school and describes the conditions that supported or did not support these changes.

### **Playworks Recess**

*“As soon as Playworks came on campus and the games were learned, I saw a completely different set of play ethos out on the blacktop and on the play field. Just a lot more organized, and kids just having fun.”*

*Teacher, Spring 2010*

Playworks is designed to support a productive and positive recess experience for all students and not surprisingly, most teachers and principals indicated that recess was the place where the program had its largest effect. Respondents identified changes that they experienced or observed at recess since Playworks was implemented, including student engagement in play, conflict, safety, inclusion, and self-regulation.

### **Recess Engagement and Enjoyment**

As discussed in section II, Playworks uses play as a vehicle for fostering the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of school-age children. A key reason to organize and structure the play yard is to increase student engagement in games at recess. Principals and teachers overwhelmingly reported that students played very few organized games at recess before Playworks arrived, and at all six newly implementing schools, student engagement in play at recess increased dramatically in just the first few weeks of the school year. “From the very first week [the coach] was here...out of 120 kids or so, there was maybe a group of 10 kids that weren’t actually engaged in a game, which was so the opposite of what we’ve been seeing the last few years,” commented one teacher. Another teacher mentioned that students in past years had frequently asked to stay inside during recess, but stated that this no longer occurred on a regular basis since Playworks had come to her school. Another teacher reported: “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.”

The increase in student engagement occurred simultaneously with students learning to better initiate and sustain their own play at recess. Initially, coach presence was required for students to start games and keep them going, but as the year progressed, students became more adept at doing this on their own. One teacher shared in the spring that she had given her students ten

minutes of class time to play and was pleasantly surprised to find that “immediately they started doing their own thing and I didn’t have to direct.” At the end of the year, 68% of teachers surveyed said that students were able to initiate games on their own without involvement from the coach or junior coaches either often or very often, and 78% indicated that students’ abilities to start and sustain games at recess without adult involvement had improved or substantially improved over the course of the year.

In focus groups, fifth graders reported that as students became more engaged, they also developed their skills in the various sports and activities available to them on the play yard by watching and playing new games. One student stated, “Kids...say they want to learn how to play basketball, so they watch basketball games and they learn...new moves.” By developing new skills, students were also able to expand the repertoire of games they were willing to play at recess. “There was this one child last year, all he did was basketball. And this year, I saw how he rotated through the games,” shared one teacher.

Overwhelmingly, principals, teachers, and students at five of the six newly implementing schools and one of the two established schools expressed the sentiment that students enjoyed recess much more since Playworks had come to their schools because there were more games to choose from, there was less conflict on the play yard, and students felt more included. Teachers also noted that their students were having more fun. Students were particularly likely to focus on the effects of having more games available to play at recess. “When we didn’t have...Playworks... everything was kind of boring...Now that [Coach] is here, we have more games, we have more fun,” commented one student.

Enjoyment of Playworks activities differed somewhat by gender. In the fall, boys and girls reported equally enjoying Playworks activities including recess, class game time, and sports and activities. By spring, enjoyment of these activities was slightly higher among boys than girls. This is likely related to the higher participation among boys, discussed later in this section. Teachers and principals related the increased inclusion and reduced conflict on the play yard to increased student engagement and happiness at recess.

### ***Recess Safety***

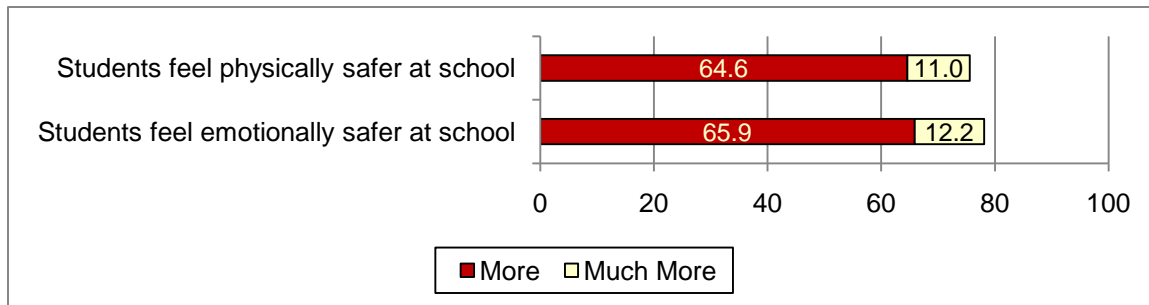
Teachers and principals reported a clear link between the increased structure that Playworks brought to the school and an improvement in students’ recess engagement; the intermediate factor that linked these was an increased sense of safety at recess and throughout the school day. According to teachers and principals, improved safety resulted from a combination of several factors, including:

- Students learning to play games in safer ways,
- More structure and organization on the recess yard,
- Improved conflict resolution skills (to be discussed in a later section),
- The use of more positive language (e.g., good job, nice try), and
- A greater sense of inclusion on the play yard.

In the spring, 77% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt safe at school. About three quarters of teachers surveyed reported that students felt emotionally (78%) and physically (75%) safer at school by the end of the year (Exhibit 8). “The kids are just happier at recess and lunch.

They feel safer. They feel that they have something to look forward to,” explained one principal. In fact, prior to Playworks, recess at this principal’s school was described as being so chaotic and unsafe that the principal had offered to pay teachers to keep students in their classrooms at lunch. An important example of improved safety cited by four teachers at one school was better supervision of soccer by the Playworks coach, a traditionally aggressive game on their campus. They all agreed that, with the coach’s support, soccer had become more structured, inclusive, and physically safe with far fewer reports of game generated conflict. A principal at an established school thought that feeling safer was key to students looking forward to recess and lunch and being happier during these periods. Feelings of safety were also linked to other developmental outcomes, including connectedness to adults and peers at school.

**Exhibit 8. Teachers Views’ of Changes in Student Safety**



Source: JGC tabulations from the spring teacher survey.

***Inclusion on the Play Yard***

One of Playworks’ core values is inclusion, which is fostered by providing non-competitive games that everyone is invited to participate in regardless of gender, grade, or athletic ability. Inclusion is also encouraged by teaching students to use positive language. One coach felt that Playworks’ emphasis on inclusion set it apart from other physical activity classes and programs: “It’s not about your own physical personal performance; it’s just about having fun and making sure everyone’s included.”

Coaches and teachers reported that Playworks made efforts to ensure that all students felt welcome to play together. The coach at one school recalled talking to the third graders about needing to include younger students in their games. A number of teachers stated that girls often did not want to participate in boy-dominated games, but that coaches made efforts to include them. We observed many boys and girls playing games such as tetherball and four-square together, but less integration in sports like soccer and basketball.

Several coaches described attempting to foster inclusion by limiting the number of balls available to students so that anyone who wanted to play a game, such as soccer, was obliged to join the “official” game. This forced students to play together rather than allowing the most elite players to form a separate game. Unfortunately, we observed at least two instances where this strategy failed because coaches took balls away from students who had started their own games, but instead of joining the official game (which was more competitive) the students played only for a short time or did not join the game at all.

Still, the result of Playworks’ efforts to foster inclusion paid dividends, according to teachers. Most teachers surveyed (82%) felt that Playworks increased students’ feelings of being included in group activities at recess. “Students feel...more welcome to play with other kids,” shared one teacher. Another teacher said that students felt “comfortable enough just to come and ask what team they’re put on.” In the spring, 69% of fifth grade students agreed that they could join a game on the play yard, although only 38% of teachers felt that students frequently encouraged others to join their games. Both students and teachers noted that students who would not have played together in the past had begun to interact on the play yard. As one junior coach noted, “I get to meet more people. I don’t really care if my friends are first graders or second graders, they might still be cool...because they might be from another culture, and...they can tell me about their culture and I can tell them about my culture.”

### **Optional Participation in Playworks**

Participation in Playworks games and activities at recess was encouraged, but optional. Coaches made efforts to invite students who were wandering or not involved in any activity to play a game, but at no school were students required to participate. Because engagement increased so quickly once Playworks arrived, we surmise that many children were receptive to the types of play opportunities afforded by Playworks. Yet, at every recess we observed students engaged in non-Playworks-driven activities, including playing on play structures, participating in imaginary or fantasy play, and walking and talking with friends. As shown in Exhibit 9, about half of fifth grade students reported sitting or standing at some point during recess (53% in the fall, 50% in the spring) and nearly all reported talking with friends (91% in the fall, 90% in the spring). We did not survey younger students, but our recess observations indicated that students in first and second grades were more likely than older students to play on a play structure or engage in fantasy play, and were less likely to walk and talk with friends.

**Exhibit 9. Students’ Enjoyment of and Engagement in Play Opportunities**

	Fall		Spring	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
<i>How much do you agree with the following statements? (Using a Five-Point Scale from Disagree A Lot to Agree A Lot)</i>	<i>% Responding “Agree A Lot” or “Agree A Little”</i>			
I enjoy recess	96%	91%	94%	90%
I like to play games and sports	97%	89%	97%	87%
I feel like I can join in a game on the playground	78%	69%	76%	63%
<i>At school, how often do you...? (Using a Five-Point Scale from Never to A Lot)</i>	<i>% Responding “A Lot” or “Sometimes”</i>			
Stand or sit someplace during recess	47%	58%	45%	55%
Talk with friends during recess	88%	93%	89%	92%
Play a game or sport with other students during recess	83%	72%	91%	77%
Stay involved in a game or sport during recess	81%	64%	83%	70%
<i>Number of Fifth Grade Students</i>	204	195	199	200

Source: JGC tabulations from the fall and spring fifth grade student surveys.

According to teachers and students, there were several reasons why some students chose not to engage in games, including difficulties with social interaction, not finding anything of interest to play, feeling “too cool” to play games, or simply preferring to talk with friends. Girls were more likely than boys to be uninvolved, and this was particularly true among older girls. In the spring,

91% of fifth grade boys reported playing games and sports at recess compared to 77% of girls. Conversely, girls reported spending more time than boys standing or sitting someplace during recess or talking with friends. One teacher commented, “The girls don’t tend to get involved in [soccer and dodge ball] as much...If [Coach] leads a game with them, they’ll play, but they don’t want to get involved.” Another teacher observed, “It’s mostly boys out there playing and being *really* active.” Despite this, 77% of teachers reported in the spring survey that girls’ engagement in games at recess had improved at least somewhat over the course of the year. The principal of one school felt that girls from all grades were more likely to participate only in select games, such as tag, hula hoop, and jump rope. Students also noted these gender differences. One student commented, “Some people just like to hang out with their friends and talk instead of playing a game, especially the girls.”

### **Physical Activity**

Recess and play provide students with opportunities to be physically active. Research indicates that students are more likely to engage in physical activity at recess under the following circumstances: (1) adults help to structure recess games and prompt students to get engaged, (2) students have access to adequate space and equipment, and (3) students are allowed to spend time outdoors. Exhibit 10 illustrates the hypothesized relationship for how Playworks increases physical activity.

#### **Exhibit 10. Theory of How Playworks Leads to Increased Physical Activity**



Although every teacher and principal we spoke with felt that Playworks had increased play at their school, there was less consensus on whether the increase in play had resulted in an increase in physical activity. On the teacher survey, a large but not unanimous percentage of teachers (82%) indicated that there had been some degree of improvement in students’ physical activity at recess. During interviews, principals and teachers gave more mixed impressions, with some perceiving major improvement and others reporting little to no improvement. Among teachers and principals we interviewed at the newly implementing schools, 38% felt there had been a large improvement in student activity levels because of Playworks, 50% felt there had been a moderate improvement, or improvement for only certain groups, and the remainder – who were from different schools – felt that physical activity levels had not changed.

Those who noted improvements in physical activity level attributed it to the increased availability of organized games, availability of appropriate equipment, improved conflict resolution, and an increase in inclusiveness which led more students to participate in games. One teacher commented, “You don’t see as many kids standing around or sitting on benches or just being in groups...Now they are more physically active than before.”

Fourth and fifth grade teachers were the most likely to state that they had not seen large improvements in physical activity. This could be due to the lower engagement levels of girls in



the upper grades. Upper grade teachers were also the least likely to have their classes participate in class game time, which prevented students from being exposed to games and also limited their knowledge of how to play them, possibly affecting their willingness play at recess.

In addition, most of the schools had large play structures that students – particularly younger students – liked to play on, and we observed that the physical activity levels of students on the play structure were lower than those of students engaged in games such as soccer or jump rope. Younger students’ low skill levels prevented them from becoming very physically active while playing some games that required coordination they did not yet possess, which in some cases also limited their abilities to maintain high levels of activity for very long. However, this does not necessarily indicate a lower quality of play.

### **Conflict and Conflict Resolution**

*“Playworks made a great contribution to the kids and how they treat each other. The students know how to solve a problem and how to work with each other and cooperate.”*

*Teacher, Spring 2010*

One of the primary reasons principals gave for bringing Playworks to their schools was to help reduce conflicts on the playground. They had high expectations that the Playworks program and philosophy would support this goal and described recess in previous years as chaotic, unsafe, and stressful for teachers and students.

Every principal interviewed in the spring reported that there was significantly less physical conflict at recess since Playworks arrived. One principal described “constant fights” in the year before Playworks and reported an 80% reduction in suspensions after Playworks was implemented. Another principal said that the number of serious behavioral incidents was less than 10% of what it had previously been. All of the principals reported fewer students being sent to the office during recess and fewer conflicts requiring intervention from an administrator. Teachers interviewed from five of the six newly implementing schools agreed. As one teacher described it, “Last year, we were putting out fires for 20 minutes if we had yard duty.”

Nearly half of the teachers surveyed in the spring (including some from each school) reported less bullying at their schools since Playworks was implemented. According to a teacher at one school, “Bullying has virtually been eliminated by having...constructive activities at recess, so [Playworks has] made a really big difference.” Another said, “I had kids that [used to] ask to stay inside with me...and do something else because they didn’t feel safe at recess time. But this year, when you go outside, it feels completely different...the number of kids who are actually doing something physical, organized, and not being mean to each other has significantly increased.” Nearly 80% of teachers surveyed in the spring reported an improvement (41%) or substantial improvement (37%) in the amount of conflict at recess.

Not everyone agreed that bullying had been reduced or eliminated. About 20% of teachers surveyed indicated an increase in bullying levels at their schools by springtime and 30% reported no change. Of those who reported more bullying, half were teachers from one of the two schools that experienced coach turnover. Teachers and principals at these two schools agreed that there was a rise in playground conflict during the coach transition period and that they did not see the

reduction in conflicts that they might have if their original coach had remained. In spite of these setbacks, principals at both of these schools maintained that, overall, serious conflicts and physical fights had been reduced at their schools compared to the previous year.

Junior Coaches from three schools reported that there was less conflict and physical fighting at recess since the arrival of Playworks. One student said, “Well, I’ve been here for six years and ...there was a lot of arguing until Playworks came.” However, junior coaches from the other three newly implementing schools did not report a similar improvement, with many citing ongoing conflict at recess during spring focus groups. The fifth grade survey also indicated that most students noted little change in the amount of conflict they experienced at recess over the course of the year. These fifth graders reported similar frequencies in fall and spring of being teased, bothered, or annoyed by other students and of getting into arguments or fights at recess (Exhibit 11) and an increase in the percent of students reporting they sometimes get into arguments or fights at recess.

Most teachers and principals felt that physical fights and disruptions had diminished, but they agreed that minor conflicts still occurred at recess in the spring. What had changed, they reported, was students’ problem solving skills and their abilities to manage disagreements more quickly and without escalation. According to one teacher, “This year, we could merely watch recess, hang out with the kids and enjoy yard duty. We wanted our kids to learn how to get along and solve problems. Playworks, for the most part, has met this expectation.”

**Exhibit 11. Student Reports of Conflict in Fall and Spring**

<i>At school, how often do you...</i>	<b>Fall</b>		<b>Spring</b>	
	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>A lot</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>A lot</i>
Get teased by other kids about not being good at games or sports at recess?	24.9	12.2	22.7	11.8
Feel bothered or annoyed by another student during recess?	26.5	22.0	32.7	17.6
Get into an argument or fight with other students at recess (words only or hitting/pushing)?	14.2	7.3	20.3	8.9

Source: JGC tabulations from the fall and spring fifth grade student surveys.

One teacher noted that the effectiveness of ro-sham-bo depended on the emotional maturity of the students, “It works...for 90% of the kids...but some kids have a hard time when they lose.” Another reported that ro-sham-bo works well for “non-emotional” things, like negotiating games rules, but that for more serious issues adult intervention was still required. Nearly 40% of teachers surveyed said that students come to them to help resolve conflict often or very often.

In addition to students’ increased use of problem solving techniques, staff from at least five schools commented that recess conflict was reduced because more students were actively engaged in activities and knew the rules to more games. According to one teacher, “The kids are so busy now that there’s not a lot of down time for them to get involved in little spats and arguments on the playground.”





## Changes in the Classroom

*“One of the things that was a real challenge before was that kids would get crazy on the playground and then as soon as lunch was over, they’d....take that craziness into the classroom. But now that there’s something structured, they’re able to go back and be ready to learn...that’s been a positive...academically.”*

*Established School Teacher, Winter 2010*

Playworks strives to foster a positive recess experience that is intended to translate back into the classroom, promoting a safe and supportive learning environment free from play-related conflict. We found emerging evidence that this was happening in most of the newly implementing schools. Specifically, teachers reported less conflict coming back into the classroom and a calmer and more focused atmosphere following recess. They reported positive changes in student behavior in the classroom as a result of Playworks’ techniques being adopted. They also reported improved student behavior in the classroom through use of incentives to participate in class game time and the junior coach program.

In interviews, teachers from four of the six newly implementing schools agreed that there was significantly less conflict returning to the classroom following recess since the arrival of Playworks. Teachers reported seeing this shift begin in the fall and confirmed that it was holding true for their classrooms in the spring. One teacher summed this up when she said, “I simply don’t have the level of disruption after recess that I did last year.” Another said, “I can’t think of a time this year when children have had emotional outbursts that have been the direct result of recess.” Both teachers and principals agreed that the transition from recess back to the classroom was easier this year with less emotional energy spent on resolving playground “drama.”

In the spring, 70% of teachers surveyed, as well as staff interviewed from six of eight schools, said there was an increase in student use of ro-sham-bo in the classroom. While nearly 60% of teachers surveyed said they promoted the use of this technique more often, teachers interviewed cited examples of students using this strategy spontaneously and effectively to solve minor conflicts and make quick decisions in the classroom without adult intervention. About 70% of teachers surveyed also reported that students were acting more inclusively in the classroom and using more positive communication with one another.

Teachers were not necessarily in agreement, however, about whether they spent less class time resolving conflict after recess. For some, their own classroom management practices were already strong and they observed no significant change in the amount of time it took to transition the students back to instruction, even though they may have reported seeing fewer problems return from recess. For others, however, a noticeable change had occurred. At least one teacher from each of three newly implementing schools commented on having gained instructional time as a direct result of no longer having to intervene in these lingering conflicts and nearly a third of all teachers surveyed in the spring reported spending less class time to resolve recess-based conflict.

## Junior Coach Program

*“I really like having meetings and...hav[ing] fun after school...because...you get to talk about how the junior coach thing is going, and then you also get to junior coach and lead games. I think that’s really cool.”*

*Junior Coach, Spring 2010*

### **Demonstrating Leadership**

Coaches, teachers, and principals all agreed that the junior coach program offered an important opportunity for students to be leaders at school and that this leadership development led to positive growth in other developmental areas. As is shown in Exhibit 12, 77% of teachers responding to the spring survey agreed or strongly agreed that participating students had gained leadership skills as a result of being a junior coach. No teachers disagreed with the statement; the remaining respondents felt neutral about it, in part because they had younger students and were less familiar with the junior coaches.

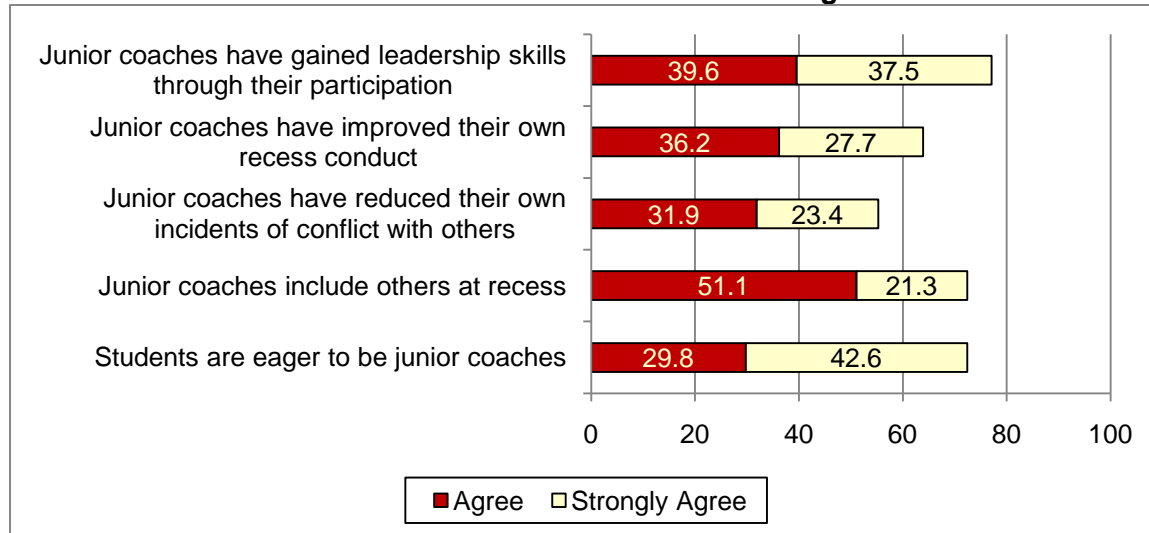
The most commonly reported way that the junior coach program positively affected students was through improved self-confidence, both at recess and in the classroom. One teacher at an established school stated, “Those kids...are put in a leadership role, they are given the responsibility, and they run it...every kid that I’ve seen be a junior coach has this confidence...and the other kids just glom onto it.” This improved self-confidence appears to be especially important for junior coaches who were initially shy. Teachers, coaches, and principals reported to us stories of students, mostly girls, who had been very shy and gained confidence through the junior coach program that spilled back over into the classroom. One teacher reported, “I have one little girl this year who is extremely quiet in the classroom, and she gets her junior coach shirt on...and she’s leading groups of younger children...she’s giving oral presentations now and actually being a good leader in her group activities.” A coach reported that two girls who were reluctant to participate in recess games previously began to feel more ownership of recess through the junior coach role and became active participants by the end of the year. At another school we learned about a girl who was unable to play most recess games due to a physical disability, which was upsetting to her. She became a junior coach and learned to run the four-square court, and with time learned to play the game in a modified way. Her teacher reported that this had a tremendous positive effect on the girl’s self-confidence.

Improved self-confidence also helped junior coaches who were previously known for their poor recess or classroom behavior and were selected for the role because of this. Coaches reported that participating in the junior coach program helped these students to moderate their behavior while at recess, and teachers reported using the junior coach label as a way to incentivize them to remain on task in the classroom.

A total of 72% of teachers reported that students were eager to be junior coaches (Exhibit 12) and several coaches and teachers capitalized on the popularity of the program by using the prospect of being a junior coach in the future as a way to encourage students to improve their grades and behavior. 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.'" Respondents to the spring teacher survey supported this, with the majority indicating agreement or strong agreement that junior coaches had improved their own recess conduct (64%), reduced their own conflicts (55%) and included others in their games (72%).

**Exhibit 12. Teachers' Views of Effects of Junior Coach Program on Junior Coaches**



Source: JGC tabulations from the spring teacher survey.

Teachers and coaches worked together to assure that junior coaches were living up to expectations in class, with coaches backing up teachers who reported their junior coach student was behind on school work or misbehaving and needed to miss his or her scheduled work time. One coach reported talking to a junior coach whose teacher said he was misbehaving and the next day the student's behavior had reportedly improved. Teachers of younger students reported using the lure of being a junior coach in the future to help motivate them to do their best.

Finally, several teachers felt the junior coach program gave students a sense of pride at school and a connection to the coach, both of which are important aspects of positive youth development. One teacher reported, "I think that's when the kids really feel the ownership of the school, that's when they build a community; that's when they're put in the role of leadership; that's when they have the responsibility of guiding these kids during recess time." Several other teachers reported hearing from parents of junior coaches that the students were using their leadership and conflict resolution skills with their families at home.

**Respect for Junior Coaches**

The greatest challenge faced by junior coaches at all six newly implementing schools was earning the respect of other students on the play yard. During the fall focus groups, junior coaches at all six schools indicated that they had experienced other students not listening to them or not respecting their authority. One coach felt that this challenge was ultimately good for the junior coaches, stating "They may think they go out there and put a purple shirt on...everything's going to be fine. But all of a sudden, kids are saying 'No' to them, kids are giving them a hard time...It's going to teach them...that having a responsibility has challenges with it." By spring, some principals and teachers felt that students had fully bought into the authority of the junior

coaches, but the junior coaches did not see things the same way. Junior coaches at four of the schools still complained about students being disrespectful to them. One described what this looked like on the play yard: “Sometimes when [other students] don’t respect you, they’ll just laugh and then just walk away.”

Although other students may not always have respected them, junior coaches were given a lot of authority, including the authority to discipline students who misbehaved, which generally consisted of “benching” students for a couple of minutes. Most junior coaches reported threatening to bench students, but it was unclear how often they actually followed through on this threat; our team never saw this happen. Junior coaches also reported telling their coaches or the principals when students were misbehaving.

### **Recognizing and Rewarding Junior Coaches**

Most coaches developed reward systems to recognize the work of junior coaches who performed their duties well. At one school with four junior coach crews, the crew deemed to have performed the best during the week was invited to act as junior coaches a second time that week. Several coaches kept a star chart where they used different notations to indicate how well individual coaches or coaching crews were doing. Some of the coaches tied these star charts to rewards given at the end of the month for the highest performing junior coach or junior coach crew. One coach ate lunch with the best junior coaches at the end of each month; another coach gave out Jamba Juice gift cards each month to the top performers. In most cases, funds for these reward systems were provided by the coach personally.

### **Overall School Climate**

*“Coach came, Playworks came, and just transformed the entire campus...it’s amazing!”*  
*Established School Teacher, Winter 2010*

When we visited the newly implementing schools in the fall, teachers, administrators and students were already talking about the differences they were seeing in their school. This section addresses how these changes, sustained over the course of the year, affected the school’s climate overall, including student and adult attitudes and behaviors.

The National School Climate Council (NSCC) defines a positive school climate as “a safe, supportive environment that nurtures social and emotional, ethical, and academic skills.”<sup>8</sup> NSCC defines school climate as comprised of four main dimensions: safety, supportive teaching and learning, relationships to peers and adults, and positive school environment (physical and normative). Providing a healthy school climate is an important way that schools can support students’ developmental growth socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically.

### **Positive Developmental Growth for Students**

*“The components of Playworks... teaching leadership, responsibility, respect...have really transformed our school...in ways that I was not expecting.”*  
*Teacher, Fall 2009*

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<sup>8</sup> National School Climate Council (2010).

A solid research base indicates that high quality programs promoting positive youth development can have significant influence on the healthy development of youth they serve. The highest quality programs incorporate mechanisms to support children in developing a range of physical, intellectual, social, and emotional strengths. In this section, we focus on the ways that Playworks supports positive youth development by fostering qualities such as inclusiveness, self-regulation, and connectedness to peers and adults.

Overall, students in the fall and spring reported being happy with themselves, their peers, and their school experiences. The vast majority of fifth grade students agreed or strongly agreed that they had a lot to be proud of, that they liked themselves just the way they were and that they were happy at their school (Exhibit 13). Nearly all students also reported in both time periods that they got along with their teachers, paid attention, got their homework done, and thought they did interesting things in school. Lack of change from fall to spring is not unusual given the very high level of agreement students had in the fall. However, the timing of the spring survey may also have played a role. It was administered as late as the second to last week of school after students finished state testing, and coincided with the period during the year when students are not always enthusiastic about school.

**Exhibit 13. Student Attitudes and School Engagement**

	Fall	Spring
<i>How much do you agree with the following statements about your school?</i>	<i>Percentage of participants who responded “agree” or “strongly agree” on a five-point scale</i>	
I have a lot to be proud of	85.1	81.8
I like myself just the way I am	91.8	89.4
I am happy to be at this school	86.4	81.5
<i>Since school started this year, how often do you...</i>	<i>Percentage of participants who responded “sometimes” or “a lot” on a five-point scale</i>	
Get along with your teachers	90.9	87.1
Pay attention in school	94.2	94.1
Get your homework done	93.3	92.1
I do interesting activities at school	82.7	81.3

Source: JGC tabulations from the fall and spring fifth grade student surveys.

*Positive Behavior and Inclusion*

In schools with strong implementation, Playworks’ promotion of positive language and behavior helped create a supportive atmosphere on the playground and throughout the school day. We observed this supportiveness on several occasions including during one class game time when classmates comforted a student who became upset after being one of the first students to get “out” of the game by putting their arm around his shoulders and trying to sooth him. In some cases, Playworks also helped spark friendships between students who might otherwise not have been friends. One teacher noted that Playworks’ promotion of inclusiveness led to “more participation with kids that aren’t necessarily buddies. It’s like they just want to play that game and then they become friends.” One junior coach agreed that Playworks promoted new friendships, saying, “[in] other years people would be embarrassed to go say ‘Hi’ to and meet other new friends...this year since we’re junior coach[es], since we play a lot with different kinds of kids, we know their name and then we talk to them more.” Teachers felt that Playworks



taught leadership skills to all students, not just junior coaches, along with other group dynamics skills like team-building, following directions, cooperation and problem-solving.

Still, positive behaviors did not improve universally. At most schools, we observed instances of negative or inappropriate language, attempted cheating, name-calling, and other behaviors that schools sought to reduce. In one established school we observed more of these types of behaviors than elsewhere, and even a teacher who used foul language when describing a student. Contexts like these point to the challenges facing Playworks in implementing its program in the schools where it is arguably most needed.

### *Self-Regulation*

Playworks promotes self-regulation by giving students tools for conflict resolution. By the spring, teachers and administrators reported that the use of conflict-resolution skills led to students who were better able to regulate their behavior and the behavior of their classmates. A total of 84% of teachers responding to the spring survey reported that students had the skills they needed for self-regulation at recess more or much more frequently since Playworks was implemented, and 62% felt similarly about self-regulation in the classroom (Exhibit 14).

At schools where Playworks implementation was weaker, including schools that experienced coach turnover, students were less likely to adopt Playworks conflict resolution tools and therefore less likely to see a shift in self-regulation. At both schools with turnover, we observed students who did not play by the rules, refused to use ro-sham-bo, and effectively derailed games with their behavior.

### **Exhibit 14. Teachers' Views of Changes in Student Attitudes**

<i>Indicate the degree of change you have seen in the following areas:</i>	<b>More</b>	<b>Much More</b>
Students have the skills they need for self-regulation at recess	61.7	22.2
Students have the skills they need for self-regulation in class	54.9	7.3
Students feel connected to our school	59.5	15.2
Students have a sense of belonging at our school	58.2	17.7

Source: JGC tabulations from the spring teacher survey.

### *Connectedness to School*

Results from the student survey indicate that students' connectedness to students at school did not change from fall to spring. On a scale comprised of five questions, students in the fall reported an average score of 3.4 (out of 5) and 3.3 in the spring, indicating no change. Despite this, students in our focus groups did report feeling more connected to school. More than half the teachers responding to the spring survey also felt Playworks had increased students' connectedness or sense of belonging at school, but only about 18% felt these were much stronger than before Playworks (Exhibit 14).

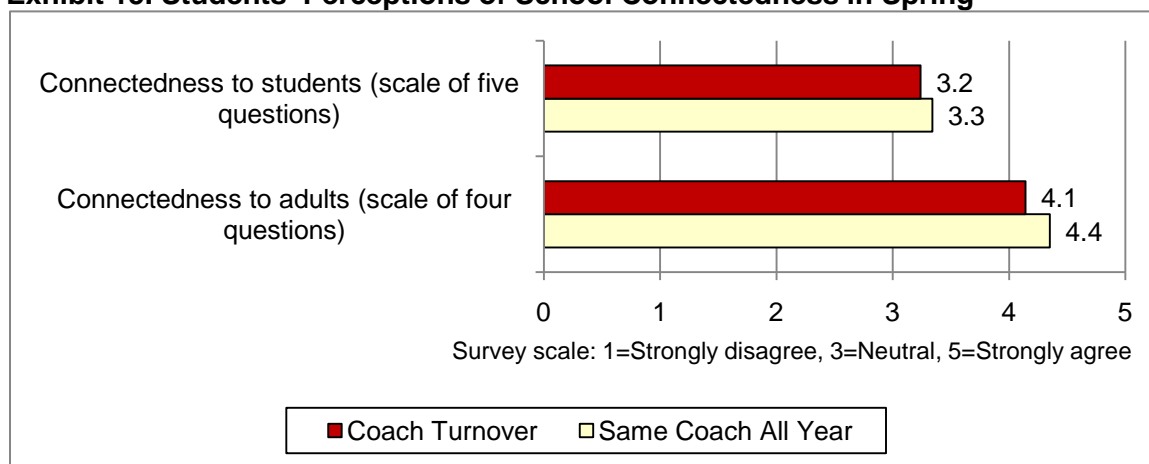
For some students, feeling connected to school came from enjoying recess more and for others it was as a result of connecting with the coach. A teacher at an established school told us that students were "so driven to spend time with [coach] that they really work extra hard to get their assignments in on time and done well and be prepared...so, they're already learning the skills of responsibility." One principal supported this, telling us that students talked to the coach about personal matters they would not discuss with other adults. The coach at this school agreed that



students opened up, saying they “tell me how they’re doing in math...who’s not showing up to class...who’s not doing their homework...who is talking, who is passing notes.”

In the fifth grade survey, when asked about their relationships with adults on campus, the majority of students reported having an adult on campus who told them when they did a good job, who wanted them to do their best, and who listened to them when they had something to say. In the spring, students at schools that experienced coach turnover were less likely to report that they had an adult on campus who cared about them than did students who attended schools with the same coach all year (Exhibit 15). This suggests that for some students, the Playworks coach may have provided a significant amount of the care that students reported feeling from adults at school. There was a smaller difference in students’ reports of feeling cared for by other students in schools with and without turnover.

**Exhibit 15. Students’ Perceptions of School Connectedness in Spring**



Source: JGC tabulations from the spring fifth grade surveys.

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.

**Adult Behaviors and Attitudes**

*“When I think of how much has changed in the past few years and how many students are playing now...it has changed my job and made the students happier and healthier and more responsible and respectful. [Playworks] has just really shown me how important playing is.”*

*Established School Teacher, Winter 2010*

Though Playworks’ primary aim is to improve recess and play experiences so children are better prepared to learn in the classroom, it is clear that the program also influences how adults at school think about and value play for their students, which is key to the long-term success of the program. By buying into the techniques and values of Playworks, teachers and administrators improve the sustainability and effectiveness of the program. The following section describes how teacher and administrator practices and beliefs changed over the course of the school year.

### *Adopting Playworks Tools and Strategies*

In the spring, we observed or heard about teachers and other school staff at seven of the eight schools learning new tools and strategies to employ at recess and in the classroom. These included teachers and yard monitors instructing students to use ro-sham-bo to resolve conflicts or make decisions in a group; using and encouraging students to use positive language; and initiating and playing games with students. In one class, the teacher had picked up enough from Playworks to conduct class game time herself when the coach was out sick. We observed as she led her students in Playworks games, used Playworks strategies to promote sportsmanship and inclusion, and ran the session smoothly.

Though many teachers were already using these or similar tools, teachers reported that these tools were more effective since Playworks was implemented because they were being used school-wide, including at recess. Echoing this point, one teacher told us that the program's success had "a lot to do with the teachers embracing Playworks...using the same lingo that the Playworks coaches have...it doesn't just stop with Coach." Another stated that Playworks takes "things that we already do in the classroom, in terms of reinforcing respect and cooperation and communication with each other, and giving us yet another context to use that in."

Coaches also reported seeing teachers and school staff, including administrators, employing Playworks techniques. One coach told us, "The teachers get involved with the games. If they're not playing the games, they're observing to see the rules," adding "they'll take their kids out[side]...[and play] the games that I just taught them." Another coach estimated that all or most teachers were on board with the program, noting that "not all of them are taking their kids out and playing the games but the ones that take their kids out anyway are playing [Playworks] games," including the school's PE teacher. This coach also reported that the vice principal "really gets into playing games with the kids. He'll bounce around; he'll go to four square; he'll go play two square; he'll go play basketball." Coaches agreed that staff support was key to a successful program. As one put it, "the teachers [are] buying in to it, signing up for my program, supporting me... it trickles down, and the kids start to believe that it's a good program."

Not all teachers adopted Playworks strategies, however. Teachers at one established school could not identify the specific tools Playworks taught students for conflict resolution or positive language and behavior and reported not knowing much about the program in general. Several teachers at newly implementing schools admitted that after a year on campus, they still did not fully understand Playworks' approach. One teacher illustrated this by saying, "I don't feel that I have a complete understanding...how [Playworks] aligns with [students] changing their behavior...so that if they're outside and they're playing, how does that affect them so that when they come in...[they are] completely ready to learn?" This teacher said there was no noticeable change on campus since Playworks implementation. Missed instructional time was also a concern for upper grade teachers in scheduling class game time and this likely contributed to teachers not fully adopting Playworks' strategies. The coach's relationship to teachers influenced the extent to which teachers embraced and used Playworks strategies. At schools where teachers had weaker relationships with the coach, overall reported use of Playworks strategies and acceptance of Playworks values was much weaker than at schools where coaches established and maintained good relationships with teachers.

### *Beliefs about the Value of Play*

In the spring teachers also credited Playworks with changes in their attitudes and beliefs about their students and about play. Three-quarters of teachers reported that staff at their schools valued youth leadership and had high expectations about student behavior more or much more since Playworks was implemented. About half of the teachers responding to the spring survey also reported that teachers were more or much more respectful of students since the beginning of the school year. One teacher thought that Playworks provided “another area for [teachers] to let students shine.” Another thought Playworks created an important environment where teachers and students got to play together, and see each other in a different light.

Despite the already high percentage of school staff who placed a great value on play in the fall, 76% of respondents to the spring teacher survey reported valuing play more or much more since the arrival of Playworks on campus. A teacher at an established school told us that Playworks enhanced her belief that “kids need to be kids and there needs to be a balance between the work and the play.” Another at the same school stated that the “focus on team building and having fun with their class...are an important part of the school day and are just as valuable as anything else that we do here.”

School administrators agreed that Playworks influenced or supported the value they placed on play. One principal thought that children “interacting with different kids from different classrooms, from different ages, out on the playground is...[a skill] they’re going to need in life... you learn how to talk politely...how to solve issues, problems, with your words...how to be a bigger person sometimes.” Another principal had not thought play had much value before Playworks, but changed his mind, “the value of play for these kids has taught them patience, has taught them responsibility, has taught them losing and winning, how does that feel and digesting the feeling and coming out still a winner.”

## VI. Conclusions and Considerations

The Playworks program is ambitious in its goals, but evidence from this study indicates that if implemented fully – with all program components in place, school staff knowledgeable and supportive of Playworks’ goals and values, and school policies and structures supporting the program – stakeholders believe it leads to improved student, classroom, and school outcomes. In particular, where Playworks was fully implemented, principals, teachers, and students reported that recess was more structured and organized, students were more engaged in games and play, many students were getting more physical activity, junior coaches and others were gaining leadership skills, and students had learned and were using conflict resolution skills. In schools where Playworks had transformed the culture of recess, its effects had begun to spread elsewhere, including into some classrooms and throughout the school climate overall.

This report documents many instances of Playworks’ reported successes in all these areas. These outcomes depend, however, on a successful and full program implementation, which we found to be a challenge across the schools. We highlight below several issues that the research points to as important for Playworks to consider as it continues to implement the program nationwide. We have grouped these into four main topic areas: training and communication, recess practices, school-wide policies, and the main program challenge – loss of the coach mid-year.

### Training and Communication

The Playworks coaches at study schools were all young people in their early 20s, most of whom were in their first year with the program. Playworks offered a week-long training prior to school placement as well as periodic training throughout the school year. In addition, Playworks supervisors supported coaches by phone and in person as requested. Coaches’ energy and enthusiasm for the program was obvious, but despite their Playworks training they were nonetheless not quite prepared for working in the school environment.

- 1. Playworks coach training should address the more “soft skills” that coaches need to work in a school setting.** Coaches faced challenges communicating with school staff and navigating the school setting effectively. In some instances this negatively affected relationships and interfered with program implementation. Coach training could include more “soft skill” building and address how to best communicate with school staff, understand expectations of working in a professional setting, and strategies for improving communication when staff are not fully supportive.
- 2. Playworks teacher training should occur very early in the school year for all participating schools.** Teachers were complimentary about the Playworks training they received and felt it was enormously useful in teaching them about the model and strategies of the program. In this study, we observed two schools that had early training, two that had training mid-fall, one that had training late in the fall and one that never was trained. The schools with later or no training had the weakest teacher buy-in and the most early challenges to program implementation. In schools where teachers or the principal were not bought into the model, challenges to implementation persisted throughout the year. Early training is key to the model and could be built into school contracts to ensure they make time for it at the start of the school year.

3. **Playworks should consider additional teacher trainings throughout the year.** Although coaches attended Playworks trainings throughout the year, we did not hear of any subsequent rounds of training for teachers. Playworks might consider another opportunity to engage teachers during the school year.
4. **Communication with families is important for promoting the positive youth development values that Playworks embraces.** We found there to be no plan for communicating with all parents, though coaches did communicate with the parents of junior coaches and participants in the after school program. Communication between parents and Playworks is especially important in schools that experienced coach turnover. Playworks might design some informational brochures, newsletters, or other publications in appropriate languages to be shared with families throughout the year.

## Recess Practices

Playworks led to an improved recess with better organization and more play opportunities at each school we visited. Still, we observed and heard about several recess challenges that coaches were unable to address.

1. **Games need to address the range of students' abilities and competitiveness.** At all six newly implementing schools, there was an existing (and in one case almost banned) competitive soccer game played by a select group of boys in the fall. Even in the spring, we observed competitive games where students were excluded and tempers flared high. One strategy we observed coaches using to get more students involved was to stop secondary soccer games from occurring and encourage all students to play together in the one sanctioned game. However, this strategy did not always succeed. In some schools, the soccer game was so competitive that less skilled students were discouraged from playing. Competitive games also required more monitoring from the coach. Playworks might consider new strategies for dealing with competitive soccer and other sports at the school in an effort to allow even non-competitive students who are interested to play these games. Possible options could include setting up two playing fields or engaging the competitive players in leadership roles to guide the less competitive players.
2. **Playworks needs new strategies for engaging older girls.** In the younger grades, girls were as likely to play Playworks games as boys, though in many cases these were different types of games, but older girls were less likely to play any type of games or sports at recess. Teachers and principals who identified this issue noted that this had to do with girls' developmental changes and that at this age they were interested in socializing more than playing. Playworks could capitalize on this by offering a different set of games, perhaps with a more social focus, during older students' recesses. Other strategies might include getting older girls interested in sports leagues or other activities that could spill over into recess.
3. **Game rules need to continue throughout the school year.** By the end of the school year, some of the game rules that were established at the beginning of the year had been redefined by students. Coaches acknowledged that this was difficult to stop, but did not report any best practices for helping students maintain the same set of rules to games

throughout the school year. Still, they agreed that this was important to a well-run recess. Playworks might consider ways to continue to promote the common set of rules to each game throughout the year.

## School Discipline Policies

The Playworks philosophy focuses on positive motivation and inclusion. Encouraging students to aspire to junior coach responsibilities and rewarding good behavior with additional play fits well into this framework. However, Playworks may want to consider how they train coaches to respond to a school culture that leans toward threatening exclusion or denying participation in physical activities to influence student behavior.

- 1. Re-thinking using recess and class game time as punishment.** In every school we visited, Playworks programs were used as a threat individually and for the class as punishment for not finishing schoolwork or misbehavior. The *Let's Move!* campaign, championed by First Lady Michelle Obama, has as part of its program an opportunity for schools to become certified as HealthierUS Schools.<sup>9</sup> One of the principles that schools must address in order to be certified is not using physical activity of any kind as a punishment for students. This is important because research has shown that children who engage in physical activity are more likely to be able to concentrate, focus, and learn.
- 2. Playworks should formulate a consistent disciplinary approach for coaches to use and suggest to school staff.** Some coaches supported teachers in their withholding of recess and class game time as punishment. One of the strategies we observed Playworks coaches using to deal with misbehavior was to “bench” students. In order to be consistent with *Let's Move!* and to keep students engaged and active at recess, Playworks might consider alternative discipline tactics for coaches to use and offer to schools that would not deny physical activity opportunities to students. Playworks could design a handbook of alternative disciplinary strategies to be shared with staff and reinforce this with staff trainings at the start of the school year or later in the year.

## Biggest Program Challenge: Coach Turnover

The literature on programs that promote positive youth development indicates that program consistency and longevity are important components to success. Playworks is designed to offer these by placing one coach at a school for the entire school year. It is therefore not surprising that the main program challenge we observed in this study was coach turnover. As mentioned previously, two of the six schools we visited experienced coach turnover during the year. Playworks programmatic data indicates that coach turnover is less common than was experienced in this group of schools. Still, having a plan for dealing with turnover when it occurs is critical. Where coach turnover occurred, it had serious effects on the quality of the program and this reverberated into a weaker implementation of key program features and fewer reported effects on students, classrooms, and overall school climate.

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<sup>9</sup> For more information, see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/HealthierUS/index.html>.



- 1. Communication during periods of transition is essential.** Principals at schools with coach turnover were satisfied with Playworks' responsiveness during the transition, but did not feel Playworks had been proactive enough in providing information to them, their staff, the students, and especially the families. Students were upset to learn that the coach had left and needed support during this time. More open communication about the process and time frame for replacement would be important to help students and their families remain connected to the program.
- 2. There should be a clear plan for program operation during the transition.** Particularly for junior coaches, it was unclear how the program would operate during coach transition. At one school with coach turnover, all the junior coaches were replaced by the new coach because of reported misbehavior during the transition process. The junior coaches at this school lost an important leadership opportunity and the new coach lost an important asset – a set of already trained junior coaches.
- 3. New coaches should be fully trained.** In both schools, the new coaches were seen by principals and staff as weaker in their abilities as compared to their predecessors. This may be, in part, because not all the new coaches received the same week-long training that coaches go through prior to starting the job. One replacement coach received no Playworks training before beginning in early spring and consequently his recess and class game time program did not include some key Playworks features.

## Implications for Youth Development

Playworks uses play as the context for promoting positive youth development concepts to students, teachers, principals, and schools. We found evidence that the program supports inclusiveness, leadership, confidence, self-regulation, and connectedness to peers and adults. 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. The programming, setting, and focus of the program are seamless and effective ways to promote youth development principles for large groups of children and youth.

These more subtle aspects of Playworks' programming were observed most strongly in schools where the program had its fullest implementation. Respondents did not report as much progress on developmental measures in schools that experienced coach turnover and where teachers were not fully bought into the model. Playworks is poised to create the conditions for improving the developmental outcomes of many youth and as such could be more explicit about that goal, with coaches, teachers, and school administrators. An enhanced communication plan as well as early and possibly more frequent trainings for school personnel could educate others about the importance of youth development outcomes and their relationship to a host of school outcomes, including academic performance.

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## Appendix: Data and Methodology

This study of Playworks implementation relied 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 views 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. The overall response rate to the survey was very high because it was collected during class game time. All fifth grade students present during the class game time were surveyed and all schools collected data from each fifth grade class in fall. In the spring one school was only able to survey two of three fifth grade classes.

- *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. A total of 65% of teachers responded to the survey, but response rates varied among schools from 48% in one school to 68% in two schools. One source of this variation was Playworks' administration of its own teacher survey in several schools, which led to some confusion and contributed to lower response rates to our teacher survey.
- *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, but spring response rates were quite low. We had just 11 teachers who turned in fully completed diaries in both fall and spring. Ultimately we felt this was not enough information on which to base findings and we did not use these data in the report. We do not recommend this type of data collection for future research on Playworks.

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 established schools were included as comparison sites for the newly implementing schools. 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 established schools, Franklin Elementary, was in a Silicon Valley district that also contained one of the six schools. The other, Verde Elementary, was in Richmond, CA and served a slightly different demographic, including more African American students. Visits included interviews, observations, and junior coach focus groups. They focused on lessons learned and best practices in the established 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. 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 codebook. In the end, the team achieved an average percent agreement of 93% and Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.61. In total, approximately 11% of data documents were coded by at least two coders. In the fall we had a total of four researchers coding the data and in the spring we had a total of three 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.