

FAQs from Parents/Guardians of Playworks Trained Schools

When Playworks partners with new schools, many families have questions about how we approach recess. Our goal is to empower kids through play to develop happy, healthy schools. To achieve this, we train adults to create fun, safe, and inclusive playgrounds through games and positive group management techniques. Children enjoy fun, interesting, challenging games as well as play alongside engaging adult role models (and often student leaders) at recess every day.

When we refer to “a Playworks recess”, we are referring to the techniques, practices, and strategies employed by Playworks and school staff trained by Playworks to create a playground culture where all kids are included and have the opportunity to play. Our goal is to create an environment where safe, healthy play is accessible to everyone. A Playworks recess is not just an area of the playground, certain days of the week, or a specific set of games.

Why do our students need a Playworks recess? Why are you organizing students’ down-time?

Recess is a time for kids and should be kid-centered. A Playworks recess is designed to create opportunities for student engagement, involvement, and leadership. The job of recess staff at a Playworks recess is to create a playground environment where children can choose from a variety of activities/games that develop social and emotional skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.

At many schools, *some* students already receive these benefits and other students sit on the side not feeling invited or welcomed to participate. A Playworks recess creates a culture where everyone is included, so everyone has the opportunity to play. At schools with a Playworks recess, the goal is for all kids to leave the playground happy, fully recharged, and able to return to the classroom ready to learn.

With limited school resources, shouldn’t money be spent on what is happening inside the classroom, rather than out on the playground?

Playworks believes it is important to look at schools as holistic systems. [Research has shown that what happens on the playground affects the entire school day](#). Teachers and students at your school know that recess is crucial as both a physical outlet and for social-emotional learning. By embracing the playground as the largest classroom in the school, a Playworks recess addresses a variety of situations with solutions that carry over to the rest of the school day. Increasing positive play at recess can be a cost-effective way of increasing learning time in the classroom.

Our school doesn’t have many problems at recess; why do we need Playworks?

A Playworks recess is built upon the core values of respect, inclusion, healthy play, and healthy community. All school communities should be based on similar core values. Playworks helps schools work through barriers to a healthy climate and build a positive school culture.

When looking at the playground, there are always areas for improvement. Are the recess games played by students from diverse backgrounds and peer groups? Are boys and girls equally included in popular games? Focus on students with exceptional needs - are they invited to play? By taking this lens to your playground, you can see where things can be improved to bring the social benefits of play to all students.

What if my kid wants to do something else other than the Playworks games provided at recess?

At Playworks, we believe every child should be allowed to self-select the activity in which they participate. A Playworks recess isn't a certain set of games in a certain area, but a methodology utilizing refined techniques and tools to bring out the best in every kid.

Recess staff at a Playworks recess are encouraged to teach and provide a variety of games that are fun and inclusive for kids to join. Games will vary in style and skill level, such as tag, kickball, or jump rope. Some students may choose more challenging games, while others may want to join a team building activity.

By teaching games and introducing basic rules that all recess activities should follow---respect, safety, and inclusion---recess staff set a foundation for kids to explore what they know and allow them to create their own respectful and inclusive games.

What about free play or imaginative/creative play?

We want kids to find joy on the playground. If your child is happiest at recess while engaging in imaginative play, this play is encouraged. All we ask of kids who engage in imaginative and creative play is to include and invite others to play as well. A Playworks recess endeavors to avoid situations where students outside of a friend-group are routinely excluded from connecting with other students because they "don't know the rules to our game."

Can my kid still play on the play structure at recess?

A Playworks recess provides a variety of options for play, including playing on available play structures, provided they do so safely.

Play structures are great for explorative play, physical activity, and mobility. However, this type of play is often very individualized. A Playworks recess is designed to help students (and schools) build community by playing together. This is the secret power of play.

Ultimately, schools must decide how play structures will be incorporated into recess safely. Rules around the usage of a play structure should be clear and consistent and include instructions for supervision and safety.

My child would rather read during recess than play. Will he/she be forced to play when he/she clearly doesn't want to?

A Playworks recess is designed so all students feel invited to play every day. Children are allowed to make their own choices regarding whether to accept or pass on those invitations. Even if a child doesn't want to play, that child should receive frequent invitations to play. We hear from schools that many kids do not self-advocate to join in a game, sometimes because of fear of exclusion or lack of skills. Our model seeks to assist children in stepping up for inclusion.

Why is all of the playground equipment being used by the group games? If my kid does not want to participate in the group game, will there be equipment for her/him and her/his friends to play their own game?

When resources are limited, Playworks has found it to be more beneficial to apply equipment to the larger group to maximize engagement.

If students want to use unclaimed equipment to start their own games, those games should be inclusive of others and be played in a space that does not overlap with other games. This is to provide all children with a recess that is emotionally and physically safe.

Why have sports like football and soccer been removed from recess?

At Playworks, we value all safe and inclusive games and sports. In some cases, popular sports at recess may not be played in a way that is safe and available for any student to join.

In these cases, recess staff *may* choose to offer an alternative game with similar skills and allow students to practice playing in a way that ensures the physical and emotional safety of all students. This should be done with clear communication. If a game has been temporarily discontinued, recess staff will work with students to teach students safe ways to play before reintroducing the game.

Why are kids no longer able to use the same rules as they have used in the past? Why can't they make up new rules?

A Playworks recess is designed to have rules that are inclusive and get all kids playing. Playworks has found that the best way to get all kids in the game is to create an environment where all participants share the same language, vocabulary, and rules to prevent conflict. Every school doesn't have to have the same rules, but each school should have a uniform set of rules for all core games (foursquare, wall ball, kickball, etc.).

Unfortunately, many common playground rules made by kids are exclusionary and are used to get others out (“If I do this and you don’t do that, you are out!”). Rules that exclude certain individuals are not allowed during a Playworks recess.

Conflict is a natural part of life and rock, paper, scissors, can’t solve everything. Aren’t kids better off in the long run learning how to handle conflict without adult intervention?

Playworks believes that play and games are the perfect environment for children to practice problem solving and conflict resolution. Rock, paper, scissors is an age-accessible tool that gives children the agency to resolve small conflicts in a way that all parties involved can move on quickly. By instituting this method schoolwide, students have the backing and support of the school community to use this tool on their own.

At Playworks, we encourage recess staff to first teach rock, paper, scissors, but when that doesn’t work, staff should help students develop other conflict resolution techniques, such as [messages and peer mediation](#). By emphasizing positive behavior and teaching simple conflict resolution tools, we give kids the power to solve their own conflicts and more time to play and learn.

If recess staff are supposed to be playing games with kids at recess, who is supervising what’s happening on the playground?

Playworks has found that supervision on the playground is more effective when recess staff engage students in pro-social play opportunities, rather than being separate from the activities that occur at recess. Participating in play also makes it easier for recess staff to supervise a larger number of students at one time.

When playing group games, recess staff are able to role model behavior, supervise students, ensure all rules are followed, and encourage participation all at the same time. By being right in the middle of the activity, recess staff can help students solve problems before they escalate elsewhere on the playground or in the classroom. This type of interaction builds a higher level of rapport through understanding and empathy between adults and children. Kids respond better to adults who care, and leading games is a great way to show kids you can connect with them on a level that they understand.

What about children with physical or non-physical disabilities or other learning challenges? Will they be able to participate as well?

A Playworks recess is designed to engage all children on the playground, regardless of background or ability level. By offering a variety of familiar games and teaching new, inclusive games, all children can play and have fun. Adults who have been trained by Playworks strive to create an environment where children want to engage with their peers. Once this environment has been created, we have seen students modify their behaviors and play habits to include all their classmates in the game.

My child doesn't like recess because the other kids make fun of him/her. What will Playworks do about this?

Playworks creates a recess that is respectful and inclusive of everyone. Recess staff will provide games and activities every student may play without fear of teasing. By ensuring all activities are fun and safe, the playground becomes a positive space in which bullying is virtually eliminated. Many children who didn't like recess before Playworks love the changes that occur on the playground and are excited to come play every day. [Read Sean's story](#) to see how we improved one child's recess experience.

Does Playworks have rules about kids missing recess for poor behavior?

Play and physical activity are essential to children's development. Playworks does not believe in withholding recess as a punishment. Studies show [recess actually benefits student learning](#).

We teach schools ways to integrate movement into the classroom to augment learning and allow students to get their wiggles out and encourage schools to develop alternatives to withholding recess.

For more information, please visit playworks.org.