

PLAY MATTERS

A STUDY OF BEST PRACTICES
TO INFORM LOCAL POLICY AND
PROCESS IN SUPPORT
OF CHILDREN'S PLAY



KaBOOM! National
Campaign for Play

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PREFACE

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I've often heard that it's in our nation's cities where the rubber meets the road. In cities, policy meets practice, and ideas become reality. Municipal leaders, cash-strapped non-profits, and socially conscious corporations work together to transform innovative ideas into programs that make our civic spaces better. Critically, they also find the money to fund them.

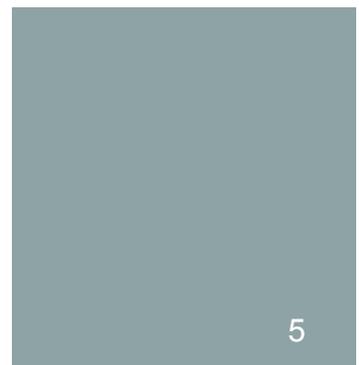
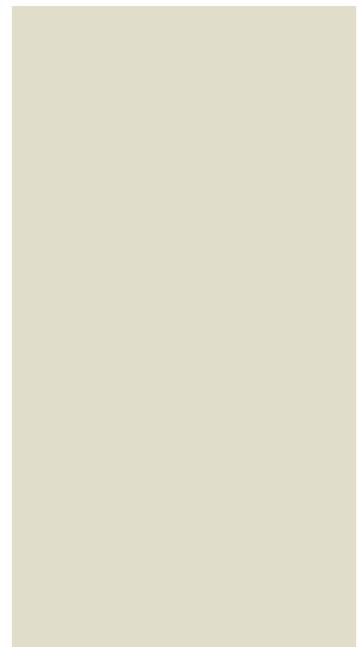
When KaBOOM! initiated the *Play Matters* study more than a year ago, I already knew about some of the accomplishments that we explore in depth in the pages that follow. After 14 years of leading an organization that has worked closely with cities building more than 1,700 play spaces and advocating for the importance of play in the lives of our children, I have seen how mayors, city councils, parks and recreation departments, school districts, corporations, social entrepreneurs, volunteers and citizens can accomplish extraordinary things when they join together in a common cause. KaBOOM! also launched the Playful City USA national recognition program in 2006 to build a cohort of cities that support play. As this network of cities grew, we continued to be impressed by local innovation and leadership. When reports came in from cities large and small, from San Francisco to Ankeny, Iowa, I was excited and heartened about what is being done to make sure this generation of children do not grow up in a world without play.

Make no mistake—play is imperiled in our country. In a recent Harris Interactive poll commissioned by KaBOOM!, 59% of parents report there is no place to play in walking distance of their homes. In poorer neighborhoods, the figure increases to 69%. Recess is disappearing from our schools. As you will read later, the absence of play has serious, negative effects, from the epidemic of childhood obesity to increasing levels of Attention Deficit Disorder, and a lack of social skills that kids would have learned on the playground and during unstructured play. The growing research on the negative consequences of the play deficit is important, but there is also a simple, clear and poignant truth we all can embrace from our childhood: on a purely human level the deficit of child's play is sad, since it means a world with less laughter and joy. When kids play, they learn to run, jump, and swing. But they also learn how to negotiate and to respect one another. They learn how to think and plan without an adult telling them what to do. Kids who play also play better as adults.

I will not take time here to describe the best practices in this report. The innovation and moxie demonstrated is heartening. Each best practice boasts proven results in the real world, despite often working with limited resources. They show what our cities can do. They present programs, ideas and approaches to funding which can, and should, be replicated.

As excited as I am about *Play Matters*, I worry that it might have an unintended consequence—reinforcing the notion that our nation's cities can go it alone. To ensure that the United States provides our children with sufficient places to play—both in total number and in the quality of the built environment—as well providing them with the time to play, I believe now is the time to look at federal policies and funding for play and physical activity in general. I invite everyone who cares about our kids to join this vital conversation. Go to kaboom.org/bestpractices, and add your voice to the cause of play. It's time to collectively turn our intent for play into more actions.

Darell Hammond
KaBOOM! CEO and Co-Founder



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Children playing outside—in spaces dedicated for play or not—signify a vibrant, healthy community. In cities and towns across America, however, children just don't get out and play as they used to. The barriers to play include increased screen time, reductions in school-based playtime, more traffic, less open space, run-down play areas, and caregivers' fears about safety. As children become more sedentary, the loss of play has serious consequences for health, education, and community development.

Providing more opportunities for play is emerging as a civic responsibility at the local level. Play as a policy imperative has not yet risen to the national agenda, despite increasing evidence of its importance:

1. Children are more overweight than ever, and they are actually gaining weight over summer break. The percentage of overweight children has doubled in the last 20 years, while the percentage of overweight teens has tripled.
2. The CDC reports that 4.5 million children (ages 5-17) have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. Many of them are being medicated.
3. Diagnoses of depression and anxiety disorders in children are also on the rise, with a corresponding increase in the use of psychoactive drugs to treat them.
4. Violence, emotional outbursts, and lack of social skills for dealing with peers and authority figures are growing issues for schools. Today's teachers spend more and more time on classroom management and less time actually teaching.

Without more time for play, we will continue to see a decrease in creativity and imagination, problem-solving skills, the ability to assess risk, and resiliency. All of these help prepare children not only to learn more effectively in school but also for successful adulthood.

Solutions that promote opportunities for play often align with national and local imperatives—including health, education, the environment, and economic and community development.

The purpose of this report is to describe successful local initiatives to improve opportunities for play and draw conclusions about why they have worked. The impact of these initiatives is gauged on three dimensions: increasing the quantity of available play spaces and play opportunities, improving the quality of spaces and experiences, and increasing children's safe access to play. This report also identifies emerging data linking play initiatives to positive outcomes in health, education, the environment, and the economy. It will be useful for those building a case for play as part of the solution to broader public priorities.

The 12 local initiatives analyzed here were selected on the basis of three additional criteria:

1. They involve significant new financial and/or human resources for play and physical activity for children.
2. They contribute to system-wide change in the community.
3. They can be replicated in other places.

The 12 communities vary in size, demographics, and resources—ranging from the city of Denver to the town of Ankeny, Iowa. The initiatives vary in complexity and cost, from rebuilding playgrounds to improving the quality of play during school recess. Some focus on space, others on programs. While each initiative is different, these stories illuminate common themes in building support for play. This report analyzes these commonalities, suggests steps for building public interest and support, and offers recommendations for citizens and policymakers.

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There are many ways to build support for play. Some projects are citizen-led; others are driven by city officials. Some cases involve a complicated intergovernmental process; others, a tested and purposeful program that has been integrated into a school system. Still others developed out of a parent addressing his or her child's needs and then spread organically to the school and the broader community. Each of these key drivers—public or private, individual or collective—mobilized a community to provide political and financial support.

While each initiative featured in the report increases play, the decisive factors in each case did not always explicitly include an argument for increasing play. In some cases, the arguments related to health, education, community development, the environment, or the economy. Increased opportunities for play were a collateral benefit.

Advocates employed a variety of strategies to build political support for their message and resources to execute their initiative. These strategies included:

- Mobilizing key stakeholders early on
- Developing a compelling argument
- Engaging direct beneficiaries
- Collecting quantitative baseline data
- Publicizing results of accountability measures against standards
- Participating in the electoral process
- Collaborating with news media

The case studies point to several strategies for citizens and policymakers who wish to develop and promote play policy in their communities.

RESEARCH STRATEGIES

- Conduct a play audit to assess play quantity, quality, and access
- Engage children and caregivers in identifying needs and priorities
- Use effective methods for data collection, particularly technology tools
- Develop strategic alliances to inform and align message and priorities

PLANNING STRATEGIES

- Set locally relevant and feasible standards for play quality, quantity, and access
- Engage broad constituencies, including children and caregivers, in strategic planning
- Coordinate and integrate plans across government agencies and offices
- Set school standards for play and physical activity time

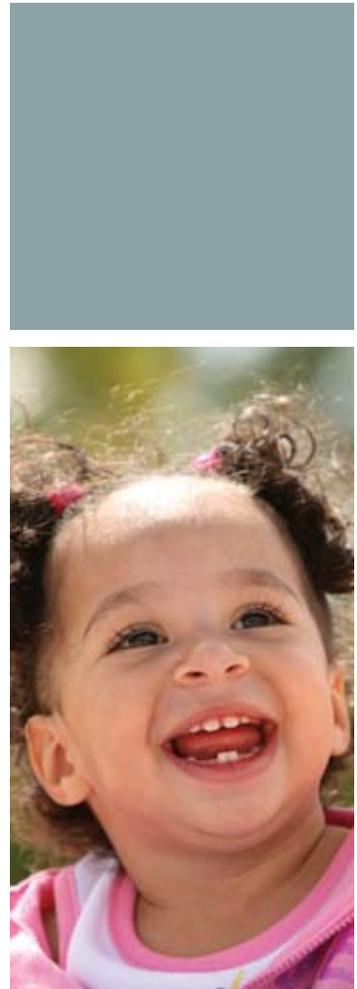
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Develop and execute a comprehensive plan to increase quality, quantity, and access
- Create systems to engage citizens and beneficiaries in implementing the plan
- Implement a proactive maintenance program for facilities
- Implement joint-use agreements
- Develop and implement incentive programs
- Use technology tools to build support

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND FEEDBACK STRATEGIES

- Regularly monitor and evaluate performance and satisfaction rates
- Use technology tools to report on progress, sustain interest, and increase accountability

Too often, children's play is an afterthought in local policy—if it figures in policymaking at all. By examining all possible spaces for play and collaborating with all relevant government departments and community stakeholders, play advocates and elected officials can significantly increase children's opportunities for play. Whether those opportunities are space-oriented or programmatic, advocates should strive to fully engage children and their families in the process. This report presents new ideas that should be adapted and adopted by more communities around the country, as well as providing a framework for increased federal and philanthropic funding for play in communities across the country.



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The opportunity to play is essential for the physical, social, emotional, and educational development of our children and for the health and well-being of our communities. Yet play is disappearing from children's lives.¹ Rising obesity rates are perhaps the most measurable and alarming evidence of a generation of children who are less active and less playful. If this trend is not reversed, this "Sedentary Generation"² is on track to live shorter lives than their parents.

The challenge for advocates and policymakers is to show that play and play spaces are part of a solution to this urgent public health problem. To overcome the misperception that play is trivial, there must be more voices for play, and these voices must do a better job of explaining its benefits. Civic leaders and citizens must mount robust and sustained initiatives that produce measurable results in enhancing health, education, the environment, and economic and community development.

To this end, KaBOOM! undertook a year-long research project to identify, describe, and analyze local initiatives to increase play in 12 communities across the country. KaBOOM! partnered with the Sheridan Group, a public advocacy and policy organization based in Washington, D.C., to conduct the study.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There were three phases to the project: research, phone interviews, and site visits. The first phase included interviews with national thought leaders in the play, health, education, parks and recreation, physical fitness, planning, and transportation communities. They were asked to identify challenges, opportunities, and trends in the broadly defined area of play and physical activity. What is happening in communities across the country to promote play and physical activity? What are the emerging trends and opportunities? What are the challenges? Based on their recommendations, a list of potential initiatives was developed for further research.

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The second phase involved document analysis and initial phone interviews with local stakeholders to understand the nature and scope of their initiative and its outcomes.

In the final phase, on-site interviews were conducted with stakeholders, beneficiaries, and members of the broader community. At the end of this process, 12 efforts stood out as offering significant findings to inform process and policy.

At each stage, the initiatives were assessed on their suitability for inclusion in the study. There were three essential requirements:

- **Did the initiative involve significant new financial and/or human resources for play and physical activity for children? For example, a single park clean-up project would not qualify.**
- **Did the initiative contribute to system-wide change in the community? One playground in one neighborhood would not indicate systematic change.**
- **Can the initiative be replicated in other places? Some effective large-scale urban initiatives that were candidates for the study relied on unique partnerships that were not easily replicable.**

Several factors were considered in the evaluation and selection of potential initiatives. In what measurable ways did the initiative improve play quantity, quality, or access? How did the key driver define success and measure impact?

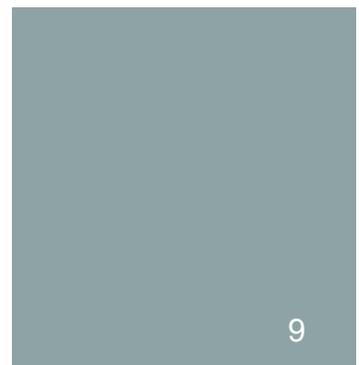
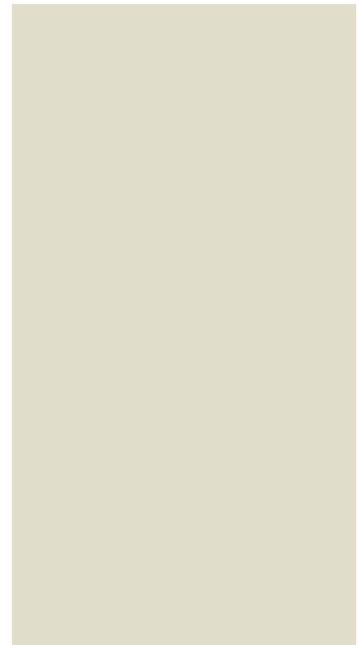
Diversity in the geography, size, demographics, and resources of the communities themselves was another consideration. How are communities increasing the amount of play space in densely developed areas? Some of these cases involved facilities rather than programs, thus requiring greater financial resources. How are communities with fewer resources finding the capital to invest in play initiatives, particularly during an economic downturn?

Finally, initiatives were chosen on how effectively children were engaged as participants in the process. What mechanisms did planners use to solicit input?

The 12 initiatives that were selected vary in nature and scope, but point to key common elements for building support for play and play spaces. Some are citizen-led efforts while others are driven by city officials. Some case studies describe a complicated and intergovernmental process while others involve a tested and purposeful program model that has been integrated into a school system. This report analyzes commonalities and then suggests a list of key questions that should be considered in building public interest and support for play initiatives in other communities.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purposes of this report, play is defined as freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated behavior that actively engages a child. Unstructured play opportunities were the primary focus of this study, but it includes some programs or curricula that provide opportunities for both structured and unstructured play and physical activity.



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This report is based on the premise that successful initiatives to increase play require development of political capital, human capital, and/or financial capital. Political capital is defined by influence and demonstrated by an individual or entity's ability to influence political leaders. Increasing the numbers of constituents who care about and will act on an issue expands a political base of support and increases political influence or capital. Human capital is defined as human resources to be mobilized and demonstrated in numbers of staff, volunteers, or organized constituents. Financial capital is the funding to support and sustain an initiative and can include public and/or private resources.

This report details the process by which key drivers and entities in each community developed the capital necessary to achieve their goals. A key driver is defined as an individual who creates interest in and opportunities for play; key drivers can be citizens or public officials. The key driver has a compelling argument and the time and energy to mobilize others behind that argument. In order to build broad public support and influence public policy, a single driver needs to be supported by an entity. For the purposes of the report, an entity is defined as a partnership, coalition, organization, association, or municipality.

In order to measure outcomes, this study details the extent to which each initiative increased the quality of, the quantity of, and access to play. The terms access and accessible in this report refer to the ability of children and other members of the community to take advantage of existing play spaces or initiatives. For example, trails that connect neighborhood parks and playgrounds and facilitate biking to these spaces increase children's access to existing play spaces. Thus, "access" and "accessible" are not limited here to their specific meanings under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Some case studies refer to the built environment. This includes buildings and spaces created or modified by people: homes, schools, park and recreation areas, greenways, and transportation systems.

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HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Play has been an essential part of human development since the earliest times. We know from animal studies that playful behavior prepares the young for the skills they need to survive. Kittens, for example, play at pouncing for hours on end—practice for the actual hunting of prey later on.

Similarly, children all over the world traditionally played at climbing trees, building forts, exploring unfamiliar landscapes, creating costumes and dressing up, and other games clearly related to survival: hunting, fishing, home-building, self-defense, and making clothes. In this way, play allowed children to practice adult social roles and prepare to be productive members of their communities.

Children's play has many other developmental purposes as well, which have become clearer through research in the last century. The simple act of throwing and catching a ball, for example, develops not just physical dexterity but also important cognitive skills fundamental

to understanding mathematics and physics. Make-believe play, in which children pretend that one object is something else or take on different roles in a story, is the earliest form of symbolic thinking, which in turn is the basis for both language and mathematics.

Many Native American peoples encouraged unsupervised children's play as a necessary part of growing up. But the European colonists were more ambivalent about play. The Puritans and other pious groups considered it idleness, "the devil's workshop," and extolled the virtues of hard work. Nevertheless, the work of children in pre-industrial America mainly involved farm and household chores and caring for younger siblings, which allowed them time and space to create their own play worlds separate from adults.

Historian Howard Chudacoff writes of these young early Americans: "Innovative by nature, children developed their own culture, one that sometimes challenged their assigned place in society and diminished parents' confidence about governing the lives of their offspring. That culture, if not one of play in the modern sense, certainly involved playful behavior."⁴

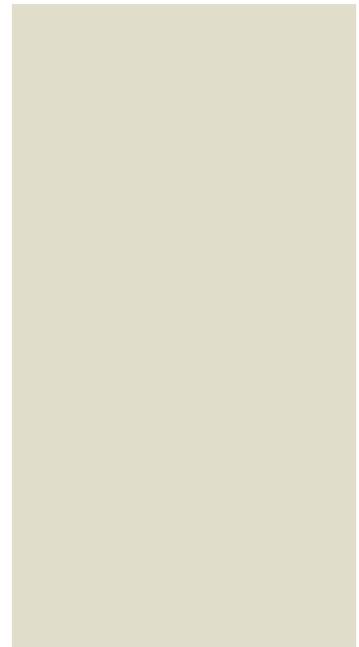
The industrial revolution of the 19th century and the shift to factory work and crowded city life dramatically changed children's lives. Farm and household chores were replaced by long hours in mills and mines, and children's free access to nature and natural playscapes was cut off. Toward the end of that century, and especially in the early 20th century, social reformers built a movement to create playgrounds and recreation programs for young people. The construction of playgrounds, an idea imported to the U.S. from Germany, spread rapidly.

The motives of these reformers were mixed. Some acted out of a belief in the importance of childhood and a desire to make life better for children. Others were concerned about juvenile delinquency, especially among newly arrived immigrant groups. Urban park and recreation programs were created in part to get immigrant children off the streets and under proper adult supervision, where they could be instructed in matters of character, citizenship, and "all the social virtues."

Local playground associations sprung up and then joined to form the Playground Association of America in 1906. Its first meeting in Washington, D.C. attracted representatives from public schools, city recreation departments, settlement houses, teachers' colleges, and charitable organizations. The following year the first Play Congress was held and the Playground Movement was officially launched.

Physical fitness and play were subjects of public concern at the highest levels. President Theodore Roosevelt, honorary chairman of the Playground Association, wrote: "Through the whole of life, from childhood to old age, there should be opportunities for the practice of those forms of recreation which renew life, and which make for the joy of living. Therefore, I consider such work as that of our Association, in establishing the best forms of play and guiding the expressions of recreation among our people, to be an essential factor in our national life."⁵

During this same general period of American history, a related movement was taking hold in education—the introduction of play-based kindergartens, another German invention of the 19th century. Friedrich Froebel's vision of the "child's garden" involved creating a small world in which children could play with their peers and experience their first taste of independence. His kindergarten program had three aspects: games and songs, construction, and a variety of instructional materials designed to lead children to explore, test, and compare. Froebel's philosophy of education had a profound influence well beyond kindergarten. His



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emphasis on child-initiated learning, creativity, social participation, and motor expression inspired generations of progressive education reformers and established the central role of play and hands-on experience in learning.

The first half of the 20th century has been called “the golden age of unstructured play” in the history of American childhood. But the advent of television and the growth of suburbs after World War II signaled the beginning of a startling transformation. Children’s toys, previously sold mainly at Christmastime, were advertised year-round for the first time and, more significantly, marketed directly to children during TV programs.

The Irish, Italian, and other immigrant children who grew up on the urban playgrounds built 50 years earlier fled the cities, which grew poorer and more dangerous. City parks, playgrounds, and recreation programs suffered. And the woods, fields, and wild places where children had played in smaller towns turned into housing developments, highways, and shopping malls. These suburban families had fewer children but more money—so children increasingly played alone, with things their parents bought for them. Toys became the focus of much childhood play, replacing outdoor roaming and exploration.

The marketing of toys to children intensified in the 1980s with the total deregulation of children’s television. The number of ads per hour was no longer limited, and the linking of products to program content was no longer prohibited. Entire programs essentially became advertisements for the toys, dolls, stuffed animals, and action figures they featured, along with the movies, lunch boxes, clothing, and breakfast cereals their images were licensed to.

The active, free-range child of early and mid-century America gradually became a couch potato. Many factors contributed to this transformation: the loss of outdoor play spaces; the rise of parental fears about letting children play on their own, fueled by sensational news stories about child molesters; an automobile culture in which children are driven everywhere, reducing the amount of walking and bike riding. At the same time, fear of injury and lawsuits sounded a death knell for some of the most engaging playground activities and equipment. Many schools actually eliminated recess entirely, or prohibited children from activities like playing tag.

By the turn of the 21st century, children’s unstructured free play was seriously endangered, in part because of a technological revolution as transformative as industrialization had been a century and a half earlier. The lure of computers and video games, added to TV, created a generation of children who typically spent four to six hours per day in front of screens, further isolating them from other children and from the outdoors. Their stressed-out, overworked parents saw few alternatives to the electronic babysitters. Safety concerns, aversion to risk, and fear of litigation created, in Hara Marano’s phrase, “a nation of wimps.” Meanwhile, the demise of family mealtime, the supersizing of American fast food, and the sedentary, screen-dominated lifestyle of large numbers of children have led to an epidemic of obesity that now threatens to shorten life expectancy and bankrupt our children’s future.

The time-tested principles of playful learning developed by Froebel and others were losing ground, too, as anxious parents feared that unstructured play was a waste of time, even for young children. They bought educational DVDs targeted to infants and toddlers, enrolled babies in sign-language classes, drilled them with flash cards, and scheduled every minute of the day with play dates and lessons that would build up their toddlers’ preschool resumes.

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The national obsession with academic achievement, raising test scores, and assigning large amounts of homework further eroded time for free play at home and in school, even in preschools and kindergartens.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

While these educational, social, and technological changes in recent years have reduced children's opportunities for free play, there is also some evidence that the tide of public opinion is turning. Two recent studies indicate that most parents see the value of unstructured play for children, even though they are stymied by major obstacles that prevent play from happening as simply and freely as it did in the past.

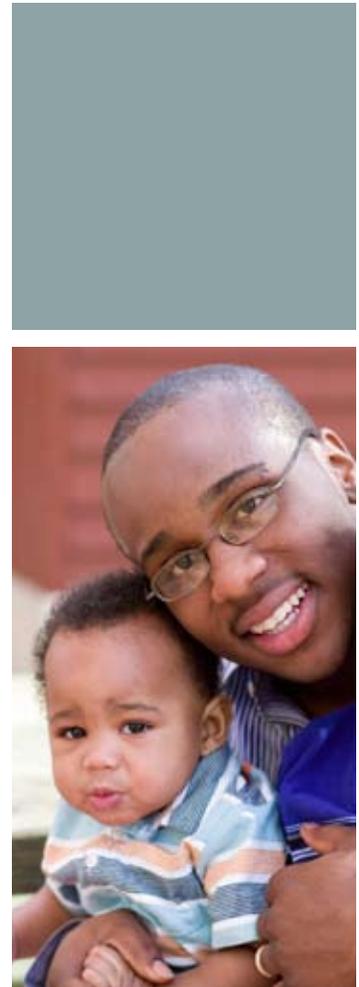
Yale University psychologists Dorothy and Jerome Singer and colleagues interviewed 2,400 mothers in 16 countries and found that, overall, 72% believe that children are “growing up too quickly.” In the U.S. the figure was 95%, the highest of any country studied. The authors conclude that “mothers are deeply concerned that their youngsters are somehow missing out on the joys and experiential learning opportunities of free play and natural exploration. ... For lack of safe outdoor play spaces and unstructured free time, children are being deprived of the excitement and social interactions of a healthy youth.”⁶

The second study, an online survey commissioned by KaBOOM! and carried out by Harris Interactive, polled 1,677 parents of children ages 2 to 12 on their views about play and play spaces in spring 2009. The great majority of parents—eight in 10—agreed that unstructured play is extremely or very important for children; only one in six said it is only somewhat or not at all important. Overall, 72% of parents said their children preferred unstructured to adult-led play. Urban parents and fathers were somewhat more likely to say their children preferred adult-organized play.

Nearly all the parents in the Harris poll agreed that outdoor play is important for children's physical fitness and development. Nine out of 10 parents recognized that their children spend less time outdoors than they did as children. They reported that their children spend, on average, about six hours per week in unstructured outdoor play but said they thought children should have twice that amount. About 80% of parents of 2- to 5-year-olds said their children preferred outdoor over indoor play. Among parents of 6- to 12-year-olds it was nearly 70%.

The top three barriers to outdoor play, according to the survey, were the lack of nearby play spaces, overly busy schedules, and lack of adult supervision at the play facilities that are available. Urban parents were the most likely to name the need for adult supervision. Three out of four parents said that citizens and government officials should take action to increase opportunities to play for children in their communities. And eight of 10 said they were willing to take some action themselves to increase the amount of time and space for children's play.

The growing interest in restoring and encouraging play is further evidenced by a remarkable outpouring of recent major reports, policy statements, and local initiatives to improve play spaces and the quality of play programs, and to increase public understanding of and support for play. Among those contributing to this new Play Movement are the Alliance for Childhood, American Academy of Pediatrics, Association of Children's Museums, Children and Nature Network, Common Good, Conservation Fund, KaBOOM!, International Play Association, National Association for Sport and Physical Education, National League of Cities, National



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Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity, National Recreation and Park Association, National Wildlife Federation, Policy link, President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, Project for Public Spaces, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Trust for America's Health, Trust for Public Land, U.S. Conference of Mayors, YMCA, and many others.

More than 100 scholars, advocates, and thought leaders gathered at South Carolina's Clemson University in June 2009 for the first Summit on the Value of Play. Organized by Fran Mainella, a former director of the National Park Service, the event focused on the cognitive, physical, and affective benefits of play as well as the barriers to play. Participants organized themselves into several task forces aimed at building a collaborative network, mounting a national communications campaign, and undertaking legislative advocacy in support of play. Planning is under way for a follow-up summit in 2010.

In July 2009 a diverse collection of more than 250 researchers and nonprofit leaders convened in Washington, D.C. to begin articulating a first-of-its-kind National Physical Activity Plan. Building on successful initiatives in Europe and Australia, working groups were organized to set priorities and sustainable implementation strategies for the fields of public health, education, volunteer and nonprofit organizations, transportation, urban design and community planning, mass media, health care, business and industry, and parks, recreation, fitness, and sports. It is expected that implementation of the plan will begin in early 2010.

The 2007 Academy of Pediatrics report titled "The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds" was striking in its unequivocal recommendations. "Play is essential to development," it said. "Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development. It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them. Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers. As they master their world, play helps children develop new competencies that lead to enhanced confidence and the resiliency they will need to face future challenges. Undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills."⁷

The United States now faces some vital policy choices that will determine the history of play in the 21st century. We can go backwards to the Puritan view of play as a waste of time, and continue to fill every spare moment in and out of school with adult-designed and -dominated activities. Or we can pay attention to a growing consensus among parents, physicians, and educators: that child-initiated, creative play lays the foundation for innovative thinking and problem-solving; self-control; social and emotional maturity; physical and mental health; and responsible citizenship. A further question is whether the U.S. will join the 192 countries that support play as a basic right of children or remain one of only two countries that have failed to ratify the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

CURRENT CONTEXT

Children's access to safe high-quality play spaces and opportunities to play has been significantly reduced in recent decades, with serious short- and long-term implications for their health and well-being. The most pressing issue is rising rates of obesity.

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Childhood obesity rates have nearly tripled since 1980, from 6.5% to 16.3%; more than 30% of U.S. children and youth are obese or at risk of becoming obese.⁸ Approximately 175,000 individuals under the age of 20 have type 2 diabetes, and two million young people between the ages of 12 and 19 have pre-diabetes—blood glucose levels higher than normal but not yet high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. Recent research suggests that long-term damage, especially to the heart and circulatory system, may already be occurring during pre-diabetes.⁹

Many government, scientific, and public health agencies recommend that school-age children and adolescents participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.¹⁰ Two-thirds of our children fall far short of meeting this standard.

Unless these trends are reversed, childhood obesity will have serious consequences for society, including increased disease, disability, health care costs, and absenteeism, along with lost productivity and a compromised quality of life. Obesity-related hospital costs for children and youth went from an annual average of \$35 million in 1979–1981 to \$127 million in 1997–1999.¹¹

A range of factors contribute to the current play and physical activity deficit.

QUALITY OF PLAY SPACES

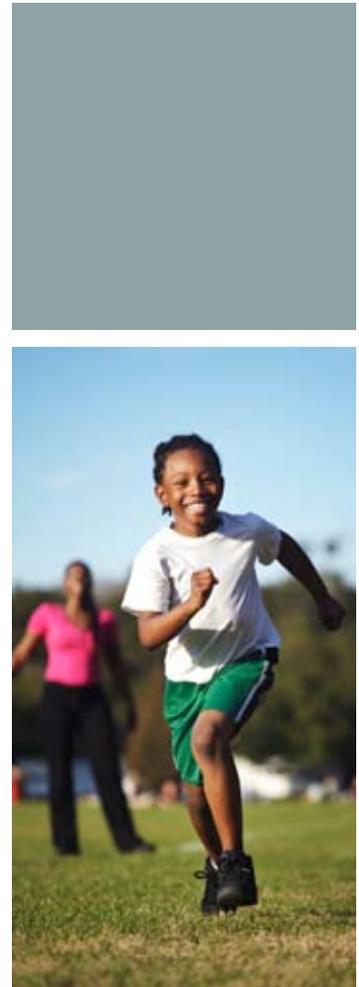
The loss of financial resources and public commitment to children’s play is reflected in the quality of the spaces that do exist and are accessible. In 2002, 29% of all playgrounds surveyed nationally contained one or more pieces of hazardous equipment.¹² Concerns regarding equipment safety have contributed to a decline in the number of children playing at their community playground.

The nature of play equipment itself is a factor in whether or not children are inclined to use it. Over the past few years, excessive concern for safety has trumped opportunities for innovation in design and more creative and adventurous play. As a result, play equipment is less physically challenging and engaging. Opportunities for physical challenge help children develop competencies that can later protect them from injury.

QUANTITY OF PLAY

Children don’t have adequate time and space for play. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s 2007 Recess Rules report, recess offers nearly half (42%) of the available opportunity to promote physical activity among children during the school year.¹³ Many schools, however, are cutting back recess in order to increase academic instruction time. And in too many schools access to recess is limited by policies that allow children to be punished for misbehavior, for not completing work, or for failure to pass tests by having their recess time taken away.

Including hours spent both in and out of school, children have less free time. Since the late 1970s, children on average have lost 12 hours per week in free time, including a 50% decrease in unstructured outdoor activities. Children lead more highly scheduled lives. A focus on structured activities led to a decrease in children’s free playtime by 25% between 1981 and 1997.¹⁴



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Screen time has replaced much of the time that was previously available for play. Television, DVDs, video games, and computers have replaced more active and creative play. Children under six years old spend an average of about two hours a day with screen media¹⁵, and youth between the ages of 8 and 18 spend an average of 6.5 hours a day with screen media—more than 45 hours a week.¹⁶ Children are spending less time actively playing and more time engaged in these sedentary activities.

ACCESS TO PLAY SPACES

The nature of the built environment, the availability of play spaces, and perceptions of risk are important factors in whether or not children have access to opportunities to play. A 2009 Harris poll of parents commissioned by KaBOOM! found that nearly half reported there was no play space or facility within walking distance in their community, yet eight in 10 parents feel it is important that such facilities be within walking distance.¹⁷

Community design affects access. Neighborhoods without sidewalks, bike paths, and safe walking and biking routes put up barriers to play. Where children used to walk or ride to school, many children now go to school by car. In 1969, 90% of children living within one to five miles from school walked there, while today only 15% from the same group walk to school.¹⁸ This is due, in part, to built environments and sprawling community designs that discourage walking or bicycling and promote driving.

Where play spaces do exist, there has been a trend toward limiting their availability. Schoolyards and other gathering places that were once open to the public have been closed because of liability concerns. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests opening schoolyards to the public as a way to increase access to physical activity opportunities.¹⁹

Even where play spaces exist and are accessible, they won't be used unless parents perceive them to be safe. Dr. James Sallis, a leading researcher in the field, has found that the most important factor when parents select play spaces for their children is safety and the perception of safety.^{20,21}

INEQUITIES IN QUANTITY, QUALITY, AND ACCESS

Data suggest that children from low-income households and communities are disproportionately affected by these trends across all areas—quantity, quality, and access. Low-income communities have fewer recreational facilities and those facilities are less well maintained.²² Children from low-income households also have fewer opportunities to play; research shows that children from such households have less recess time.²³ Finally, children in low-income households are estimated to spend 50% more time watching television than their more affluent peers.²⁴

RESEARCH CONNECTING PLAY TO POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Emerging research makes a case for access to high-quality play space as a way to reverse sedentary patterns in children's behavior and support their physical, cognitive, social, and

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emotional development. Some of this research suggests that play and physical activity are required to reduce childhood obesity.

The American Academy of Pediatrics²⁵, the Institute of Medicine²⁶, and Stanford University²⁷ all recommend that solutions to childhood obesity focus on opportunities for free play and the provision of facilities for play. There is a growing body of research that suggests that children will be more active if they are given opportunities to engage in unstructured or free play. Active children are less likely to be obese and less prone to have obesity-related health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. Unstructured play gets children moving, and more active children are more likely to be physically healthy.

The built environment can support behavioral change in children. Many studies associate physical activity with time spent outdoors and proximity to parks and recreational facilities. There are some studies that associate “neighborhood greenness” with lower body mass index in children.²⁸

Play is also linked to positive educational outcomes. Play is associated with neuro-physiological development that leads to stronger academic achievement, increased concentration, and improved math, reading, and writing test scores. Children who are below average on language and cognitive skills do better in early school achievement if they are physically healthy and have strong social and emotional skills—all factors that are highly correlated with play.

Finally, play in the outdoors builds confidence and social skills. Children are happier and better able to get along with others when they have regular opportunities for free and unstructured play outdoors. Outdoor experiences in adolescence result in enhanced self-esteem, self-confidence, independence, autonomy, and initiative—and these positive results extend into adulthood.²⁹

PLAY POLICY AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

The recent history of efforts to support children’s play at the federal level is at best discouraging. Although the federal government has yet to address the importance of play with any specific legislation or initiative, aspects of two programs, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program (UPARR), have in the past been used effectively to enhance play opportunities. Both programs, however, are currently underfunded or receiving no funding.

Almost every county in the nation has benefitted from LWCF funding of state and local park and recreation projects since its establishment in 1965; they have protected seven million acres of wilderness and wildlife habitat. UPARR provided \$230 million to local governments from 1978 to 2000 for park rehabilitation and maintenance and recreation programs in the inner cities.

During the 1970s, for example, the New York City Parks Department received about \$5 million per year through the LWCF. UPARR grants for New York City projects ranged up to \$1.5 million per year. A \$794,000 grant in 1979 helped establish the city’s Urban Park Rangers program.



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Actual spending from the two funds has almost never reached the levels authorized by Congress: \$900 million per year for the LWCF and \$725 million over five years for UPARR. The LWCF was fully funded only twice in its history, the last time in fiscal year 2001. Since then, allocations from the fund have dropped precipitously; the 2009 amount is about \$27 million, just 3% of the authorized level. UPARR has fared even worse. No funds have been spent under that program since 2002. In the current economy, the challenge of restoring funds for these programs—especially for capital expenditures—is especially daunting.

A coalition of nonprofit organizations, foundations, and corporations including the YMCA, the National Recreation and Park Association, and the National Association for Sport and Physical Education came together in 2007 and pushed for new federal legislation to support children’s play. The PLAY Every Day Act, introduced in the 110th Congress that year, would have required the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop a community play index to assess the policy, program, and environmental barriers to participation in physical activity. It also would have awarded grants to state health departments for partnerships with community-based coalitions to plan and implement initiatives to increase spaces and opportunities for physical activity and “quality play.”

The bill was sponsored by Senator Tom Harkin, Democrat of Iowa, and had 11 co-sponsors in the Senate, including Hillary Clinton of New York, Barbara Boxer of California, Richard Durbin of Illinois, and Charles Hagel of Nebraska. The proposal was referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, which never reported it out. On the House side, the bill was introduced by Representative Mark Udall of Colorado and had 82 co-sponsors. It was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, which took no action on it. When the 110th Congress expired, the proposal died. The bill has not been reintroduced in the current Congress.

Two other pieces of federal legislation marginally related to play and introduced in 2007 fared slightly better, although neither has become law. The No Child Left Inside Act, designed to enhance environmental education and training and promoted by the Children and Nature Network, was reported out by the House Education and Labor Committee and approved by the full House in a 293 to 109 vote on Sept. 18, 2008. But the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee never took action on it, and the bill died with the 110th Congress. It has been reintroduced in the new Congress, though, sponsored by Senator John Reed of Rhode Island (as S. 866) and Representative John Sarbanes of Maryland (as H.R. 2054).

The FIT Kids Act was introduced in 2007 by Representative Ronald Kind of Wisconsin and Senator Harkin of Iowa. Its goal was to promote healthy active lifestyles through improved health and physical education in schools. Neither the House Education and Labor Committee nor the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee took action on it during the 110th Congress, but the bill has been reintroduced in the new Congress by Senator Harkin. It has 20 co-sponsors, including three Republicans.

The ongoing debate over health care reform offers a potential opportunity for play advocates to project their concerns onto a national stage. The projected costs of medical care for the Sedentary Generation of today’s children are staggering, and the health benefits of a playful, active childhood should by any measure be a part of this important policy conversation. Thus far, however, voices for children’s play have not found effective ways to enter the increasingly noisy health care fight.

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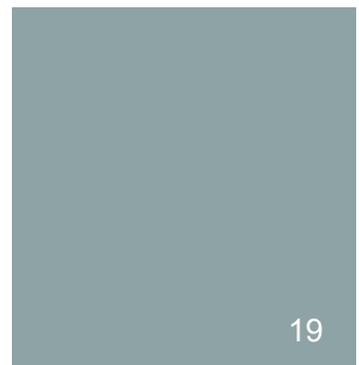
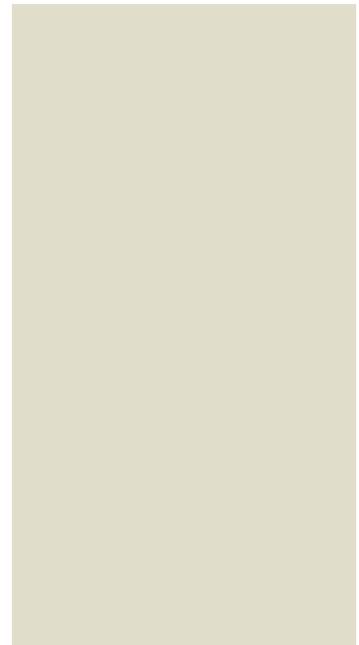
The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, in recent years known by the name No Child Left Behind, is due for reauthorization. That debate will also offer opportunities for advocates of play. The current law's emphasis on standardized testing of literacy and math skills has had the effect of narrowing the curriculum, curtailing physical education and recess, and driving play from every classroom and especially from the early childhood classroom—as noted in the report “Crisis in the Kindergarten” by the Alliance for Childhood.

Advocates also have the opportunity to work with other federal agencies. The Department of Housing and Urban Development, for example, could do more to recognize and promote the importance of high-quality play areas in public housing projects, as many units are constructed or remodeled without consideration for play and recreation. The Department of the Interior could support efforts to increase opportunities for children's exploratory play in nature as a demonstrated way to build respect for the environment and the importance of conservation. The U.S. Forest Service is already considering a proposal to designate “children's forests” around the country, where programs to encourage play in the outdoors could take place. The Center for Disease Control could expand its obesity related efforts to include infrastructure as well as research. The Corporation for National and Community Service could expand the utilization of Corps Members to provide human capital support in our nation's playspaces.

Building political support for play will require strategic planning, careful use of data, and inspired reporting. An important part of that effort is to make visible the results of the successful local initiatives in this report to the people who most need that information at both the grassroots and policymaking levels. (Note: the complete case studies of the 12 initiatives are available at the KaBOOM! web site: kaboom.org/bestpractices.)

At the same time, an analysis of what happened to the PLAY Every Day Act in the 110th Congress, why the bill has not been reintroduced in the new Congress, and how the coalition of organizations that initially promoted the bill can be remobilized is badly needed. Advocates must work harder to educate and enlist the support of reporters and editors about the importance of outdoor play and the growing consensus that children need at least 60 minutes a day of it.

In addition to the successful initiatives described in this report, other newly emerging ideas can transform public perceptions of play and its role in children's lives. One of the most powerful of these is the playworker, or play associate—a trained, observant, responsible adult who creates a safe and playful environment for children without directing or controlling play. Well known in other countries, the discipline of playwork is just being discovered in the United States. It has the potential to revitalize children's play and health while contributing to both economic and community development.



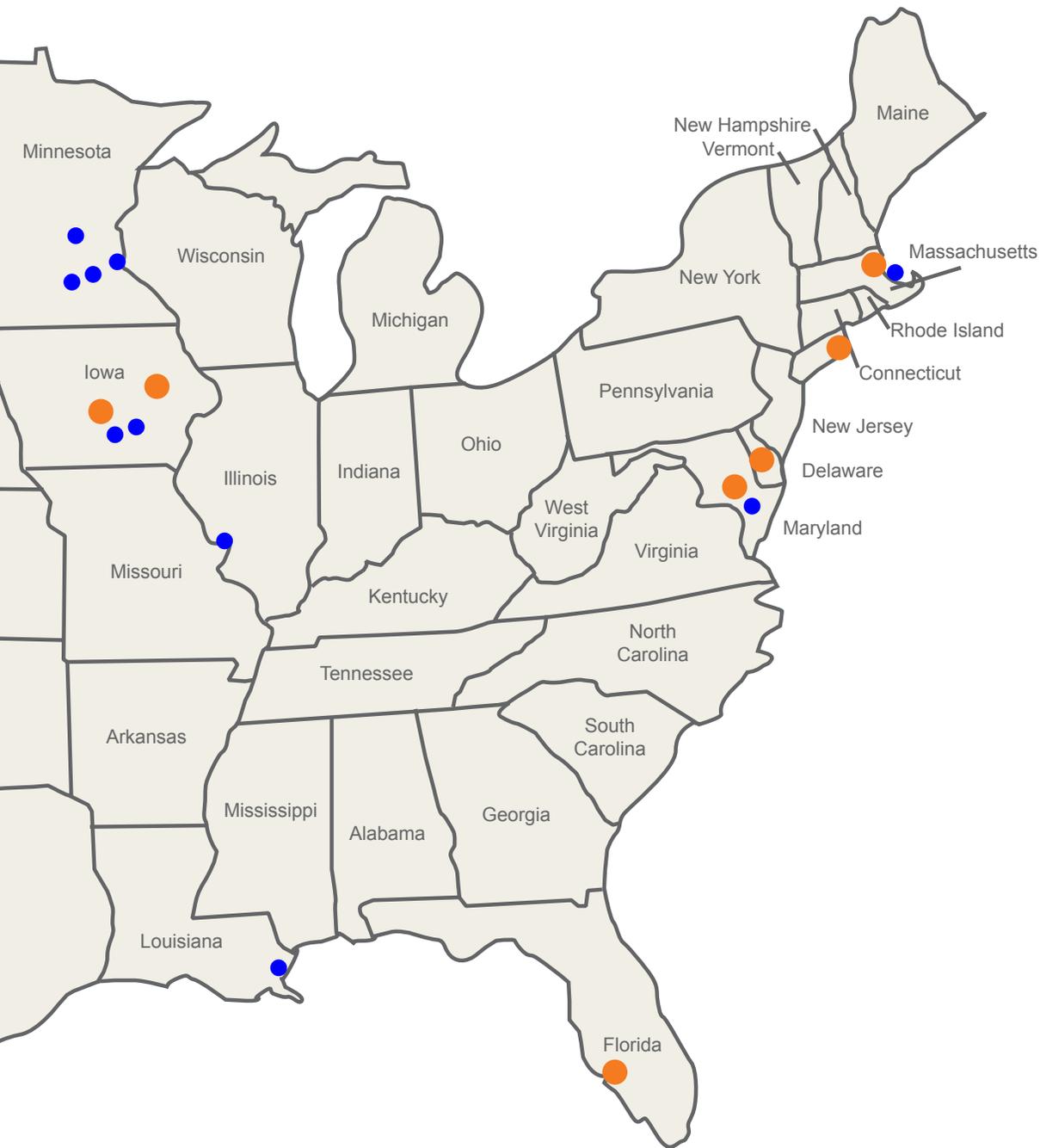
MAP: MUNICIPAL BEST PRACTICES PLAY MATTERS



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● Municipal Best Practices
● Best Practices Expansion





ANKENY, IOWA: PARKS AND RECREATION

GOVERNING THROUGH CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

PUBLIC-PRIVATE COLLABORATION BUILDS POLITICAL CAPITAL IN A GROWING COMMUNITY

Ankeny offers an example of a city-led process to engage citizens and build political support and financial resources for play. With a rapidly expanding population of young families and a culture oriented to athletics, citizen demand for athletic facilities in Ankeny exceeded the supply. After a bond measure to build a sports complex failed, the city solicited citizen input and enlisted their support in fundraising. The success of that process revealed pent-up demand for play space and triggered a cultural shift in governing: the city now incorporates resident input into all phases of planning, implementation, and maintenance. Newfound citizen participation and satisfaction rates have given Ankeny the political capital to proceed with an ambitious plan for the development of play areas.

OUTCOMES

Since 2002, Ankeny Parks and Recreation has directed \$1.5 million in public resources per year to new playground development. Public input—through surveys, focus groups, community engagement meetings, and playground votes—now informs every park and playground development project. The city’s 228-page master plan to guide future investment in parks, playgrounds, and other open space is a product of public-private collaboration.

Quantity: City-led efforts resulted in a new 124-acre sports complex that alleviated pressure on neighborhood playgrounds. The city has since built two playgrounds at the complex and a skate park. There are now 33 parks and 21 playgrounds serving the roughly 20,500 regional area youth under 18. The city of Ankeny is constructing up to three new playgrounds per year.

Quality: Ninety-five percent of residents consider the city’s parks and playgrounds “good” or “excellent.” The diverse opportunities for play are designed to accommodate multiple interests and ages, ranging from fishing ponds to a skate park.

Access: As a result of these developments, most youth in Ankeny are now within a quarter mile of a playground or trail to connect them to a playground. Every child is within six blocks of a 6- to 15-acre park. These parks are connected by 33 miles of eight-foot wide trails.

CORE FINDINGS

Engage key stakeholders early in the process. Following the failed bond measure, the mayor was proactive in meeting with key stakeholders early in the process, including stakeholders and political elites who had opposed the bond measure.

Leverage private resources to build public support. The city of Ankeny agreed to contribute \$2 for every \$1 raised at the community level. These matching dollars were effective in raising private resources for recreation facilities; proposed bond measures were not.

Engage citizens. The city builds political support for play and playgrounds by meaningfully involving citizens in setting priorities and helping to actualize these priorities. Residents vote on playground designs. Surveys and focus groups inform the long-range goals of the Parks and Recreation Department.

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Empower youth. The mayor personally convened a youth council to inform needs, suggest solutions, and help execute initiatives. The council was empowered to develop plans for a skate park that is now a signature feature within the city.

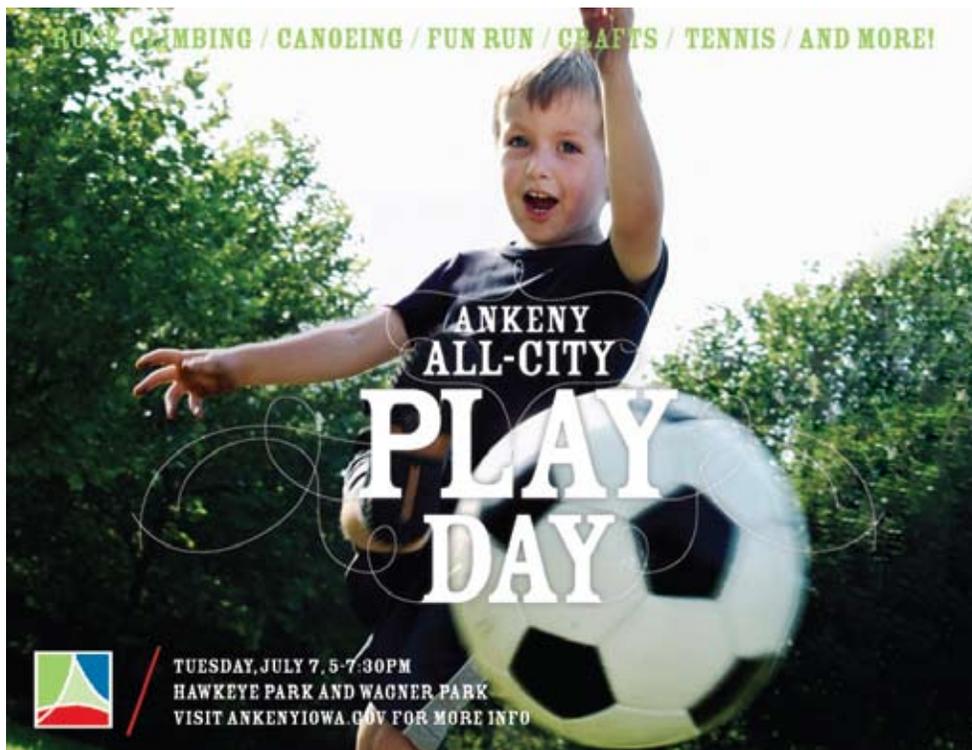
Create joint-function play facilities. Ankeny's Prairie Ridge Sports Complex was developed to create playing fields for sports teams, but city leaders and staff quickly realized a demand for unstructured play opportunities within the same complex. Adding amenities for unstructured play within the broader umbrella of the sports complex created a bustling town center focused on play and recreation.

Create park and recreation master plans. The city invested in a comprehensive master plan. They integrated a full range of facilities in the plan and incorporated citizen feedback. Trails for biking and walking are connected to playgrounds and schoolyards, increasing access to play.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

In Ankeny, the sports complex itself was arguably a catalyst for a systemic culture shift that led to greater citizen input into park and playground decision making. Challenge grants were one mechanism to spur financial investment. How can municipalities identify overlooked opportunities to use policy to increase citizen ownership and investment in parks and playgrounds? Economic development data helped to court private donations. In what ways can drivers and municipalities use economic data as an argument for investment in play?

For more information on this case study, please visit kaboom.org/bestpractices



One of several promotional pieces from the Ankeny Play Day.



Population
of Ankeny:
42,287

Population
under 18:
11,460

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND: PLAYWORKS

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL RECESS

A COST-EFFICIENT WAY TO REDUCE VIOLENCE AND IMPROVE BEHAVIOR

Playworks, formerly Sports4Kids, provides full-day play and physical education programming at low-income schools. The program began in Oakland, California, and is now active in several cities. It has been championed by school principals as a cost-efficient way to improve a school's learning environment and culture, not just children's behavior on the playground. The Playworks model uses coaches trained to facilitate play during the school day. A key focus of the program is recess. Particularly at low-income inner-city schools, disciplinary problems, a lack of school staffing, and unsafe playgrounds have compromised opportunities for play during recess. As a result of the program, schools report fewer incidents of violence, suspensions, and expulsions, as well as improved behavior in the classroom.

OUTCOMES

Playworks was introduced in six schools in Baltimore in the fall of 2005. The program has now expanded to 24 elementary schools with plans to expand to 36 schools during the 2009–2010 school year. Participating schools report improvements in student behavior and lower incidents of violence and suspension.

Quantity: There are 10,000 children participating in Playworks programs at 24 schools across Baltimore. There are 450 youths in the junior coach program and 350 students who receive after-school programming. Playworks runs two interscholastic leagues serving 500 children.

Quality: Based on principal and teacher surveys, 94% of respondents reported that Playworks increased the level of student participation in physical activity on the playground.

Access: In addition to recess and the after-school programming, Playworks also runs classroom games during the school day. On average, Playworks will deliver three of these 30-minute classroom games each day and in different classes within the school.

CORE FINDINGS

Identify a key local driver. Medfield Heights Elementary School Principal Debbie Thomas was a key driver for the program, promoting Playworks through word-of-mouth marketing to like-minded principals and offering her school for site visits.

Show, rather than describe, the model. In launching the program in Baltimore, principals benefited from seeing and experiencing Playworks rather than just hearing about it. A video or site visit can effectively demonstrate an initiative and can move principals from interest to commitment.

Integrate programs and providers of these programs into the school community. Playworks site coordinators develop trusting relationships with students, teacher, and parents; they become an integral part of the school community. Through these relationships and this rapport, site coordinators are able to effect change in the behavior of the students and the culture of the school.

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Three children jump roping with a Playworks employee.

Population of Baltimore:

763,181

Population under 18:

178,012

Engage beneficiaries. While Playworks has a core curriculum, students are able to introduce their own games or tailor Playworks games. The junior coach program gives youth an opportunity to develop leadership skills and help participate in delivering the program.

Provide a cost-effective model for school principals. Playworks has developed a program model that passes along at-cost site coordinators to the school principals. Principals report that the cost of \$23,500 for a coordinator who serves as a full-time staff person, interscholastic coach, and an after-school teacher is good value.

Leverage national initiatives to offset costs. The use of AmeriCorps members helps to staff the site coordinator positions and offset personnel costs.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

The Playworks roll-out in Baltimore gave school principals an opportunity to take a fresh look at how they were managing and using recess at low-income inner-city schools. Their experience raises some critical questions about overlooked opportunities. What other opportunities can play advocates identify within a child's everyday schedule? What opportunities lie in other community-based gatherings, such as at church or after school? The Baltimore experience also points to the ability of a single program and well-trained individual to increase play and transform the culture of a school.

For more information on this case study, please visit kaboom.org/bestpractices

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS: BOSTON SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE

A BIG-CITY MAYOR CHAMPIONS PLAY BOSTON INITIATIVE SUCCEEDS BY AVOIDING COSTLY ERRORS

This public-private collaboration, initially inspired by the green movement, has constructed new schoolyards across the city. With the leadership of Mayor Tom Menino, the Boston Schoolyard Initiative has transformed the outdoor physical space of more than 70 Boston schoolyards into colorful and engaging outdoor classrooms and places to play. The project enjoys ongoing public support and is a sustainable model that relies on public-private funding and a comprehensive maintenance program to provide accessible and high-quality play spaces.

OUTCOMES

More than \$4 million in private funds and close to \$16 million in public funds have been invested in designing and constructing comprehensive schoolyards across Boston. Mayor Menino has been the leading political champion for this effort, safeguarding resources during an economic downturn and positioning this project as part of his education reform agenda.

Quantity: Boston has constructed or reconstructed schoolyards and outdoor classrooms at 71 of the district's 130 schools, including almost 90% of the city's elementary schools. The play spaces cover 125 acres and serve almost 30,000 students. Boston Schoolyard Initiative is on track to have 85 schoolyards completed by 2010.

Quality: Improved outdoor spaces include comprehensive, age-appropriate play structures and green spaces that address educational, social, and cognitive development issues. They replace asphalt surfaces with limited play equipment.

Access: Boston Schoolyard Initiative has renovated schoolyards in each of the city's 15 neighborhoods. The 71 new play and educational spaces are open to the general public after school hours, serving over 90,000 children under age 14 living in these Boston neighborhoods.

CORE FINDINGS



A typical asphalt surface outside a public school (before renovation).

Gather data to ascertain community and organizational needs.

Thoughtful community outreach and research allowed the task force to identify needs and opportunities, including the development of Boston schoolyards. This ensured a baseline of support, particularly from the environmental and health communities.

Engage a key political ally early in the process. By securing Mayor Menino's leadership early in the process, green space advocates were successful in building the political support necessary to secure public funding. This ongoing political support has helped to sustain the initiative through tighter budgetary periods.

Involve the community and beneficiaries. By inviting students, community members, parents, and teachers to participate in the design, construction, and maintenance processes, Boston Schoolyard Initiative helps to ensure that these spaces will meet the needs of the community and cultivate community ownership and pride.

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Playground and green spaces connect the school with the community (after renovation).

Population of Boston:
589,141

Population under 18:
116,649

Create entities to streamline funding and implementation. Creating one entity to manage public-private funding and another to implement design and construction improved efficiency of the process and helped deliver successful outcomes.

Implement a sustainable maintenance program. The program avoids costly errors by investing in training for students, interested residents, and maintenance crews. Adapting these programs as needs evolve is important.

Develop curriculum geared toward learning standards. Outdoor classrooms became increasingly successful as Boston Schoolyard Initiative developed activity guides based on the school's existing curriculum. The school district embraced the model, which offers teachers new ways to address curriculum requirements.

Promote schoolyard improvement as tied to education reform. Mayor Menino has retained funding for schoolyard construction in the face of budget cuts by linking these spaces to his education reform agenda. The approach has helped the initiative weather public criticism.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

The Boston Schoolyard Initiative's sustainability is striking. The results-driven approach of this project has maintained donors' interest, while the mayor's efforts to tie high-quality schoolyards to his education reform agenda has helped validate its continuation in the face of budget cuts. Will the Boston Schoolyard Initiative be able to weather the current economic crisis as high-dollar donors cut back on giving? When Menino eventually leaves office, will this program have sufficient political support to weather a new administration with its own priorities? What will continued research show about this program's impact on children's learning?

For more information on this case study, please visit kaboom.org/bestpractices

BOULDER, COLORADO: THE FREIKER PROGRAM

SOLAR-POWERED CHILDREN

A LOW-COST PROJECT TO GET KIDS BIKING AND WALKING

Freiker (short for “frequent biker”) is a parent- and volunteer-driven nonprofit that uses incentives and innovative technology to increase the number of elementary school children regularly bicycling and walking to school. A solar-powered Freikometer counts daily trips. Children and parents can view and manage their data online, and students receive awards based on activity level. Within five years, this low-cost model has significantly increased physical activity and has spread to schools in four states and to Canada. Although launched in an affluent suburb, the program has also proven replicable in low-income and urban communities.

OUTCOMES

Bike-riding rates among students and parents have significantly increased as a result of the Freiker program. The original goal of doubling one school’s bike racks has ultimately resulted in a solar-powered, wireless device at 10 schools in four states.

Quantity: Three thousand participants have completed more than 120,000 foot and bicycle trips, and have traveled 150,000 miles (six times around the world). Freiker reports that the children have burned more than 3.5 million calories, saved nearly 8,000 gallons of gas, and prevented more than 150,000 tons of CO2 emissions.

Quality: Volunteers report a 10% decrease in drowsiness rates, improved parental involvement in schools, more time spent with family and friends, increases in the rate of parents’ physical activity, and an increase in the numbers of students who are physically active.

Access: Once the program has developed traction in a community and achieved gains in walking and biking rates, parents report reduced car traffic and safer streets and sidewalks. Children have access to safer space for biking.

CORE FINDINGS

Use technology to track data and communicate with participants. This web-based program allows for efficient data collection and dissemination. Freiker updates data and communicates with participants on a daily basis.

Positive reinforcement supports behavior change. Combinations of random weekly rewards and goal-based incentives encourage students to increase their physical activity in the short term and to meet long-range goals.

Data collection and goals act as motivators. The Freiker system for setting, tracking, and recognizing goal achievement is effective. Even students who have won the “grand prize” iPods continue to set new goals for themselves and track their progress online.

Engage school personnel. Students are enthusiastic when teachers, rather than parents, volunteer to meet them at Freiker Stops and bike or walk to school with them. When the physical education teacher is involved in promoting the program, the Freiker staff report higher participation rates.

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Three students prepare to bike to school.

Population of Boulder:
94,673

Population under 18:
13,569

Provide immediate feedback. Children receive immediate feedback (a bell rings as they ride under the Freikometer) for physical activity. The program directors believe that this immediate feedback has helped boost ridership rates.

Build flexibility into the program. By tailoring the program to meet individual school and community needs, Freiker has expanded to more diverse communities.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

The initial arguments for Freiker were its environmental benefits and increased independence among the city's youth. Secondary concerns were health and play, yet the program ultimately encouraged both children and adults to increase their physical activity. Is Freiker replicable in lower-income or inner-city environments, or those that don't have adequate trails and sidewalks? Its advocates believe it is and are identifying methods by which the program can adapt to different locations. Another critical question raised by the Freiker experience is the federal government's role in funding such initiatives. Can a relatively small federal investment give technology-based programs the research capacity to reduce costs per unit enough for a national roll-out?

For more information on this case study, please visit kaboom.org/bestpractices

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA: THE SWITCH PROGRAM

COMBATING OBESITY ON THREE FRONTS

MORE PLAY, LESS SCREEN TIME, AND HEALTHIER EATING

Switch What You Do, View, and Chew is a community- and family-based program designed to encourage 8 to 10 year-old children to change three critical health behaviors, all of which are proven risk factors for childhood obesity. The program aims to increase children's physical activity ("Switch What You Do"), decrease their screen time ("Switch What You View"), and increase their fruit and vegetable consumption ("Switch What You Chew"). Initially developed and tested by the National Institute on Media and the Family, the program measures and then creates incentives for physical activity, fruit/vegetable consumption, and reduced screen time. The program is successful. One outcome is that children in Cedar Rapids are spending less time in front of the computer or television and more time playing.

OUTCOMES

Over four years the National Institute on Media and the Family has developed and implemented the program, in partnership with the Cedar Rapids School District, to raise awareness and inspire healthier habits for children and their families. Leveraging the financial and volunteer support of local businesses, these benefits come at no direct cost to the taxpayers.

Quantity: Since 2005, more than 2,500 students in Cedar Rapids have participated in the Switch program.

Quality: On average, participants decreased their screen time more than two hours per week, increased their steps by about 350 per day, and increased fruit and vegetable consumption by two servings per day. The Switch Team reported that children in the program spent more time playing and less time in front of the television or computer.

Access: Switch providers speak at workplaces, PTA meetings, and other events, increasing awareness of the program throughout the community. In one study conducted by the Institute on Media and the Family, only 15% of responding families had formally participated in Switch yet 33% of those who had heard of the program reported that they had increased their physical activity as a result of the program.

CORE FINDINGS

Engage children from multiple "ecological levels." Participating students received encouragement to change behavior directly from Switch, as well as from their schools, parents, and the broader community. Aligning a consistent message across all four planes creates a complete environment supporting behavioral change.

Address multiple behaviors in tandem. Switch works because it helps students see a dynamic connection between screen time, activity level, and food consumption.

Engage local part-time staff and volunteers. One staff person or volunteer can manage the Switch program at multiple community sites, such as schools or YMCAs. Selecting local residents who are well known and trusted can accelerate community buy-in. Switch communities rely on nurses, physician's assistants, physical education teachers, athletes, and other health care professionals.

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Students stretch, preparing for outdoor play.

Population of Cedar Rapids:
126,396

Population under 18:
30,967

Invest in local leadership. The National Institute on Media and the Family funded three part-time employees who were well known in the Cedar Rapids School District. These retired physical education teachers were the face of Switch in Cedar Rapids and established immediate credibility for the program with teachers, students, and families.

Diversify funding sources. Cargill Inc., the Healthy and Active America Foundation, Medica, and Fairview Ridges Hospital provided \$1.3 million to fund Switch’s development and testing. The Institute remained in control of the research, while the funders were informed of the design and development of the materials and the research results as they became available.

Integrate programs into pre-existing curriculum. According to teachers, the Switch is easily integrated into a school’s academic curriculum. This feature of the program was critical to the partnership with the Cedar Rapids School District.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

Switch raises some compelling questions about behavior modification programs. Is Switch’s community approach—simultaneously addressing the individual, family, school, and community—an effective model for similar programs? In what ways might other initiatives boost their efficacy by taking a more holistic approach and addressing multiple health behaviors simultaneously? What was the role of incentives in changing behavior versus other features of the program?

For more information on this case study, please visit kaboom.org/bestpractices

DENVER, COLORADO: LEARNING LANDSCAPES

LINKING PLAY AND LEARNING

A SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP INSPIRES CIVIC LEADERS

Learning Landscapes is an entrepreneurial public-private partnership that designs and builds comprehensive outdoor play spaces at schools across Denver. The design-and-build process provided an opportunity to work with schools to engage parents, students, businesses, and civic leaders. Through joint-use agreements, these play spaces were opened up to the community after school hours. The popularity of Learning Landscapes inspired broad public support and the public financing necessary to expand the program to every school playground in Denver.

OUTCOMES

Citizen-led initiatives to upgrade neighborhood schoolyards inspired the launch of a public-private partnership to bring the same improvements to underserved neighborhoods across the city. The popularity of these play spaces led to public demand, and \$39 million in public funding, to expand the model program to every schoolyard across Denver.

Quantity: There have been 48 playgrounds built across Denver, serving 18,000 students; not all created new space for play, but many old schoolyards lacked play equipment.

Quality: The 48 new playgrounds replaced or repaired dilapidated asphalt areas and outdated or unsafe play equipment with age-appropriate climbing and play structures, artwork, gathering places, shade structures, and green areas. There was virtually no grass at any of the sites before the learning landscapes were developed.

Access: State grants required that the play spaces be accessible to the public after school hours, resulting in 46 new playground facilities open to local communities.

CORE FINDINGS

Engage stakeholders through firsthand experience. Potential stakeholders needed to witness firsthand, rather than hear or read about, the necessity for high-quality play spaces in order to overcome cost objections and to make the association between play and learning.

Engage key public officials early in the process. Lois Brink, leader of the Learning Landscapes Alliance and landscape architecture faculty member at University of Colorado at Denver, worked in partnership with officials from the city and with the Denver Public Schools, building trust and engaging them early in the process. The partnership with key DPS staff was critical to the success of the initiative.

Enlist direct beneficiaries in advocacy. The Learning Landscapes Alliance was able to command the attention of public officials when they began to hear directly from the students; student presentations to the city council and school board were an effective tactic.

Mobilize the community to inspire civic leaders. The engagement of school and community members, particularly in the underserved neighborhoods of Denver, and the resulting

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AmeriCorps members work with students to add drought-resistant plantings.

Population of Denver:
588,349

Population under 18:
143,557

ownership and pride in their play space inspired the support of key civic leaders. When 80% of the school community at Colfax Elementary School came out for the build day, civic leaders took notice.

Expand access through joint-use agreements. The Colorado’s Great Outdoors (or COGO) grant, which required schools to extend the use of their schoolyard to the community after hours, was the primary impetus for some principals to participate in these joint-use agreements.

Utilize private funding to catalyze public funding. While many private investors supported the Learning Landscape Alliance, Denver’s Gates Foundation was the leading contributor. An initial Gates Foundation investment of \$1.2 million was a catalyst for \$19 million in public funding through the bond measures.

Align of grass roots and grass tops. The pace of the Learning Landscapes expansion was made possible by the alignment of an effective grassroots campaign and willingness of the city to invest in playground development.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

The University of Colorado at Denver played a key role in propelling Learning Landscapes, from inception to the development of supporting research. What other opportunities exist for partnerships with the academic sector to expand play options in urban areas? This case study raises the importance of interagency collaboration in determining priorities for play facilities. What are the best practices for coordinating play facility placement across jurisdictions? How can parks departments and school districts best collaborate to determine play priorities? Would a play space audit across jurisdictions have been helpful in identifying and aligning priorities?

For more information on this case study, please visit kaboom.org/bestpractices

GREENBELT, MARYLAND

JOINT-USE AGREEMENTS WITH HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATIONS

A CAMPAIGN FOR EQUITY IN ACCESS TO PLAYGROUNDS

A public-private partnership between the city of Greenbelt and homeowners associations (HOAs) increases the quality and the accessibility of playgrounds. Building on a model joint-use agreement between the city and the most established homeowners association in Greenbelt, representatives of some of the more recently developed associations successfully lobbied the city council to extend agreements for play spaces across the city. As a result of this partnership, there has been greater public and private attention to and investment in playgrounds. And, as a condition of these joint-use agreements, these upgraded play spaces are accessible to all citizens of Greenbelt.

OUTCOMES

Greenbelt's process for implementing joint-use agreements offers an efficient and effective way to increase access to play. Given the city's commitment to bringing all joint-use playgrounds up to U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Standards, the joint-use agreements also led to improvement in the quality of playgrounds in Greenbelt.

Quantity: There are currently 60 public and private playgrounds in Greenbelt, a city covering six square miles. The city has focused on access to these existing playgrounds rather than new playground development.

Quality: As a result of the joint-use agreements, the city has repaired HOA playgrounds that did not meet national safety guidelines. The city either has already or is currently in the process of fully remodeling four HOA-owned playgrounds. Public investment inspired more attention to and private investment in playground development and maintenance.

Access: The joint-use agreements provided access to an additional seven playgrounds for children and families living outside HOA areas. This also includes specific investments in making these play spaces more accessible for disabled children.

CORE FINDINGS

Implement joint-use agreements. The agreements were a cost-effective way to increase access to playgrounds in a densely developed community with numerous privately owned playgrounds.

Clarify maintenance responsibility. The upfront and collaborative process of detailing maintenance responsibility was critical to the success of these joint-use agreements; both the HOAs and the city were clear about roles and responsibilities.

Engage the community in the design and build process. The process of engaging the community in selection of the plans and helping to build the playground through Greenbelt's "Hope to Finish Days" (a community service event) engendered ownership and civic pride.

Invite the press to playground launches. Events like the launch of a playground provided opportunities to publicize newly accessible or developed playgrounds, building community awareness and interest.

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An updated playground for a Greenbelt HOA neighborhood.

Population of Greenbelt:
21,456

Population under 18:
5,167

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

The argument for joint-use agreements in Greenbelt was one of equity. Windsor Green homeowners made the compelling case that joint-use agreements benefiting one homeowners association should be extended to all homeowners associations. What are the implications for equity as an argument for expanding joint-use agreements throughout municipalities and beyond privately owned communities? For example, if some school playgrounds are open to a community but not others, don't taxpayers have an equity argument for opening up all school playgrounds?

For more information on this case study, please visit kaboom.org/bestpractices

NEW YORK CITY: STREETS RENAISSANCE CAMPAIGN

STREETS AS PLACES TO PLAY

REVIVING AN OLD NEW YORK CITY TRADITION

Streets can be great places for children to play. New York has a long history of turning paved areas into opportunities for community gatherings, entertainment, and play. The last few years have seen improved access to streets for such activities. The movement has been driven by grassroots advocacy groups and community members who are effectively using new media tools to develop public awareness and build support. A recent increase in applications for block parties and high profile street closures are evidence of the success of this effort. In a densely developed urban area, street closures are a cost-efficient and effective way to provide children with access to safe, open areas for play.

OUTCOMES

Individuals and grassroots organizations were able to revive a century-old city policy of play streets. In the past two years, there has been growth in the number of streets closed to traffic and some particularly high visibility closures. Street closures, particularly in densely populated urban areas, create opportunities for children to be outdoors and to play.

Quantity: In 2008, residents held 3,000 block parties, an increase of 300 over 2007. The city also permitted one Sunday play street for seven months of the year, serving roughly 1,000 people per week. Efforts are under way to expand the program to additional neighborhoods.

Quality: Streets provide children with access to open space. How children make use of these spaces—the quality of play—varies street to street.

Access: Neighborhood play streets provide opportunities for safe play areas in close proximity to children's homes.

CORE FINDINGS



*A block party in full gear.
Photography courtesy of Emmanuel Fuentesbella.*

Develop strategic allies. The Project for Public Spaces, the Open Planning Project, and Transportation Alternatives brought unique areas of expertise to a single campaign on a common area of interest.

Engage direct beneficiaries. Although Transportation Alternatives provides funding and guidance for block parties, residents are responsible for planning an event that suits their community's interests.

Utilize new media to increase awareness and build support. The Open Planning Project uses a dynamic social networking platform to educate, organize, and connect city residents interested in creating open streets.

Offer grants and experience to establish pilot programs. In areas where the city has less uniform or accessible mechanisms for creating open streets, nonprofit organizations can establish pilot programs and provide support to launch first-time events.

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*The “Sunnyside of the Block Party” in Sunnyside, Queens.
Photography courtesy of Emmanuel Fuentesbella.*

Population of New York:
8,008,278

Population under 18:
2,153,450

Create newsworthy events. Transportation Alternatives created a strong event for the Prospect Park campaign by having youth advocates march across the Brooklyn Bridge to hand deliver their signed postcards of support to City Hall.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

If one of the nation’s most densely populated cities can close streets for play, then this model should be replicable in other places across the country. How can advocates accelerate support for street closures in their own cities? How can major urban centers accelerate this internal process? And, extrapolating from the New York example, what other cities have long-held traditions that can be revived or modified to create additional open space?

For more information on this case study, please visit kaboom.org/bestpractices

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA: PARKSCAN

SMARTPHONES IMPROVING PLAYSACES

A COALITION OF PARK ADVOCATES CHANGES BUSINESS AS USUAL

In San Francisco, citizens organized to hold public officials accountable for improving playground quality and safety. The effort was led by a park activist, Isabel Wade, who mobilized a coalition of park groups to build awareness, visibility, and broader political support and financial capital for parks. To improve on public transparency and accountability, the Neighborhood Parks Council developed ParkScan, a tool to document, report, and track park maintenance issues. ParkScan data collection heightened public interest in improving the safety of San Francisco's playgrounds. In response, the NPC focused its political capital and tactics on playgrounds in disrepair and increases in public and private funding for playground development.

OUTCOMES

Over 13 years, the Neighborhood Parks Council developed public awareness and political capital to significantly increase public and private funding and public accountability for safe playgrounds. The 2000 bond of \$110 million and the 2008 bond of \$185 million, which generated \$40 million for playground development, would not have been possible without the group's advocacy work. The NPC has helped to raise an additional \$1.93 million in private funds and in-kind contributions for playgrounds.

Quantity: Since 1996, the advocacy of the NPC helped to support the rebuilding and renovation of 40 playgrounds in San Francisco.

Quality: Of the 26 playgrounds receiving a failing grade on the 2006 Playground Report Card, seven have been upgraded to a passing grade and 15 are on track to receive a C or better, either through capital development or a focused effort on playground repair. The NPC has supported over 100 "friends of" community groups that have conducted work days to clean up and repair their neighborhood playgrounds.

Access: Improving these seven formerly failing playgrounds improved access for a significant portion of the city's children. New joint-use agreements with the San Francisco school district have opened up 14 school playgrounds to their local communities after normal usage hours.

CORE FINDINGS

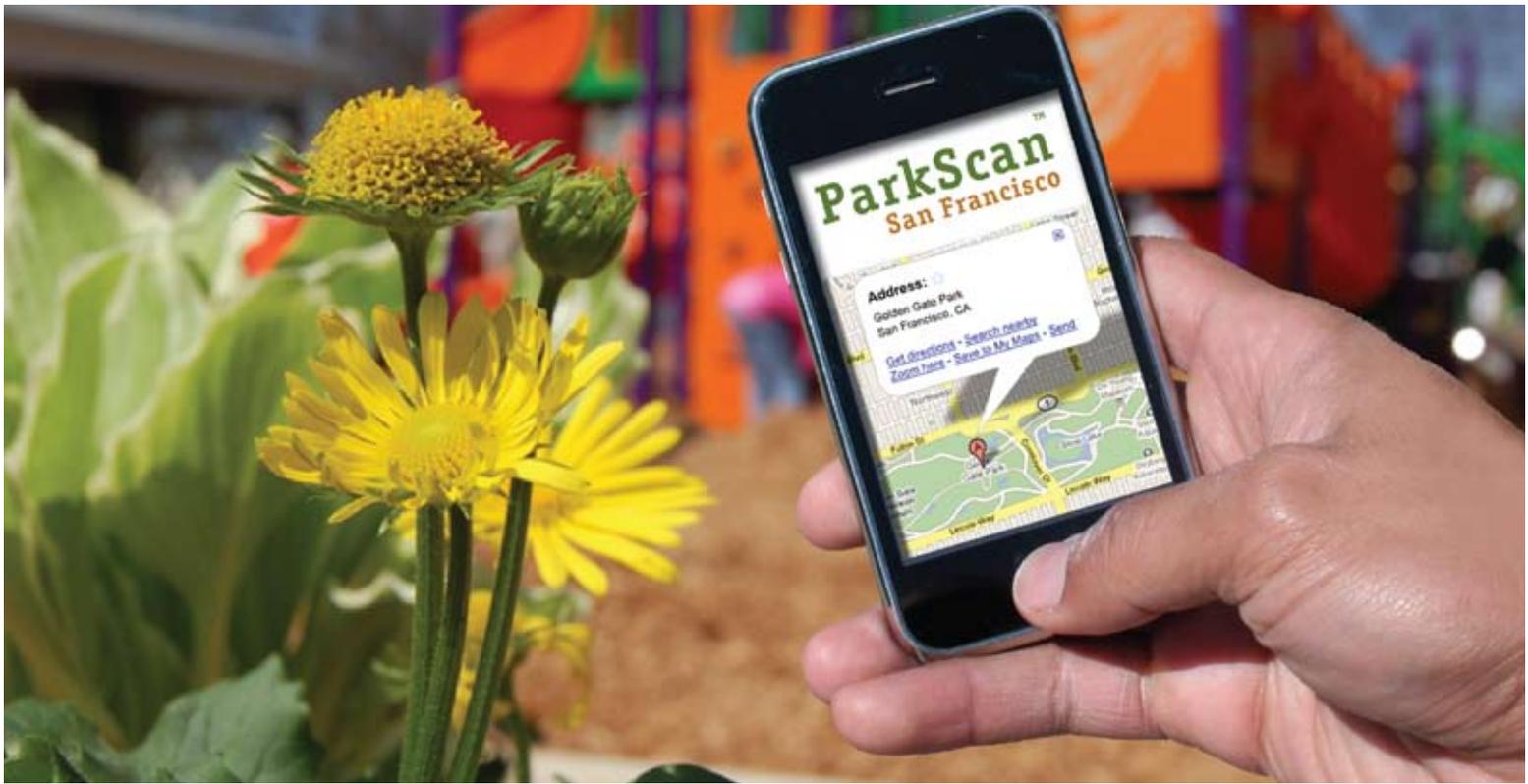
Build an advocacy base. Isabel Wade understood that she could not be an effective political force in San Francisco without a strong constituent base. The "friends of" park groups and neighborhood associations provided this foundation.

Prioritize political activity. Wade was clear at the outset that the coalition's core mission was to build a movement and effect political change, rather than to develop a social network or conduct renovation projects. Key activities—such as participating in the electoral process, building an e-mail mailing list (now 20,000+), attending budget meetings, and holding annual meetings with supervisors and the mayor—all reflect the coalition's ongoing commitment to political engagement.

Establish standards for playground quality. The Park Plan and the Playground Report Card establish, describe, and publish clear standards for park and playground maintenance. Clear grades for performance facilitate accountability.

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ParkScan facilitates community engagement.

Population of San Francisco:
744,041

Population under 18:
107,885

Develop objective data. The ParkScan.org citizen-generated data helped the NPC and the Recreation and Parks Department collaborate on solving problems. Playgrounds were not an initial concern of the NPC. In response to ParkScan.org data, both the NPC and the city focused on playgrounds and collaboration on the Love Your Playground! campaign.

Use technology to engage citizens on maintenance reporting. Citizens may be able to recognize problematic patterns in parks that are not visible to civic leaders or municipal staff. ParkScan.org allows the mayor's department managers to track problems and report on progress; it also helps staff to better understand their role in customer service and efficiently route concerns. The city's 311 system expands opportunities for reporting and for accountability.

Publicize data, standards, and progress against these standards to increase accountability. The ParkScan.org and the Playground Report Card data—organized by political jurisdiction and distributed to all political leaders and city officials on a regular basis—provide information that allows elected officials and managers to prioritize and take action on pressing issues. The NPC takes notice of significant improvements and attention to parks and playgrounds every year in advance of the Annual ParkScan.org Report.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

Through the use of technology, a nonprofit inserted itself into the city's maintenance process for public parks and playgrounds. The case study raises the question of whether other private groups could substantially improve playground safety and upkeep by implementing a similar public accountability campaign. The Playground Report Card, developed through residents' input, suggests the power of a simple, well-branded tool to focus public attention on specific needs. Could a similar report card be developed for other issues linked to play opportunities?

For more information on this case study, please visit kaboom.org/bestpractices

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON: HIGH POINT HOUSING PROJECT

A MODEL MIXED-INCOME COMMUNITY

THIS PLAY-FRIENDLY HOUSING PROJECT IS ATTRACTING NATIONAL ATTENTION

The High Point Housing Project provides a model of a mixed-income and intergenerational planned community that was designed with a focus on healthy living. The Seattle Housing Authority, a public corporation governed by a citizen commission, received federal funding for the project. By engaging residents and collaborating agencies, the authority transformed a built environment oriented to vehicles and without safe, accessible play areas into an innovative, play-friendly community that is attracting national attention.

OUTCOMES

When the High Point Project is completed in 2010, an estimated 1,700 families and 1,300 children will be living in the neighborhood. The community will include 340 low-income and subsidized housing units, 160 senior housing units, and 275 condo properties. This community is designed to promote active living through pedestrian-friendly streets and a high concentration of parks and play spaces.

Quantity: Within less than a square mile, the High Point development has 17 playgrounds and a community park. There are pocket parks on every other block that serve as front lawns and community play spaces.

Quality: The Seattle Housing Authority solicited design input through planning meetings with members of the community. Children informed playground designs.

Access: High Point provides highly accessible and safe play spaces for every child in the community, with a front-yard play space or pocket park within eyesight of each dwelling.

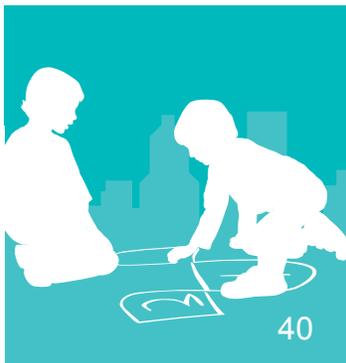
CORE FINDINGS

Create a built environment that supports play. Planners designed the community to promote play. The design includes pocket parks in front of each dwelling and a natural water drainage system that doubles as a park.

Engage beneficiaries. Residents in the community were engaged early in the design process. The Seattle Housing Authority created a process that meaningfully involved members of the community regardless of age or language spoken. Children were given an opportunity to field test potential new play equipment and then provide feedback on their equipment of choice.

Establish an inter-agency planning team. The Seattle Housing Authority convened an inter-agency planning team to collaborate on priorities and planning. The process of bringing relevant city department stakeholders together through a collaborative process facilitated innovative components to High Point's built environment such as a state-of-the-art water drainage system.

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Playspaces become desirable local points for children to play and parents to build social capital.

Population of Seattle:
594,210

Population under 18:
103,747

Develop a diverse maintenance program. High Point relies on a comprehensive, cross-sector maintenance program. The High Point Open Space Association, the Home Owners Association and the Neighborhood Association collaborate to maintain the space.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

Seattle's High Point Housing Project benefitted from significant federal investment to redesign and transform a community. For communities that don't have access to this level of federal funding, what opportunities exist to incorporate play into the design of a built environment? How can developers and government agencies use the example of High Point as a lens by which to evaluate projects currently in the pipeline, and modify them as necessary to increase opportunities for play?

For more information on this case study, please visit kaboom.org/bestpractices

ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA: PLAY 'N' CLOSE TO HOME

A PLAYGROUND NEAR EVERY CHILD

HOW ONE MAN (THE MAYOR) MADE A DIFFERENCE

St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Baker developed a policy, Play 'n' Close to Home, to create a playground within a half mile of every child in the city. The mayor then leveraged his political position to create the organizational authority, systems, and resources necessary to implement this policy. Through joint-use agreements with the school district and community organizations, the city has significantly improved opportunities for play.

OUTCOMES

Over seven years, Mayor Baker increased the percentage of youth age 18 and under who live within a half mile of a playground from 49% to 75%. The mayor also directed \$500,000 in public resources per year to new playground development during that period.

Quantity: The mayor's playground policy resulted in 25 new playgrounds across the city, many of which are located in underserved communities.

Quality: The mayor's initiative resulted in eight new play areas on school grounds, where the previous equipment was often inadequate, outdated, and dilapidated.

Access: Joint-use agreements with schools and community groups resulted in 11 new playground facilities open to the local community after normal usage hours.

PLAYGROUND COVERAGE

	Population within 1/2 mile	% population within 1/2 mile	18 yrs and under population within 1/2 mile	% of <18 yrs population within 1/2 mile
Playgrounds before 4/1/2001	111,834	45%	26,041	49%
Playgrounds by 12/30/2009	170,301	69%	39,631	75%

CORE FINDINGS

Set a clear standard and policy for playground accessibility. The city set a clear standard that every child should live within a half mile of a playground. The specificity of the mandate focused the attention and resources of city staff.

Establish responsible personnel for accountability. The deputy mayor was explicitly charged with accountability for day-to-day execution of the play policy, reporting progress to the mayor on a weekly basis.

Engage political elites early in the process. The mayor was proactive in meeting with new city council members to introduce Play 'n' Close to Home and in building relationships with school principals and the school board. He ensured that key political leaders were aware of his policy and were updated on its progress.

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Mayor Rick Baker celebrates another playground opening.

Population of St. Petersburg:
248,232

Population under 18:
39,631

Develop political capital with key stakeholders. The mayor leveraged his business acumen to develop corporate partners and gain financial resources for every school in St. Petersburg, building good will that served him during negotiations with the school district on joint-use agreements.

Implement joint-use agreements. The mayor developed partnerships with schools and community groups to cost-effectively increase access to play space and share liability and insurance costs.

Leverage events and media for policy awareness and promotion. The mayor attended every ribbon-cutting ceremony to underline his play policy in a way that actively and visibly engaged the local community and provided citywide publicity through newspaper and local television coverage.

Determine clear responsibility for maintenance. The city developed clear lines of responsibility and schedules for maintenance. This proactive maintenance system minimized complaints.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

St. Petersburg's Play 'n' Close to Home program was successful, in large part, because a unique individual—who happens to be the mayor—cares deeply about accessible play spaces for children and was able to use his office and tenacity to promote an ambitious play policy. What will happen when Mayor Baker leaves office? Has the change been systemic enough to be sustainable? Will public support for this policy affect the next mayor and help to sustain political support? Staff turnover at individual schools has been a challenge for this city. How can St. Petersburg, and other cities with similar agreements, find more effective ways to increase the buy-in of incoming school administrators?

For more information on this case study, please visit kaboom.org/bestpractices

TUCSON, ARIZONA

SHARING PLAY SPACE AND RESPONSIBILITY JOINT-USE AGREEMENTS INCREASE OPEN SPACE AND IMPROVE SAFETY

A joint-use agreement between the city and its largest school district increased access to play. As a result of this agreement, playgrounds have been upgraded to meet the city's safety standards. School athletic fields and open space at 12 elementary schools are now available to the community after school hours. This led to a reduction in the maintenance costs for participating schools, improved the safety of the school grounds, and increased the city's inventory of open space.

OUTCOMES

The city of Tucson and the Tucson Unified School District developed a joint-use agreement to open up new play spaces to the public. By sharing liability and maintenance responsibilities, the school district saved money while city residents benefited.

Quantity: Twelve neighborhood playgrounds and fields have been opened up to the community and general public. Each of the city's six districts now has two additional playgrounds, chosen specifically in communities with the largest deficit of play space.

Quality: Play equipment at these 12 playgrounds was evaluated and, where necessary, upgraded to meet the National Playground Safety Institute's guidelines. The spaces on these grounds now receive year-round maintenance support and are regularly patrolled by the police. Communities report reduced vandalism at schools with open school yards.

Access: Tucson has almost 130,000 residents under the age of 18. By opening the gates to playgrounds and fields in diverse locations and neighborhoods across the city, Councilman Rodney Glassman, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Tucson Unified School District have increased access to safe play spaces for thousands of Tucson children.

CORE FINDINGS

Conduct a play audit. The city conducted a play space audit to identify areas in need of development.

Engage key stakeholders early in the process. By developing strong relationships with school board members before and during his campaign for city council, Councilman Glassman generated broad support for his playground proposal. He also sought police input before developing his plan. The police chief agreed to include police presence as part of the joint-use agreement.

Engage the press. The city and school officials publicized the schoolground openings through earned and paid media. The local public television station also helped to promote the joint-use agreements.

Clearly delineate liability, safety, and maintenance responsibilities in joint-use agreements. The joint-use agreements outlined which safety codes applied to the playgrounds and specified entities responsible for liability and maintenance.

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Kids and military volunteers enjoy a mudslide sponsored by the Parks and Recreation department.

Population of Tucson:
486,669

Population under 18:
129,227

Establish long-term agreements. The city and school district built sustainability directly into the joint-use agreement by creating a 75-year statute.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

The arrangement between the city of Tucson and its largest school district provides a best practice example of using joint-use agreements to quickly establish new community parks at a relatively low cost. Communities and schools were selected based on below average access to other parks or open space. How many more people are now taking advantage of these newly opened parks and what kinds of tools can be used to measure usage? How do these agreements move the city toward its goal of having every child within a half mile of a park or playground? Finally, what other resources might be available to help the city expand the program to all schoolyards in Tucson?

For more information on this case study, please visit kaboom.org/bestpractices

INITIATIVE PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

PLAY MATTERS

The snapshots in the preceding section show that there are many ways to build political support for play. Many of the 12 initiatives were begun by individual citizens and with varying levels of support from the private sector. Sustaining these initiatives, however, involved the engagement of the local government. In order to attract the interest of public officials and public financial resources, it was necessary to build awareness and political capital. The amount of political support required varied depending on the nature and cost of the project. The following recommendations outline key steps to building such political leverage.

In a few cases, municipal leaders took the initiative to promote a play agenda. While their approaches varied, they needed to build support among colleagues and had a vested interest in cultivating broader public support. Many of the process components of building political capital apply to advocates both inside and outside government.

In each case study there is a key driver, either an organization or individual, who creates interest in and opportunities for play. In order to build political capital and influence public policy, a key driver must develop support among citizens who care about the issue, agree with the fundamental arguments, and are ready to take action. To build political, human, and financial capital, key drivers employed a variety of strategies including: identifying or creating an organization or entity, mobilizing key stakeholders early in the process, developing a compelling argument, engaging direct beneficiaries, collecting quantitative baseline data to demonstrate need, establishing clear standards, publicizing results of accountability measures against these standards, participating in the electoral process, and collaborating with news media.

Many of the strategies for building financial capital are similar to strategies for building political capital. For example, firsthand experience of an initiative, through a playground build or a site visit, can be an effective way to both build political support and cultivate potential donors. In developing financial resources, it is important to consider the range of potential sources for funding including: individual donors; local businesses for donation or in-kind goods or services; foundations; municipal, state, and federal programs that are aligned with the mission of your initiative.

FIND THE KEY DRIVER

In each of these case studies there is a key driver, either an organization or individual, who creates interest in and opportunities for play. They have compelling arguments and the time, energy, and ability to mobilize others.

In San Francisco, Isabel Wade was the advocate and organizer who developed a clear message that parks and playgrounds needed both capital and operations investment. She effectively mobilized others around this message, beginning with her neighborhood park group and then creating and building the Neighborhood Parks Council. Isabel initiated a campaign that led to significant increases in public and private funding for playgrounds in San Francisco, as well as increased public accountability for safe playgrounds.

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BEGIN TO CREATE POLITICAL SUPPORT

In order to build political capital and influence public policy, a key driver must develop support by increasing the number of citizens who care about the issue and are ready to act. A key driver must develop an attentive public on the issue to influence public policy. Some practical ideas for beginning this process include:

- Collect and develop a database of names and contact information.
- Form an umbrella association of community groups with similar interests.
- Enlist neighborhood volunteers to help gather data.
- Visit community groups, including those who may have opposed similar initiatives in the past.

In Boston, the Boston Greenspace Alliance and the Urban Land Use Task Force formed an alliance to advocate for the development of green space. With Mayor Menino's support, the Boston Schoolyard Initiative became a full-scale and sustainable model for schoolyard renovations across the city.

DEVELOP PUBLIC AWARENESS, ENGAGEMENT, AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

To develop broad public support, a single driver needs to be supported by an entity, such as an association, partnership, or coalition. Other ways to support the key driver include:

- Provide infrastructure, such as administrative support and database management.
- Develop data to support your initiative.
- Develop and supply volunteers.
- Demonstrate public interest by creating high turnout at clean-up days, site builds, and city council or school board meetings.
- Fund a few key staff members.

In Denver, key stakeholders formed the Learning Landscape Alliance, an entrepreneurial public-private partnership, to systematically expand learning landscapes to underserved neighborhoods throughout the city. The Learning Landscape Alliance included representatives from the city of Denver, the School District, and the private sector. The alliance developed tools such as promotional videos, flyers, and a fundraising packet to raise awareness and build support.

ENGAGE KEY STAKEHOLDERS EARLY IN THE PROCESS

In order to successfully build political support to influence public policy, key stakeholders must be engaged early. If the initiative involves schools, key stakeholders might include



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principals, senior school district personnel, the school board, city managers, mayors, and city council members. Ways to do this include:

- **Children’s testimonials:** Bring children to city council and school board meetings and let them showcase their fundraising efforts and talk about their vision for the play initiative.
- **Site visits:** Give key stakeholders a firsthand look at existing site conditions or experience an initiative in person.
- **Personal briefings:** Meet individual council or board members and brief them on the initiative.
- **Compelling presentations:** Incorporate photos, video, and data into presentations.
- **Board or advisory board:** Create or further develop a board or advisory board for your effort.

In St. Petersburg, Mayor Baker developed strong relationships with school principals early in his tenure, identifying corporate partners for schools and regularly visiting students and teachers. In implementing the Play ‘n’ Close to Home playground policy, and with little available land for development, opening up school playgrounds to the community was identified as a cost effective way to deliver on the policy. Mayor Baker was successful in negotiating with school principals and the district, in part because of his strong track record of building political goodwill with the school district.

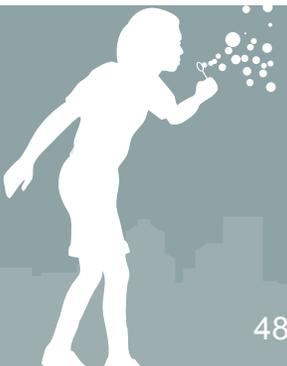
IDENTIFY STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

While stakeholders have a vested interest in the outcome, allies or strategic partners have some alignment of interests or assets of mutual benefit. Strategic alliances are an opportunity to build your base of support with people who might care about your issue, potentially recruiting individuals or organizations with more clout or political capital. Tactics for building strategic alliances include:

- Reach out to organizations or individuals with shared or similar interest areas.
- Join organizations or associations with an aligned or complementary mission.
- Attend conferences or other gatherings on issues aligned with yours to network and identify individual or organizational prospects.

In New York, three organizations with allied interests and unique assets came together to conduct The Renaissance Campaign to promote healthy, vibrant, and playful urban streets. The Project for Public Spaces, with planning and design expertise, provided the vision and messaging. Transportation Alternatives, with on-the-ground advocacy expertise and services, organized volunteers, staged protests, and engaged communities. Finally, the Open Planning Project, with expertise in online social networks and various technology-based mechanisms, created and maintained outreach instruments such as blogs and videos.

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DIRECTLY ENGAGE BENEFICIARIES

Involving direct beneficiaries helps to inform initiatives, develop human capital for projects, facilitate a sense of investment and ownership, and build a larger base of political support. Ways to directly engage beneficiaries include:

- Empower a youth council to advise political bodies on initiatives regarding events, programs and the built environment.
- Engage neighborhoods on the design and build process for playgrounds.
- Where projects involve the built environment, demonstrate positive economic impact to local businesses so they see themselves as beneficiaries.

Workers from the Seattle Housing Authority learned from experience that community engagement in the redesign of their High Point neighborhood would be critical to the project's success. The Seattle Housing Authority held multiple community meetings, determined priorities, and field tested prospective play equipment with children.

BE POLITICALLY AWARE

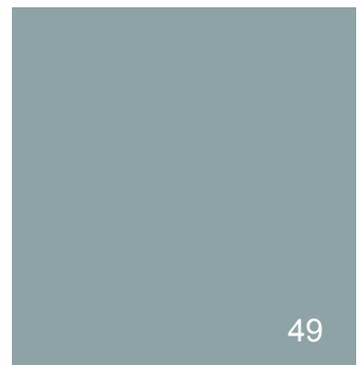
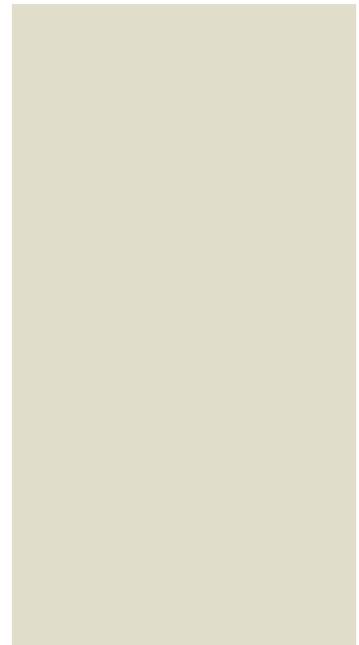
Regularly engaging in political activities can raise awareness and support for play, help to cultivate champions, and influence policy decisions. Organizing as a group of citizens with a singular, collective message increases this influence. Some specific activities for engagement include:

- Target political up-and-comers eager to make their mark in order to build lasting allies down the road. Reach out to candidates, particularly incumbents, on the campaign trail at events like debates and town hall meetings.
- Invite candidates to site visits, playground builds, and community forums.
- Send advocates to budget forums.
- Develop a candidate ranking on play.

In San Francisco, the Neighborhood Parks Council partnered with other community organizations to co-sponsor debates for candidates. During these debates, the Neighborhood Parks Council asked candidates to speak to their “park friendly” self-rating, a tool that the Council had developed to encourage candidates to clearly define their position on the issues of parks and playgrounds. Council members made significant progress generating financial support for parks through regular participation in political advocacy activities.

SUBSTANTIATE AND STRENGTHEN YOUR ARGUMENTS WITH DATA

Objective data, identifying a need and/or illustrating positive results of a model, strengthen your arguments, provide a baseline to inform priorities, and help enlist human and financial capital for your initiative. Some types of objective data that can inform your initiative, motivate stakeholders and allies, and generate public support include:



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- Usage data.
- Measurable impact on children's health or educational outcomes.
- Economic impact data.
- Outcome data from other municipalities that have done similar projects.
- Surveys and focus groups.

In Boulder, the Freiker program, using the solar-powered Freikometer, tracks daily performance outcomes, develops the program model based on the information, and leverages this data to build support and momentum. Freiker reports that 3,000 participants have completed more than 120,000 foot and bicycle trips, and have traveled 150,000 miles (six times around the world). The collection and dissemination of this data is a core part of the program's model.

COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH NEWS MEDIA

Effective communication is a key ingredient to building broader public awareness, understanding, support, and engagement. Some communications tactics for building support include:

- Celebrate the opening of every play space or new play initiative and invite the press.
- Gather volunteers' e-mail addresses and send them e-newsletters on progress, events, and ways to get involved.
- Cultivate relationships with key reporters from print, television, and radio outlets, as well as editorial board members of your local and regional newspapers.
- Send press releases to local newspapers, community groups, business groups, and homeowners associations.

In Tucson, the schools and city collaborated to broadly publicize the opening of playgrounds. As a result of the joint-use agreements, the city's public television channel broadcast announcements that the schoolyard fences were coming down and gates would be open at participating schools. The city of Tucson paid for newspaper advertising and used press releases to generate earned media. Schools actively promote the playgrounds, posting signs in the neighborhood.

ESTABLISHED STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY BENCHMARKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Successful policy requires standards and individuals responsible for implementation. Once the standard is set, it must have personnel accountable for policy implementation according to clear benchmarks. Cities and nonprofit organizations that successfully develop and implement playground policies report that assigning senior staff to policy execution is a key to success. For example, city managers and department heads should be directly responsible for implementation and deliver weekly reports on progress. Some tactics for accountability include:

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Students are asked to draw their “dream playground” at a community meeting—directly engaging the beneficiaries of an upcoming playground build.

- Create a task force to develop standards and benchmarks, engaging representatives across sectors as is relevant for your initiative.
- Utilize technology tools to track daily data against benchmarks, such as goals for complaint closure rates.
- Regularly distribute reports on benchmark data to key stakeholders and influencers.

In St. Petersburg, Mayor Baker set a clear policy standard for playground accessibility—every child should be within a half mile of a playground. The mayor assigned his deputy mayor the responsibility for delivering on this policy. A wall-size map of the city, identifying current playgrounds and areas for development, was an ever-present reminder to his leadership team of the priority of this initiative.

PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

After initial enthusiasm for a great project, the next challenge is sustaining it into the future. Challenges may range from sustaining interest with key stakeholders to ongoing maintenance issues. Each hurdle has different solutions. Tactics for sustainability include:

- Personally introduce the initiative to new key stakeholders, including staff (e.g., principals), incoming legislators, and school board officials.
- Continue building up your volunteer database over time so you have additional resources to draw upon for fundraising or maintenance.

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- Establish maintenance plans and schedules during initial project development, and clearly detail roles and responsibilities as part of any joint-use agreements or memorandums of understanding.
- Work with local businesses to establish ongoing volunteer programs.

In Ankeny, the city uses e-newsletters, direct mail, citizen surveys, focus groups on specific projects, neighborhood meetings, press releases, websites, and school partnerships to engage residents and sustain strong support for park and recreation. These approaches deepen relationships and increase opportunities for financial, in-kind, and volunteer support.

IF YOU WANT TO EXPAND YOUR INITIATIVE, WHAT WILL BE REQUIRED?

Depending on the scope and nature of an initiative, it can be difficult to scale up during economic downturns. Donors might pull back on their financial commitments, and cities and states might look for opportunities to cut budgets. Some ideas for scaling up in a cost-effective way include:

- Supplement your part-time staff with volunteers.
- Streamline program operations (e.g., are there ways to decrease paperwork or other time requirements?).
- Identify revenue generators, such as experience or technology your group has developed.
- Identify local, state, or national organizations that might sponsor or co-sponsor your work.

In Denver, scaling Learning Landscapes across the city required public financing. Denver's Office of Economic Development provided critical resources to begin scaling the model. As Learning Landscapes become more visible in the community and popular with voters, the school board introduced ballot measures to scale Learning Landscapes to every schoolyard in Denver.

IDENTIFY SOURCES OF PRIVATE CAPITAL

Opportunities for private funding include the local business community, particularly businesses whose mission may be aligned with the driver's compelling message. Strategies for building financial capital are similar to strategies for building political capital. For example, experiencing an initiative first hand, through a build or site visit, helps cultivate potential donors. Additional tactics for individual donor development include:

- Enlist individuals who have a potential to be high-dollar donors or who can connect you to such individuals.

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- Identify in-kind donations and look for “low-hanging fruit,” such as contractors who do work with the city and those with nearby construction projects.
- Identify ways to recognize donors, such as displaying their names prominently at a project site, including them in groundbreakings, mentioning them during media opportunities, and spotlighting them during community events like clean-up days and festivals.

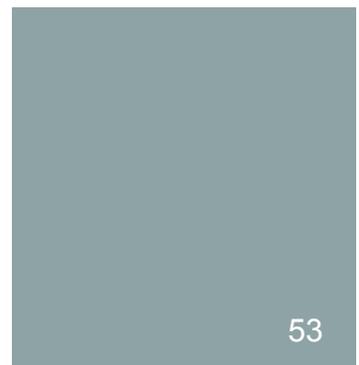
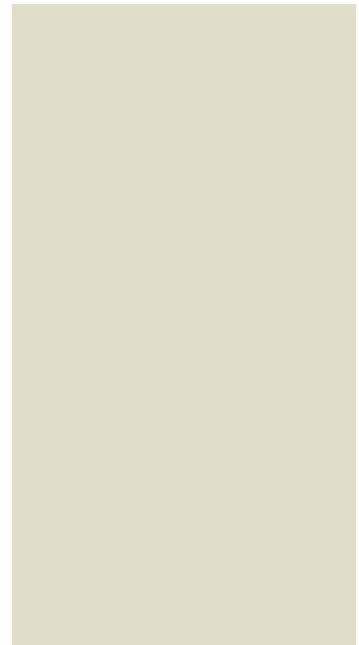
In Cedar Rapids, the primary funder for the “Switch What You Do, View, and Chew” program is Cargill, Inc., a Midwest-based international producer of food, agricultural, financial, and industrial products and services. Cargill has a track record of funding community based initiatives, particularly in the areas of health, nutrition, and education. The program is also funded by local health-oriented organizations, such as hospitals.

Identify potential sources of public funding at the municipal, state, or federal level. Take advantage of programs that are getting an infusion of federal dollars to offset costs and build partnerships.

In many cases, expanding initiatives required some level of public funding. Elected officials will lend support to projects that are valued or supported by citizens. In order to build a case for public funding, advocates should look for opportunities to measure citizen interest and engagement. After working with elected officials to identify and advocate for potential sources of city, county, or state funding, advocates should also assess potential opportunities for funding through federal programs. Some ideas for consideration include:

- Grants from city or state offices of economic development.
- Public agencies that seek to preserve open space.
- Public agencies promoting walking and biking to school.

In Baltimore, Playworks helps to offset some of its personnel costs through AmeriCorps, a federally funded national service program. AmeriCorps members serve in intensive 10–12 month placements. Playworks places AmeriCorps members as site coordinators at participating schools. Many of these site coordinators continue with the program after their AmeriCorps tenure has been completed, providing a pipeline for experienced staff.



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This inventory of policy ideas provides a starting point for civic leaders and citizens looking to advocate for play in communities across the country. The ideas presented can be adopted by drivers or entities as a focus of their work. For example, an entity could establish and advocate for quality standards for local playgrounds. These are also ideas that can be championed and implemented by city leaders.

These policy ideas are woven throughout almost every initiative spotlighted in this report. However, some studies speak more directly than others to how advocates implemented a particular policy. When this is the case, specific case studies that offer practical ideas for implementation are referenced below.

RESEARCH

Conduct a play audit to assess play quality, quantity, and access.

Prior to setting standards, a play audit should be conducted to assess current spaces and opportunities for play, including, but not limited to, streets, town centers and squares, parks, playgrounds, and recreational programming. The purpose of the audit is to gather information about local facilities and services. Where are the spaces for play? What is the quality of these spaces and are they accessible? This audit should inform the development of local standards and plans. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – St. Petersburg case; Tucson case)

Engage children and caregivers in identifying needs and priorities.

Youth should inform play priorities and solutions. What are their tastes and preferences and what sustainable solutions will be appealing to them? Opportunities to solicit input from children, whether through focus groups or a youth council, should be established. Given the opportunity to provide input, for example, youth may prioritize development of a skate park over a more traditional play space. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Ankeny case; Boston case; and Seattle case)

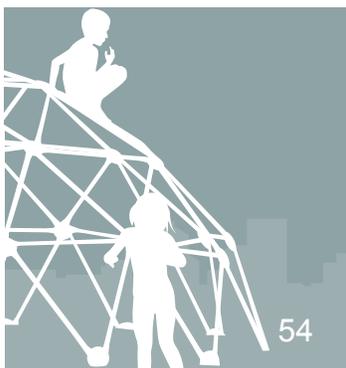
Use effective methods for data collection, particularly technology tools.

Technology tools provide cost-efficient mechanisms for data collection. Web-based tools allow community members to remotely submit data. Technology such as Global Information Systems (GIS), a computer-based mapping and data assessment tool, provides planners with comprehensive information about the physical environment of a community and accelerates the data collection process. Advocates should implement technology tools to help facilitate data collection and inform priorities and new initiatives. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Ankeny case; Boulder case; New York case; and San Francisco case)

Develop strategic alliances to inform and align message and priorities.

Allied organizations, associations, or individuals can provide complementary assets and knowledge to help inform initiatives. Reaching out to diverse stakeholders—in areas such as environment, health, economic development, child welfare and sustainable building, for example—can help to identify overlooked opportunities and diversify political support. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Boston case; New York case; and San Francisco case)

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Research Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a play audit to assess play quality, quantity, and access. • Engage children and caregivers in identifying needs and priorities. • Use effective methods for data collection, particularly technology tools. • Develop strategic alliances to inform and align message and priorities.
Planning Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set locally relevant and feasible standards for play quality, quantity, and access. • Engage broad constituencies, including children and caregivers, in strategic planning. • Coordinate and integrate plans across government agencies and offices. • Set school standards for play and physical activity time.
Implementation Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and execute a comprehensive plan to increase play quality, quantity, and access. • Create systems to engage citizens and beneficiaries in implementing the plan. • Implement a proactive maintenance program for facilities. • Implement joint-use agreements. • Develop and implement incentive programs. • Use technology tools to build support.
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly monitor and evaluate performance and satisfaction rates. • Use technology tools to report on progress, sustain interest, and increase accountability.



PLANNING

Set locally relevant and feasible standards for play quality, quantity, and access.

Access to outdoor play space within walking distance should be a right, rather than a privilege. Civic leaders should set a clear, measurable standard for play space accessibility and then develop plans to achieve this standard. Similarly, quality standards should be set to require that playgrounds provide elements such as green space, shade structures, and age-appropriate playground equipment. Additional features, such as climbing structures, walking paths, benches for caregivers, space for public art, and gardening areas should be considered for inclusion in setting quality standards for local playgrounds. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Boston case; Denver case; and St. Petersburg case)

Engage broad constituencies, including children and caregivers, in strategic planning.

City governments and civic leaders should develop and implement a process to include members of the community and allies in a strategic planning process to increase opportunities for play. Children and caregivers should be involved in this process. By using focus groups, surveys, and community engagement meetings to inform master plans for play spaces, advocates can help to identify all possible opportunities and more effectively meet a community’s actual, rather than assumed, needs. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Ankeny case; Boston case)

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Coordinate and integrate plans across government agencies and offices.

City government offices and departments should coordinate on priorities and initiatives for play as part of a unified effort. For example, the transportation office should closely coordinate with the parks and recreation department, the health department, and the school district on the development of trails to connect schoolyards and parks by walking and bike riding trails. Coordination on these kinds of initiatives will better leverage resources and lead to better outcomes for play. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Boulder case; Seattle case)

Set school standards for play and physical activity time.

Schools should set a standard for play and physical activity time that meets or exceeds the recommended 60 minutes per day. In meeting this recommendation, time for recess should be safeguarded as an integral part of the school learning day, rather than an option for district administrators or teachers. Where needed, well-trained professionals should be placed on the schoolyard playground to help facilitate play. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Baltimore case)

IMPLEMENTATION

Develop and execute a comprehensive plan to increase play quality, quantity, and access.

As a result of research and a strategic planning process, policies and a plan to implement these policies should be developed and executed. The plan should lay out criteria for identifying priorities for development, goals, projects, timelines, and resources. It should include clear roles and responsibilities for collaborating agencies, allies, and the community. For large-scale projects, an inter-agency team should be developed to facilitate close communication and collaboration. The plan should be widely accessible to the broader community. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Ankeny case; Seattle case)

Create systems to engage citizens and beneficiaries in implementing the plan.

Municipalities and advocates should establish mechanisms to continue to facilitate broad community participation in implementing play initiatives. Engaging the community can help facilitate community connection and cohesion, engender greater ownership in the play space or initiative, and result in higher levels of investment in caring for and maintaining the space. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Ankeny case; Boston case; Cedar Rapids case; Greenbelt case; New York case; and San Francisco case)

Implement a proactive maintenance program for facilities.

Where capital projects are concerned, maintenance standards and roles should be determined as part of the planning process. Sustainability plans need to be developed at the outset of a project. A proactive maintenance system and turnaround time on complaints should be part of this standard. Engaging citizens in public play space maintenance, through volunteer days and tools such as a 311 call number to include playground issues, should be a part of this standard. If play spaces require special attention, provide training for specialized maintenance crews as well as key stakeholders in the community. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Boston case; San Francisco case; and St. Petersburg case)

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Implement joint-use agreements.

Joint-use agreements with school districts and neighborhood groups, including churches and colleges, should be implemented to cost-efficiently improve on the accessibility of play spaces. Where non-public outdoor play spaces exist but are not accessible to the broader community after normal usage hours, municipalities, schools, or civic leadership should initiate joint-use agreements that open facilities up to the public. As part of the joint-use agreement, the city should share in costs of equipment upgrades, maintenance, and liability coverage. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Greenbelt case; Denver case; St. Petersburg case; and Tucson case)

Develop and implement an incentive program.

Incentives should be implemented to help foster excitement, engagement, and momentum for initiatives to promote play. Well-executed incentives for children can be both playful and highly effective. Children should be engaged in developing and implementing an incentive program that will work for them. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Cedar Rapids case; Boulder case)

Use technology tools to build support.

Social networking platforms, online videos, and other media tools can help to spread a message virally and build a network of support for an initiative. By connecting like-minded members of a community around a compelling initiative, play advocates can use these technology tools to increase membership, fundraising, develop volunteers and generally build momentum. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Boulder case; New York case)

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND FEEDBACK

Regularly monitor and evaluate performance and satisfaction rates.

In order to inform future priorities and plans, advocates and municipal officials should regularly evaluate the effectiveness and impact of initiatives. Tools for data collection can include focus groups and surveys. The data and conclusions drawn from the data analysis should be regularly and widely distributed. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Boulder case; Cedar Rapids case; San Francisco case; and St. Petersburg case)

Use technology tools to report on progress, sustain interest, and increase accountability.

Advocates and municipal leaders should use technology tools to help sustain interest and engagement, as well as to increase accountability. The immediate and cost-effective nature of web-based communication provides an opportunity for regular dissemination of updates through tools such as e-newsletters, annual reports, and blogs. As part of this communication, publicizing standards, benchmarks, and progress against these benchmarks on the web can be an effective tactic for holding public officials accountable for results. (See kaboom.org/bestpractices – Ankeny case; Boulder case; and San Francisco case)



NATIONAL PLAY POLICY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

This report begins to show how advocates and civic leaders in communities across the country are approaching initiatives for play. It illustrates how they are mobilizing constituents, developing compelling arguments—sometimes explicitly for play, sometimes not—connecting solutions to broader public priorities, and influencing local policy. Play is at the nexus of these solutions. Based on this report, one might conclude that a natural next step would be to use these findings to help inform and develop a national consensus and agenda for play.

In communities across the country, people are looking for ways to support more play. We are at a moment in our nation's history, similar to the early 1900s, when societal changes are limiting children's access to safe, high-quality play spaces and opportunities to play. As a result, children are less active and less healthy. Local citizens and civic leaders are taking notice and looking for solutions.

It is critical that federal policymakers see evidence of this public interest and begin to connect solutions for play to other priorities. To build on local momentum and to develop stronger public and political relevance—to overcome the perception that play is somehow trivial—federal policymakers must hear directly from advocates regarding the powerful impact of initiatives for play. In the way that advocates in this report developed visibility, awareness, and political capital at the municipal level, there is an opportunity to build awareness and credibility in Washington, D.C.

The national political environment is ripe for a federal play policy agenda. Better health, educational, and environmental outcomes are top national priorities. These issues, addressed by local leaders in the case studies that informed this report, are at the forefront of the new President's agenda. There is a national opportunity and imperative for play advocates to connect play and spaces conducive to play as part of a solution to these broader public priorities, and to help inform policymaking at the federal level.

Play advocates can use this report to inform a new conversation on play. Drawing on lessons learned and bringing together advocates across sectors, there is an opportunity for activists and thought leaders to begin to develop a singular voice for play and the beginnings of a national policy platform. This alliance should reflect the diversity of issues and initiatives represented in these case studies.

Not since the early 1900s has there been a strategic and politically powerful and effective alliance and agenda for play. Informed by proven processes and policy ideas at the local level, there is an immediate and compelling political opportunity to do so.

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ABOUT KaBOOM!

KaBOOM! is a national nonprofit organization whose vision is that every child in America have a great place to play within walking distance. Since its inception in 1995, KaBOOM! has grown into one of the most widely recognized and highly respected national organizations dedicated to the play and physical activity needs of children. The organization has a well established track record of delivering high-quality play spaces for children throughout the country. It also has a proven capacity for mobilizing local stakeholders and decision makers in support of community-based initiatives.

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Chief of Staff
Greater Centennial AME Zion Church

Ms. Carolyn Williams Meza

Former CAO
United Way for Southeastern Michigan



ABOUT PLAYFUL CITY USA

Playful City USA is a national recognition program, targeting cities and towns across the country that are committed to the power and importance of play. Since 2007, Playful City USA annual recognition is given to communities that submit a comprehensive application that is signed by the Mayor and aims to engage communities in increasing play opportunities and closing the play deficit. Recognized cities meet five commitments for recognition:

1. Create a local play commission or play task force.
2. Design an annual action plan for play.
3. Conduct a playspace audit of all publicly accessible play areas.
4. Identify current spending on capital projects and maintenance of playspaces.
5. Proclaim and celebrate an annual “KaBOOM! Play Day”.

2009 PLAYFUL CITY USA COMMUNITIES

Alabama

Dothan
Huntsville

Arizona

Casa Grande
Chandler
Coolidge
Gilbert
Mesa
Phoenix
Tempe
Tucson
Yuma

Arkansas

Springdale

California

Baldwin Park
Brentwood
Cerritos
Encinitas
Kerman
La Mesa
Riverside
San Bernardino
San Francisco

Colorado

Commerce City
Evans
Northglenn
Thornton

Florida

Coral Gables
Delray Beach
Lake Worth
Lauderdale Lakes
Miami Lakes
New Port Richey
Orlando
Palm Bay
Parkland
Safety Harbor
St. Petersburg
West Palm Beach

Georgia

Atlanta

Hawaii

Hilo
Honolulu

Idaho

Nampa

Illinois

Columbia
New Lenox
Yorkville

Indiana

Bloomington
Fishers
Indianapolis
Richmond

Iowa

Ankeny

Kansas

Wichita

Kentucky

Murray

Louisiana

DeRidder
Kenner
Lake Charles
New Roads

Maryland

Annapolis
Greenbelt
Laurel
Takoma Park

Massachusetts

Shirley

Minnesota

Landfall

Mississippi

Hernando

Montana

Missoula

Nevada

Henderson

New Jersey

Hamilton

New Mexico

Las Cruces

New York

New York City
Niagara Falls

North Carolina

Creedmoor
Durham
Greensboro
Greenville
Sanford

North Dakota

Bismarck

Ohio

Columbus
Findlay
Portsmouth

Pennsylvania

Allentown
York

South Carolina

Spartanburg

Texas

Arlington
Corpus Christi
Euless
Grand Prairie
Killeen
San Antonio

Virginia

Danville
Norfolk

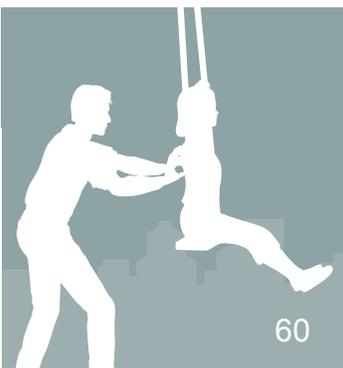
Washington

Auburn
Longview
Mercer Island

Wyoming

Green River
Laramie

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RESOURCES

PLAY MATTERS

ANKENY, IOWA

City of Ankeny

Todd Redenius, Director of Parks and Recreation
210 S. Ankeny Blvd., Ankeny, IA 50023
Phone: (515) 963-3570
tredenius@ankenyiowa.gov

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Playworks Baltimore

David Gilmore, Baltimore Director
2601 N. Howard St. Suite 310,
Baltimore, MD 21218
Phone: (410) 662-1220
dgilmore@playworksusa.org

Playworks National

Eunice Dunham, National Expansion Director
517 Fourth St., Oakland, CA 94607
Phone: (510) 893-4180
eunice@playworksusa.org

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Boston Schoolyard Funders Collaborative

Myrna Johnson, Executive Director
One Center Plaza, Suite 350, Boston, MA 02108
Phone: (617) 727-5944, ext. 145
myrna.johnson@schoolyards.org

BOULDER, COLORADO

Freiker

Tim Carlin, Executive Director
Phone: (303) 895-4310
tim@freiker.org

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

National Institute on Media and the Family

Samantha Williams, Switch Program Consultant
606 24th Ave. South, Suite 606
Minneapolis, MN 55454
Phone: (612) 672-5437
swilliams@mediafamily.org

DENVER, COLORADO

University of Colorado at Denver, Department of Landscape Architecture

Lois Brink, Executive Director
P.O. Box 173364, Campus Box 126,
Denver, CO 80217
Phone: (303) 352-3636
lois.brink@ucdenver.edu

GREENBELT, MARYLAND

City of Greenbelt

David Moran, Assistant City Manager
25 Crescent Rd., Greenbelt, MD 20770
Phone: (301) 474-8000
dmoran@greenbeltmd.gov

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Project for Public Spaces

Ethan Kent, Vice President
700 Broadway, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10003
Phone: (212) 620-5660
ekent@pps.org

Transportation Alternatives

Lindsey Lusher Shute
Director, Environmental Campaigns
127 West 26th St., Suite 1002
New York, NY 10001
Phone: (212) 629-8334
lindsey@transalt.org

The Open Planning Project

Kim Wiley-Schwartz
Livable Streets Education Director
349 W. 12th St #3, New York, NY 10014
Phone: (212) 796-4220
kwileyschwartz@openplans.org

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Neighborhood Parks Council

Meredith Thomas, Executive Director
451 Hayes Street, 2nd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94102
Phone: (415) 621-3260
mthomas@sfnpc.org

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Seattle Housing Authority

Tom Phillips
Senior Development Program Manager
120 Sixth Ave. North, Seattle, WA 98109-1028
Phone: (206) 615-3414
tphillips@seattlehousing.org

ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

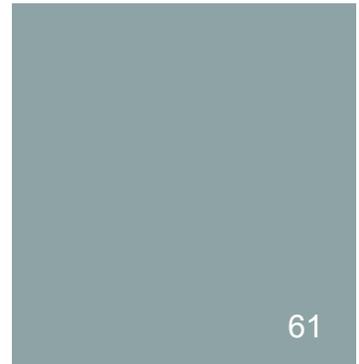
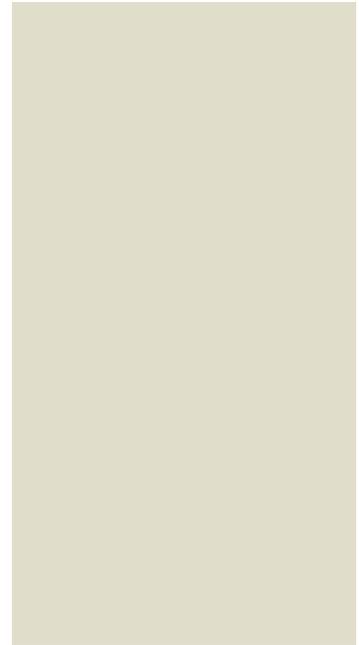
City of St. Petersburg, Neighborhood Partnership Department

Susan Ajoc, Neighborhood Partnership Director
P.O. Box 2842, St. Petersburg, FL 33731
Phone: (727) 893-7171
Susan.Ajoc@stpete.org

TUCSON, ARIZONA

City of Tucson, Eastside City Hall

Rodney Glassman, Ward 2 Council Member
7575 E. Speedway Blvd, Tucson, AZ 85710
Phone: (520) 791-4687
rodney.glassman@tucsonaz.gov



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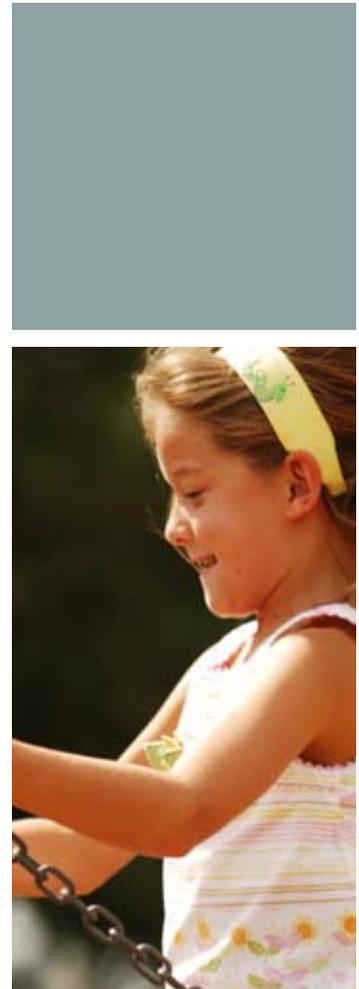
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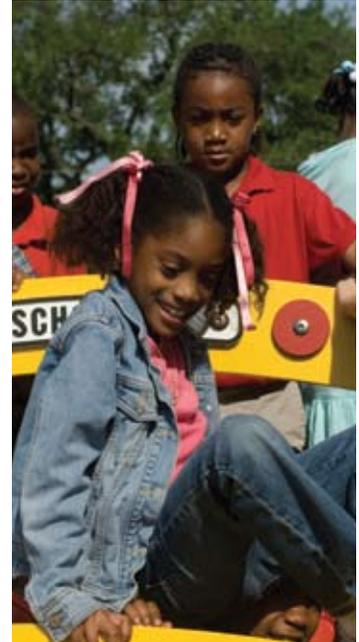
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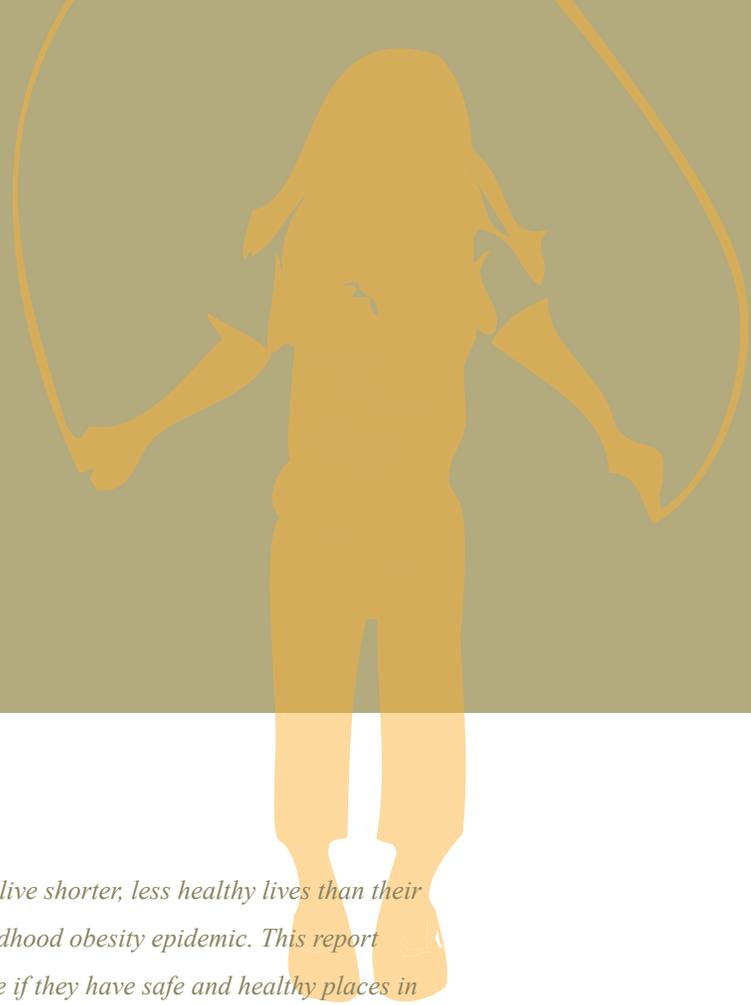
“Play Matters reports innovative and practical examples that build not only more active and healthier children but stronger and more vital communities as well. Nothing brings citizens together more effectively than their shared commitment to the well-being of our kids, and the relationships described in this volume provide the most powerful set of engines for developing the entire community.”

Dr. John ‘Jody’ Kretzmann, Director, Asset-Based Community Development Institute at Northwestern University

“The growing ranks of advocates for children’s play in the United States will find a treasure trove of important information and ideas in KaBOOM!’s Play Matters report. Every city, suburb, and small town in America could improve the lives of its children and young people by learning from the experiences of the municipal officials and community activists who contributed to this unique document.”

Joan Almon, Executive Director, Alliance for Childhood





“Today’s children could be the first in U.S. history to live shorter, less healthy lives than their parents, unless we take action to turn around the childhood obesity epidemic. This report identifies initiatives that show kids will be more active if they have safe and healthy places in their communities to play. The successful strategies highlighted in this report provide important lessons for ways communities can help children become more active, which in turn puts them on course to be healthier for the rest of their lives.”

Jeff Levi, PhD, Executive Director, Trust for America’s Health

“The National League of Cities is committed to providing examples of innovative programs and inspirational leadership to mayors and community leaders across the country. Play Matters provides an exceptional example of exactly that, with guiding strategies for cities interested in providing opportunities for play that get kids moving and that address the physical activity challenges facing our country.”

Donald J. Borut, Executive Director, National League of Cities

4455 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite B100, Washington, DC 20008

