

PlayROCs

THE ROCHESTER
CITY SCHOOL
DISTRICT:

A COMMUNITY
VISION FOR
PLAYFUL
LEARNING



Introduction

Play is fundamental to whole child health and well-being.

For many children, play is their preferred way of learning, and research demonstrates that play can enhance academic performance. As we continue to navigate through COVID-19, play is even more critical for kids. Experts across the country, including the Harvard Center for the Developing Child, believe the best way to mitigate trauma associated with the pandemic is to provide play opportunities for children.

Despite play's myriad benefits, not all children in the Rochester City School District (RCSD) have equitable access to play as part of their education. Although there are bright spots in the district and a wealth of community organizations committed to making play more accessible, there is little coordination of these efforts and no mechanism to support the transition of knowledge and resources among professionals and staff working with children in schools.

That is why the Healthi Kids Coalition's PlayROCs Advocacy Committee and families brought the community together to build a vision for play in school. Over the last year, Healthi Kids has been working to bring the PlayROCs Advocacy Committee's vision to life. The purpose of this work and report is to:

- **Advance a community vision for play:** Outline a vision to support children's learning and outcomes in the RCSD, and highlight strategies and tactics to promote the potential for play in learning environments.
- **Advocate for change:** Families, students, and organizations can work together to bring this vision to life. This report identifies opportunities to improve policies, practices, and environments to support playful learning in the RCSD.
- **Recognize community bright spots:** There are schools, community organizations, students, and parent leaders spurring change to maximize the potential of play in learning. Our goals are to lift up and amplify these efforts and to develop recommendations to repeat their success across the district.
- **Coordinate resources:** Community organizations are bringing the power of play to the RCSD, but efforts are not always aligned. We hope this report will support coordination of community resources.



Our hope is that our community vision will allow organizations to break down silos, leverage resources, and work together to build a system of playful learning that families and students across the RCSD want to see implemented.

Together, we can ensure that play is foundational to children's learning experiences. All children in the RCSD (PreK-12) must have equitable access to playful learning and unstructured play opportunities throughout the day, in school, out of school, and during the summer.

- Healthi Kids' PlayROCs Advocacy Committee



“I KNOW MY CHILDREN DON’T HAVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLAY AT SCHOOL, AND THEY SHOULD.”

PlayROCs Advocacy Committee member

About this report

This report is the result of research and outreach conducted by the Healthi Kids Coalition’s PlayROCs Advocacy Committee. Since 2015, this team of 32 resident leaders and organizational partners has amplified the importance of play across the City of Rochester and has recruited residents to advance changes in their neighborhoods and transform systems.

In December 2019, the PlayROCs Advocacy Committee embarked on a journey to identify potential policy levers to continue to advance the campaign. When sharing with Healthi Kids staff where they wanted to go next, residents expressed the need to expand their work to the RCSD.

As the team began to plan this expansion, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. With the rise of online learning and social isolation, families became even more concerned about their children’s lack of play opportunities. It was from this these conversations that PlayROCs in the RCSD began – and advocacy team members agreed to create a community vision for playful learning.

The committee worked with RCSD family leaders and organizational partners to build an authentic vision reflecting family and student voices. These discussions and partnerships provided the background for this report and collective vision for playful learning in the RCSD.

Methodology

To build a community vision for playful learning in the RCSD, Healthi Kids and the PlayROCs Advocacy Committee reached out to several organizational partners, including Aria Strategies LLC, Children’s Institute, Generation Two (G2), the Greater Rochester After School and Summer Alliance, the Greater Rochester Health Foundation, ROC the Future, the RCSD, and the Strong Museum of Play.

Partners agreed to take a multidisciplinary approach to ensure multiple avenues for collecting feedback from parents and students, consisting of:

1. Hosting a series of convenings with families, students, and organizational leaders.
2. Holding informal table talk conversations with families and students.
3. Conducting a survey of RCSD students and families.

Convenings took place in May-June 2021 with a total of 76 participants. From June to September 2021, six table talk conversations were held with 20 family and student leaders. From April-August 2021, more than 115 survey responses were collected.



This multi-tiered approach allowed the team to learn from students and families:

1. If playful learning was important to them
2. What was – and wasn’t – happening in their schools
3. If students and families were given a magic wand, what would they want to see happen in their schools and across the district to advance playful learning opportunities?

This report summarizes their responses.

HOW WE GOT FEEDBACK



3 convening sessions bringing together 76 students, families, and organizations



6 table talk conversation with 20 RCSD students and families



115 surveys completed by RCSD students and families

“WE HAVE TO BRING THE MOMENTUM OF PLAYROCS AND THE SUCCESSES WE’VE SEEN IN NEIGHBORHOODS TO THE ROCHESTER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT.”

PlayROCs Advocacy Committee member

A community vision for playful learning in Rochester

During spring and summer 2021, RCSD families and students developed the following vision statement for playful learning in the district:

Play is central to the education and well-being of our children. To support our kids, we must maximize the potential of play in a culturally responsive and sustaining way within our education system.

All children (PreK-12) in the Rochester City School District (RCSD) must have equitable access to playful learning and unstructured play opportunities throughout the day (in school, out of school, and during the summer).

When asked what they would like to see happen to bring this vision to life, they shared that playful learning is critical and urged leadership to:

Focus on mental health and emotional well-being.

Parents and families were particularly worried about the impact COVID-19 has had on their children. Through table-talk conversations, one parent shared, “I see the importance [of playful learning] now more than ever...removal from play is severely impacting youth.” Another shared, “play is meaningful, it can bring out the happiness in you and keep you young, help to release mental anguish and physical pain, keep you spiritually connected. This is what our students need right now.”

Participants shared how playful learning should be prioritized to support children’s mental health and well-being following pandemic-related trauma.

Implement playful learning within the NYS Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Framework. Participants noted that they wanted to ensure the implementation of playful learning within the state’s framework, which provides a foundation for educators to create student-centered learning environments that affirm

racial, linguistic, and cultural identities. Families and organizational partners stressed the need to move forward a model for education and playful learning in the district that supports our students of color in the way that they learn best.⁶² One participant shared, “I wish we had a culturally responsive school district that did everything from [method and practice of teaching], to curriculum, to the way we look at play and social interaction.”

They urged the community of partners to advance playful learning within a paradigm that celebrates the way Black and Latino children play and want to learn—and centers their voices in the process – instead of providing an environment that requires students to assimilate and code switch to Eurocentric culture.

Focus on inclusion. Participants shared that they would also like to see playful learning opportunities that are inclusive of all students, including those with disabilities. One participant shared a story about how students with disabilities are currently being left out of playful learning opportunities. “Students with disabilities are not seeing modifications being made. If the child couldn’t play the game, he had to research the game and write a report about the game. That’s not supporting playful learning for that child.” While another shared the “need for inclusive play so that all the benefits of play are accessible to all.” Adaptations and accommodations

should be made available to students with disabilities to ensure all children have access to playful learning.

Provide more opportunities to spend time outside of the classroom. Participants also want more opportunities for playful learning to happen outside of the classroom, such as playing outside, outdoor lessons, field trips, and other experiential learning opportunities. One student leader shared, “COVID-19 took away a lot of our play opportunities. I wish we had more hands-on play and field trips. Things that get us away from our laptops and desks.” Families and students added that it is a challenge to know what opportunities are available outside-of the school day.

Embed playful learning into curriculum and daily practice. Family and student leaders stated that it’s critical to embed playful learning into curriculum and daily instructional practice to ensure all kids have equitable access. One participant shared, “When kids are engaged because it’s relevant and of interest to them then they’ll learn!” Another shared, “Play is an afterthought, not woven into the day.” Many stressed their concerns that some playful learning opportunities are currently dependent on school resources or on what the classroom teacher brings to learning. They stressed that this is not providing equitable access to all students, resulting in a system of “have” and “have nots.”

Ensure consistent enforcement of policies. Some playful learning policies currently exist, participants stressed, and if enforced, would go a long way to supporting their vision for playful learning. One parent shared frustration with the daily-recess-policy implementation and stated that, “the policy does not allow to take away play time as a punishment, but some schools do! How are we enforcing this?” Building a framework of accountability around existing district policies, like the wellness policy, is a good first step to ensuring playful learning happens in the district. Without this framework, administrators and teachers have limited incentive to implement playful learning.





Play is vital to education

The research is clear: play is vital to education, as it benefits children in a wide range of developmental areas. Play aids both physical and cognitive development by strengthening muscles, bones, vital organs, and brain functions in children.² Play supports maintaining healthy weight and facilitating development of key brain functions involved in focus and cognitive control.³ In fact, playful learning is directly correlated to teacher reports of less fidgeting, better behavior, and more focus.⁴

Research shows 60 minutes of active play improves academic performance.⁵ Opportunities for play throughout the day cause a student's brain to function more efficiently, leading to overall improvements in cognitive control, focus, and performance.⁶

Socially, play is crucial to boosting language skills, empathy, imagination, self-regulation, and life skills such as cooperation and problem solving.⁷ Studies show that opportunities for play can support a child's emotional health by reducing feelings of anxiety and providing a mechanism for working through complex feelings and emotions.⁸

Most significantly, play is a key mechanism to support children building healthy relationships with their peers and adults. Strong relationships with adults are critical protective factors as children navigate trauma and events throughout their lives.⁹ Research consistently has demonstrated that children who have strong and healthy relationships with adults in their lives are able to better navigate toxic stress and stay on track developmentally.¹⁰ Research also shows that toxic stress in childhood caused by poverty, adverse childhood experiences (ACES), and racism significantly alter overall brain structure and function in children and undermines health and well-being later in life.¹¹

Simply put, play makes for healthier, happier, and more successful children. Opportunities for both structured and unstructured play throughout children's education are vital to their health, well-being, and success.

The value of play

Throughout the vision-planning process, families and students developed a holistic playful learning definition. Families felt strongly that playful learning opportunities should be offered for PreK-12 students throughout the RCSD to ensure every child has access to play in their education experience. Families also shared that playful learning includes both structured and unstructured activities.

Most importantly, they stressed that any playful learning framework must be culturally responsive, sustainable, and inclusive to celebrate diversity. Any approach to learning should not vilify, adultify, or persecute Black and Latino children for the way they learn, grow, and play.

Based on community input, we adopted the definition of playful learning shared by the Brookings Institute report, "A new path to education reform: Playful learning promotes 21st-century skills in schools and beyond," that states: Playful learning is an umbrella term that includes both free play and guided play.

Playful learning can be implemented through a number of teaching practices including theme-based learning and project-based learning, where children construct knowledge by exploring a real-world problem that is often driven by student interest. Research demonstrates that children learn best when they can be active and engaged in learning that is meaningful, socially interactive, iterative, and joyful.¹



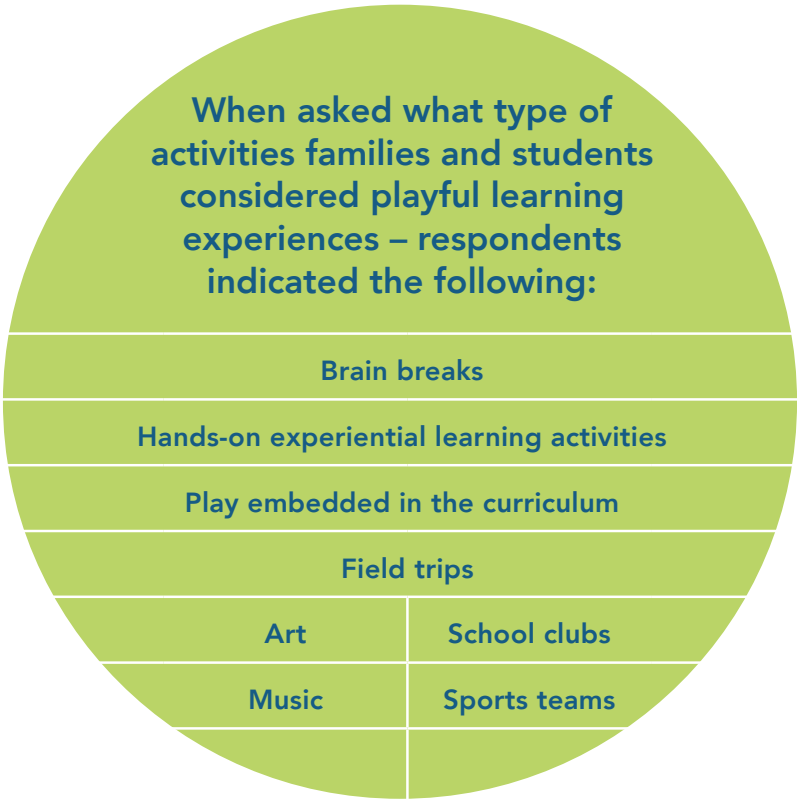
Types of playful learning opportunities

What families and students want in the RCSD: unstructured playful learning prioritized

WHY PLAYFUL LEARNING IS IMPORTANT TO RCSD FAMILIES AND STUDENTS:

- Builds critical social and emotional skills
- Supports whole child health
- Builds healthy relationships between peers and with adults
- Key to authentic student success
- Ensures equitable access to the benefits of play for all students
- Fosters healthy brain development
- Best way students learn
- Makes learning fun for all students

Playful learning provides children with the opportunities to maximize the value of play in school and during out of school-time programs. Families and students in the RCSD want to see more playful learning opportunities embedded throughout their learning experiences.



For this report, activities are divided into four categories:

1. Unstructured play opportunities (e.g., recess, and brain breaks),
2. Play embedded in curriculum and instructional practices (e.g., physical education, art, music, experiential learning activities,
3. Play embedded in curriculum and field trips
4. Play opportunities during out of school time (e.g., school clubs, after-school programs, and sports teams).

52% percent of families and students surveyed shared that recess is their number-one priority for playful learning.

Overall, data collected throughout this process demonstrate that families want opportunities for their children to have both structured and unstructured playful learning experiences. While recess was the number-one priority, families also indicated brain breaks (36%), school clubs (22%), and after-school programs (11%) were important to them – all of which are supportive of providing unstructured play opportunities for students (Figure-1).

Unstructured play is a set of child-directed activities that provide students a self-discovery process, allowing children to explore, create, and have fun without guidelines set by educators or parents.¹²

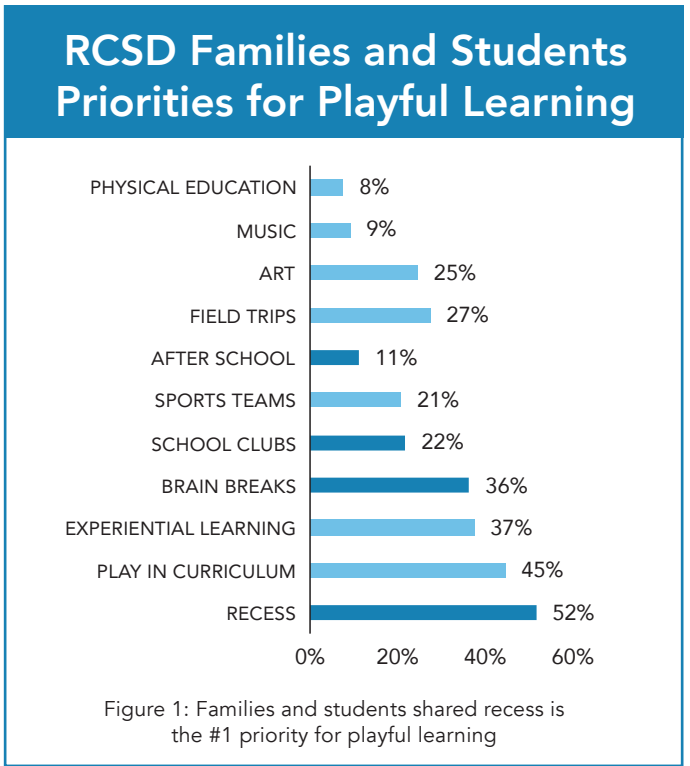
A common mechanism to support unstructured play in the classroom is a local wellness policy. This federal legislation mandates school districts to establish wellness policies and detail their goals to advance health and wellness. Since 2008, the RCSD has mandated 20 minutes of daily recess in K-6 classrooms through this policy. In 2017, the district amended its policy to state recess cannot be taken away as a form of punishment.

“KIDS NEED TO HAVE RECESS. A LOT OF KIDS, IF YOU DON’T TURN IN YOUR HOMEWORK, YOU DON’T GET RECESS. BUT THAT’S NOT FAIR. WHEN YOU TAKE AWAY RECESS, YOU’RE TAKING AWAY OUR EDUCATION.”

- RCSD Student Leader

Much has been done to advance daily recess in the RCSD. However, recess-assessment data compiled by Healthi Kids and the Children’s Institute in 2013-2015 indicate that RCSD schools continue to struggle with policy implementation. Less than half of participating schools have a requirement for recess minutes, training for recess supervisors, or regular recess facilities and equipment maintenance.¹³ Families and students consistently share stories of recess not occurring in school buildings and of recess being taken away as punishment.

Despite the barriers to implementation, the RCSD and community partners are working to advance unstructured play opportunities for RCSD children. The district and New York State can emulate policies from across the country that ensure unstructured play in the classroom. For example, in Arizona and New Jersey, there are laws in place that safeguard recess in elementary schools. Elementary schools and state recess cannot be taken away as a form of punishment.^{14, 15}



What families and students want in the RCSD: embedded playful learning curriculum and instructional practices

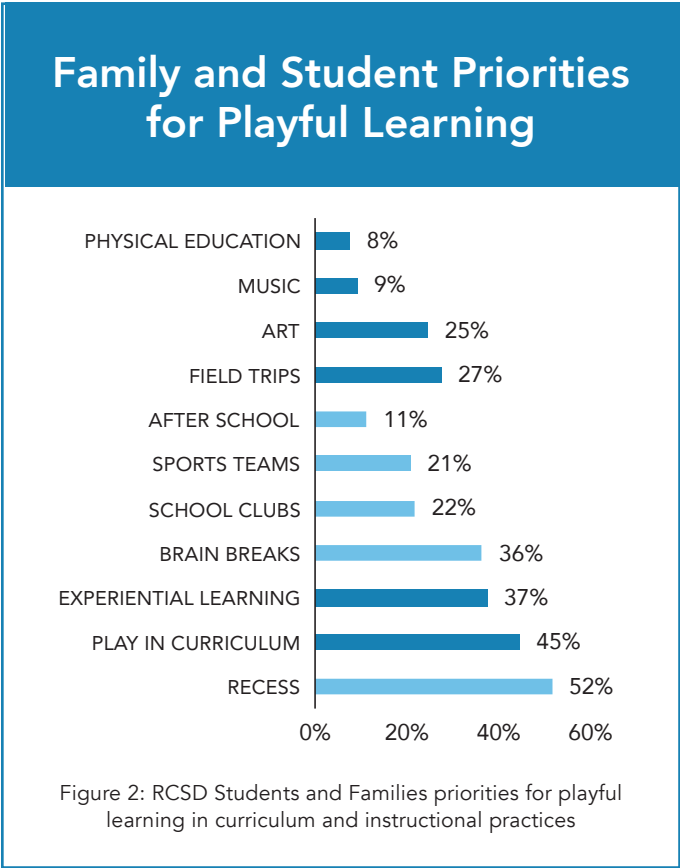
RCSD’s Pre-K program has been one of the district’s playful learning bright spots, consistently ranking among the highest in the nation for nearly 20 years. Children’s play is the primary learning mechanism in the Pre-K program. Each day, teachers arrange and equip the classroom with diverse, open-ended materials for children to explore and learn through creativity, prediction, trial and error, and fun.

In fact, play-based, child-centered learning is the foundation of the nationally recognized High Scope Pre-K curriculum. The daily routine includes a “plan-do-review” sequence, in which children make decisions and choose what they will do, carry out their ideas, and reflect upon their activities with adults and other children. These higher-level thinking skills are linked to the development of executive functions, which are needed to be successful in school and life.

When asked to define what playful learning in their education experience meant to them, most activities RCSD students and families listed involved curriculum and instructional practices. RCSD families want to see play embedded in curriculum (45%), more opportunities for hands-on experiential learning (37%), field trips (27%), art (25%), music (9%), and better physical education implementation (8%). (Figure-2)

Structured play “is generally led by adults, providing direction and a specific task in order for children to learn a new skill,” such as Capture the Flag or board games.¹⁶ This form of play is particularly important in the classroom because it allows children to practice achieving an established goal in a fun and effective way. It also teaches them valuable life skills including

active listening, cooperation, and sportsmanship.¹⁷ This type of play is often incorporated into curricular and instructional practices in school districts; for example, experiential learning activities, embedding practices in lesson plans like movement in math lessons, and with materials and resources.



These forms of playful learning must be central in RCSD school curriculum and instructional practice. The district can look to New York State and other places across the country for curriculum and instructional practices, such as:

New York State standards. The New York State Next Generation Standards for Education, adopted in 2017 by the New York State Education Department (NYSED), emphasize the importance of playful learning: “educators [must] design age-appropriate experiences that both stimulate and gratify children’s natural curiosity and desire to understand their world; and understand the importance of play in promoting learning.”¹⁸ According to the standards, “the goal in early childhood education settings, including schools, should be to build capacity by strengthening cognitive and social development through intentional play experiences.”¹⁹

The Long Island Play Revolution. To move towards a more play-centered curriculum, RCSD should look to the Long Island Play Revolution as an example. In 2015, the Patchogue-Medford District on Long Island made radical changes to prioritize play in its curriculum. Specifically, the district increased recess from 20 to 40 minutes, established a 40-minute lunch period, started optional yoga and mindfulness periods for K-8 students, and created weekly play clubs for child-led play. The results were astonishing: Discipline problems in the district were cut by more than 50%, student

attendance went up, and reports of student stress and anxiety went down, both in and out of school, and classrooms became places of joy and extra-productive learning.”²⁰ The Patchogue-Medford District has set a standard for play-based learning.

The LiiNK project. Texas Christian University’s (TCU) LiiNK project is another proof point that play offers numerous educational benefits for kids. TCU’s play program included professional development, multiple unstructured play breaks, and daily curriculum on character development.²¹ TCU found that four, 15-minutes recess periods per day and four-character curriculum lessons per week correlated with improved attention, less fidgeting, and more positive emotional expressions on the playground.²² This rigorous play program provides clear evidence that play should be integral to any curriculum and instructional practice.



What families and students want in the RCSD: more playful learning opportunities in their out of school time (OST) programs and settings

More playful learning opportunities outside of the structured school day were a priority for students and families. Priorities important to them included school clubs (22%), sports teams (21%), and after-school programs (11%).

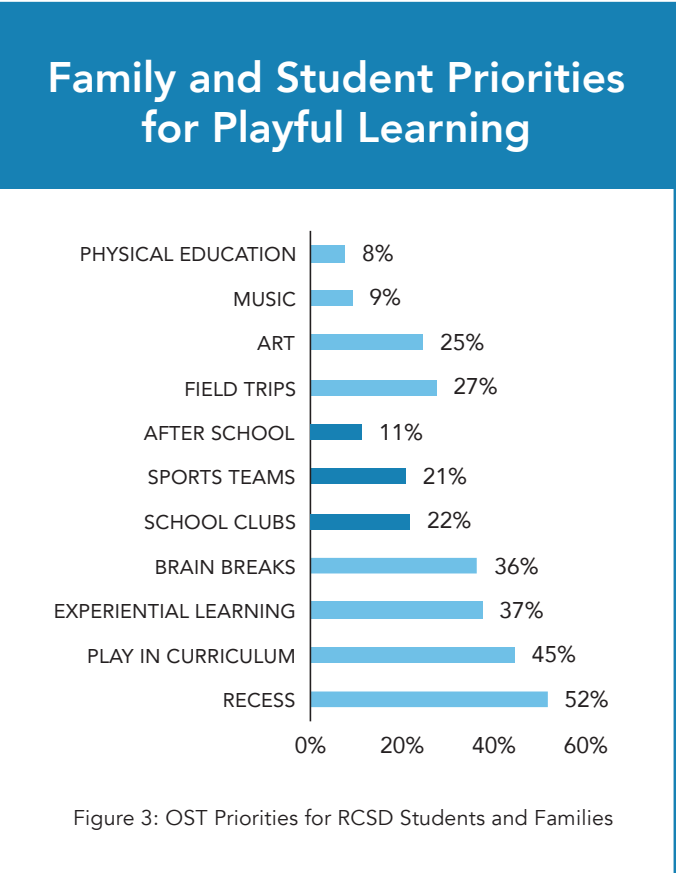
It is important to note that out of school time (OST) programs and settings are another venue for playful learning to happen – and that many students receive the benefits of music (9%), art (25%), field trips (27%), experiential learning (37%), and unstructured play (52%) within these settings. Ultimately, OST programs and settings provide a foundation for playful learning by integrating the things families and students have identified as important to them in their learning experiences. (Figure 3)

OST and playful learning best practices across the country

Nationally, kids of all ages spend on average 18.5 hours a week in OST programs, which amounts to almost 36% of additional instructional time outside of the school day.²³ OST programs provide a unique mechanism for students to not only be cared for while families work, but they are an opportunity for students to build social-emotional skills, support overall health and well-being, explore new opportunities, and address the opportunity gap for students in traditionally under resourced neighborhoods.^{24, 25} This can include: after school, before school, or summer programs, experiential learning experiences (e.g. visiting local cultural institutions), access to organized sports, school clubs, and other opportunities that can provide a well-rounded educational experience for students.²⁶

New York State funding for OST. In New York, NYSED and the Office of Children and Family Services provide several funding mechanisms for OST opportunities, including 21st Century funding streams, Advantage After School, Empire State After-School Program, Extended Day/School Violence Prevention programs, and the Youth Development program.²⁷ The Empire State After School Program is a particularly relevant funding stream for OST providers looking to implement playful learning as it is funded through the state Education Department and requires school districts to work with community and public-private partners to offer educational, recreational, and age-appropriate OST activities.

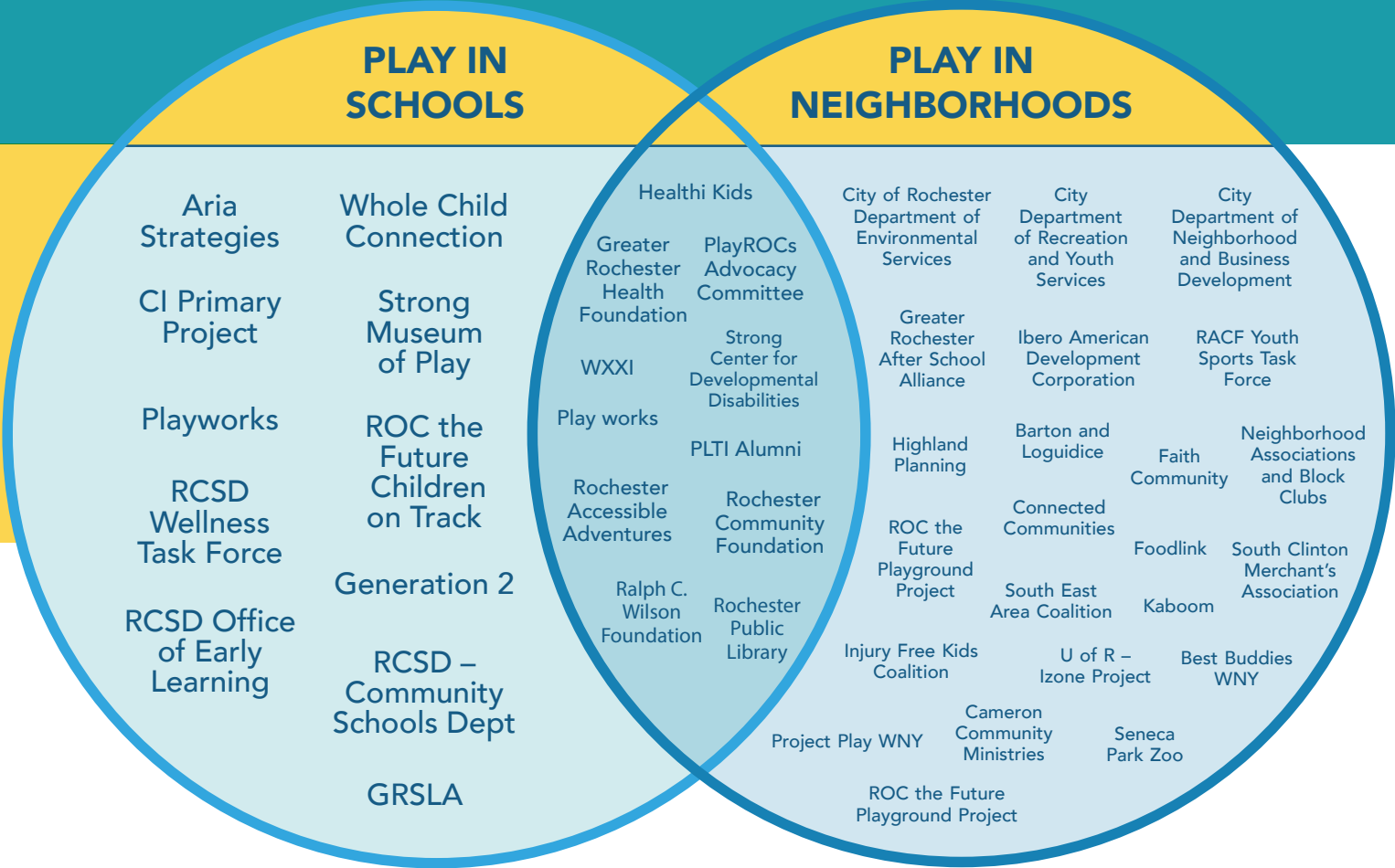
Boys and Girls Club of America. Boys and Girls Clubs are a national model for implementing playful learning in after-school settings. With 4,300 clubs serving over four million students, the Boys and Girls Club of America offers comprehensive programming to support kids and youth ages 6-19 in their physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development.²⁸ Programming offered includes photography, music, arts, drama, and sports. Academic programs offer an interactive, fun way for students to learn STEAM, digital literacy, and literacy, and they provide experiential learning experiences through games, hands-on activities, and other playful learning mechanisms that make learning fun.²⁹



Landscape of playful learning partners in Rochester

A wealth of resources

There are many different organizations, institutions, and community members invested in supporting playful learning opportunities throughout Rochester. Figure 5 demonstrates current partners who are advancing playful learning in schools and neighborhoods across the City of Rochester. This list is ever-changing and is a snapshot of the current environment. A full summary of activities each organization, business, and institution are advancing is available in Appendix 1.



A need for greater collaboration

Families and students shared that while there are bright spots among the efforts of many, the work is siloed, and partners are not always working together towards a unified mission. Families and students want to see greater collaboration when it comes to executing a vision for playful learning in the district.

Key barriers to playful learning in the RCSD

Efforts to advance playful learning within the RCSD encounter several key barriers, according to families, students, and community partners, including:

Lack of administrative prioritization and accountability. Parents are frustrated that play is not a priority in either the school schedule or in the curriculum. Even when play policies are changed, RCSD Central Office, principals, and other administrators often fail to properly enforce the policies.

The inaccurate distinction between play and work. Play is seen as an afterthought and privilege separate from learning. Children and parents would like to see play as an essential form of education and as a basic right. Often playful learning is seen as an addition to learning, not as something integral to a well-rounded education.

Inequitable division of resources and funding coupled with a lack of unified protocol. A child’s access to play in Rochester depends heavily on their school and/or teacher. Families, community partners, and students pointed to the inequitable distribution of existing resources. Families shared that while some schools have “all of the resources,” others have none. They want to see these resources available to all district students.

The teacher’s role is not clear. Some teachers feel tethered to their school’s curriculum, which prioritizes teaching to a test rather than providing play opportunities. At the same time, many parents believe teachers either do not want to or do not know how to utilize play to teach or engage with children.

The education system is not child-centered. Families and students voiced concerns that schools do not make a sufficient effort to hear from the most important people: their students. They expressed frustration with the emphasis on testing at the sacrifice of play opportunities.

Lack of implementation of policies and standards. While the NYS Next Generation standards and RCSD wellness policy provide a framework for supporting playful learning throughout the RCSD, families are increasingly concerned about their inconsistent implementation across district buildings.

Barriers to playful learning in RCSD identified by families, students, and organizations during the PlayROCs the RCSD convening sessions >



Play is a racial health equity issue in Rochester

Framing playful learning as racial health equity

Barriers to play in Rochester neighborhoods have been identified by residents through multiple studies. Families and students in the RCSD have stressed that if play is not happening in neighborhoods, then we must ensure that playful opportunities are happening throughout the school day. However, little has been done to assess the overall state of playful learning in the RCSD.

The health disparities prevalent in our community are reflected in the overall health of our children. Families and students called for implementing a playful learning vision within a racial health-equity framework. Racism currently prevents our Black and Latino families and students from achieving their best health, and policies, systems, and environments must be transformed to ensure student diversity is celebrated and honored.

Understanding the barriers to play in neighborhoods

Despite benefits for all children, not all Rochester kids have access to play in their schools or neighborhood.

Across the region, 68% of Black adults and 53% of Latinos live in poverty, compared to only 12% of White adults.³⁰ 45% of children under the age of 18 live in poverty.³¹ African American and Latino children and families in the City of Rochester experience worse health outcomes than the White/non-Latino population in Monroe County, including higher obesity rates and higher premature mortality rates.³²

Data from Healthi Kids Coalition's playability plans demonstrate that over 60% of parents in the City of Rochester say the lack of safe places to play in their neighborhood is a problem; 82% of kids across the city do not play in traditional parks or playgrounds;³³ and 65% of residents state they would not feel safe letting their child walk to a park in their neighborhood.³⁴ Residents across the City of Rochester share the top barriers to neighborhood play are neighborhood safety, traffic safety, and the state of our playgrounds.³⁵

Results from "My Health Story" conducted by Common Ground Health reveal that only 25.5% of city residents believe their neighborhood is great for children to play outdoors, three times lower than the average response by their suburban counterparts (Graph 1).³⁶

Understanding how Black and Latino children play

To advance our community's playful learning vision, we must examine play and playful learning through a lens accounting for anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Most importantly, we must recognize the ways in which Black and Latino children move and play, within a context that has historically discriminated against them.

Students of color navigate within the "white gaze", the hyper-vigilant eyes of the current predominant Eurocentric, white system, culture, and beliefs.³⁷ As Dr. Brian Wright from the University of Memphis shares, students of color navigate white gaze in their everyday settings (schools, or their neighborhood), and often they feel like they are being watched, judged, and not welcome. He leans on the examples of the 2014 killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice by local police as he played outside of a Cleveland recreation center and a 10-year-old Black boy who was charged for assault for playing dodgeball to illustrate this point.³⁸

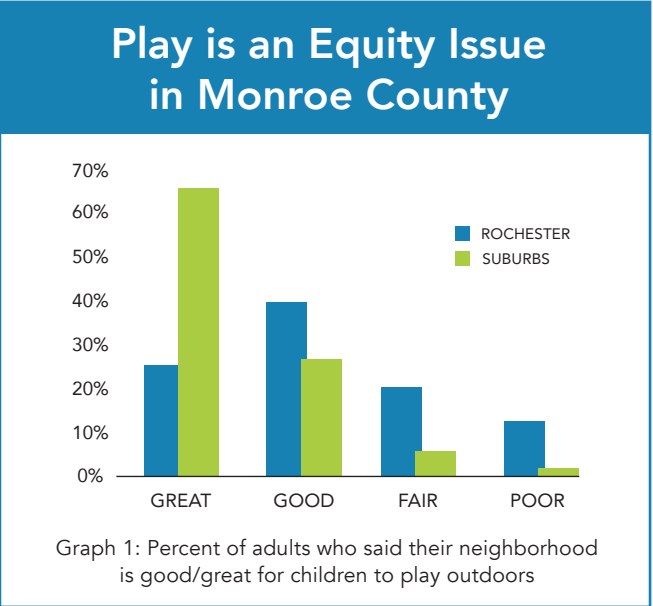
Most importantly, Dr. Wright notes, is that the white gaze, in the form of surveillance by school authorities, police, and educators all leads to students of color being adultified and dehumanized, and criminalizes their actions as their view of play is seen as violent compared to White students, whose play may be viewed as innocent, fun, and protected.³⁹

Dr. Wright's work is significant, as it highlights the importance for all educators, community partners, and actors working within the RCSD to recognize the significant ways that current paradigms of playful learning intersect with inequitable policies, systems, and environments. His work also provides us with the ability to call out injustice and move forward solutions that prioritize all district students.

Other challenges to students' ability to play and learn

Despite 90% of the RCSD student population being people of color, a recent Education Trust New York report showed that 82% of teachers in the district are White - the largest gap between the diversity in the student body and a teaching staff representative of those students among the five largest school districts in New York.⁴⁰ Recruitment and retention of educators of color, addressing the underlying causes of poverty, adverse childhood experiences, and racism are long-term problems that must be addressed in order to advance better educational outcomes for all.

It is important that the RCSD's White educators recognize the context in which they are teaching, who their students are, and the impact racism has on their overall health and well-being, while also understanding the implicit bias they may bring to their work.



“IT’S IMPORTANT WE FOCUS ON PLAY IN SCHOOLS BECAUSE ALL KIDS DON’T HAVE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD.”

PlayROCs Advocacy Committee Member

Importance of play during COVID-19 and beyond

COVID-19's impact on children and families cannot be ignored. Families already living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet were dealt another setback with additional loss of income, stability, and support. On top of that stress, Monroe County's Black and Latino residents are dying from COVID-19 at a rate three times higher than Whites, and our Latino and Black residents are also three and five times more likely to be hospitalized because of the illness.⁴¹

Following the COVID-19 crisis, play has never been more important. National advocates and families have raised alarm bells about the impact COVID-19 has had on children's mental health and well-being, and particularly their ability to rebound from yet another trauma without adequate support. One of the best ways we can mitigate the impact of pandemic-related trauma is through the power of play. National experts like the Harvard Center of the Developing Child,⁴² Brookings Institute,⁴³ the American Academy of Pediatrics,⁴⁴ the International Play Association,⁴⁵ the Global Recess Alliance,⁴⁶ and the American Psychological Association⁴⁷ agree that opportunities for play will be vital to the mental health of children recovering from the pandemic-related trauma and anxiety.

Play relieves stress and reduces anxiety by providing time for relaxation, increasing connectedness with friends and family, and allowing children to make sense of changes by "playing out" their traumas.⁴⁸ 87% of parents say play is more important now than ever before because it encourages high self-confidence, less screen time, and more physical activity. Yet only two in five families report their children are playing more now than pre-pandemic.⁴⁹

"[MY KIDS ARE] STILL TRYING TO UNDERSTAND HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED, AND WHAT'S GOING ON. IT'S STILL DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN TO THEM EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED. [COVID-19] HAS CHANGED THEM."

Table Talk Primary Caregiver Participant

When we prioritize building healthy relationships through play, play-based learning, recess, and out of school time opportunities, we are mitigating the trauma and impact the pandemic has had on our children. All children in the RCSD deserve that opportunity.

Parent concerns about COVID's impact on play

Play's importance for families during COVID-19 and beyond rang clear in the table-talk conversations hosted with families and students.

One parent shared, "I've failed in reference to where my kids were and where they are now. I'm an advocate for play, but due to COVID, my family's gone backwards instead of forward."



"[PLAYFUL LEARNING IS] EVEN MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER BEFORE DUE TO THE HUGE GAP IN SOCIAL INTERACTIONS THAT OUR CHILDREN HAVE. THIS NEEDS TO BE A CORE ELEMENT TO EVERYTHING WE DO — PARENTS, TEACHERS, LEADERS."

RCSD Parent Leader

Recommendations: for parents, families, and students

Advocate. Family and student voices are critical to moving forward a vision for playful learning in the RCSD. Your voices matter. Attend School Board meetings, PTO/A meetings, and amplify why playful learning is important. Share the recommendations outlined in this report with district leaders, School Board members, and your school's administrators. Not sure where to start? Reach out to Healthi Kids!

Educate. Educate your peers, your teachers, or principals on the importance of playful learning. Tell them why it is important to you and why you want to make sure that it is part of your learning experience. Share this report and educate them about why playful learning should be a priority within your school building and across the district.

Join your school-based planning team or PTO/A.

For parents, ask how playful learning is being adopted within your school building and share with your teachers and administrators why it is important. Demand changes to current policies and practices at the school-building level that can advance playful learning opportunities. For students, get involved with your school's student leadership team. Make sure your voices are heard at student meetings and ask for a seat at the table where decisions are being made about your education, such as school-based planning committees.

Recruit your friends and family. The more voices advocating for playful learning, the louder we become. Ask friends and family to join in your advocacy to advance playful learning. Work together to amplify the importance of play, and share stories of why this is important to you!

Partner with organizations. There are many organizations looking to advance playful learning (Appendix 1). Reach out to learn more about their work and ask them how they can expand to your school. Not sure where to start? Reach out to Healthi Kids at info@healthikids.org.

Model playful learning. Model playful learning whenever you can! If your school is not making playful learning a priority, consider partnering with your local neighborhood association or PTO/A to host a play event at your school. Create your own opportunities for playful learning with students, and model what it should look like at your school.



Recommendations: for district leadership

Professional development. Provide annual professional development on the power of play at the beginning of each school year for teachers and administrators. Provide ongoing coaching, and peer to peer learning on how to integrate play into the school day. Partner with like-minded organizations to leverage resources, and share how playful learning can be implemented.

Invest. Earmark a portion of recent American Relief Act funding or Title IV(a) to be equitably directed towards playful learning. Partner with organizations to bring additional resources to the district through private funding streams and other grants. Funding may be used to develop play-centered programs, finance play training of staff and teachers, purchase resources (e.g., games, blocks, and other material), or to pay staff to facilitate play by serving as play coaches.

Share best practices. There are bright spots of schools, educators, and administrators doing playful learning well. Develop a mechanism for cross-sharing and learning between school buildings so best practices can be communicated to other educators and administrators.

Reassess curriculum. Incentivize alignment of current curriculum with the NYSED Next Generation Standards to ensure adoption of statewide standards that emphasize the appropriateness of playful learning for Pre-K through third grade students. Share with educators' mechanisms to infuse play-based learning opportunities, such as literacy/numeracy games or arts-based units into their lesson plans and experiential learning.

Develop accountability mechanisms. Building a framework of accountability around existing district policies, like the wellness policy, is a good first step to ensuring playful learning. Without this framework, administrators and teachers have limited incentive to implement playful learning.

Partner. The district should leverage the institutional and organizational partners invested in advancing the power of play in education (listed in Appendix 1). By working together, we can braid resources, apply for additional funding, and ensure that opportunities are equitably distributed across all school buildings.

Implement with an equity lens. Ensure the implementation of any playful learning initiative is embedded within the New York State Department of Education's Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Framework. Play is critical to whole child health and development, but we must make sure that our students of color are not penalized for playing in ways that are culturally relevant to them. Continue to offer professional development on the framework, and ensure any future curriculum, lesson plans, or policies are examined and amended in relation to the state guidelines.



Recommendations: for educators

Advance play. Continue to advance the power of play in your learning environment. Take advantage of professional development opportunities to learn more about the intersection of playful learning, gender, and race, and about how to implement playful learning within the NYSED Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Framework. As playful learning champions, share with your peers how to infuse playful learning into daily instructional practice or lesson plans.

Leverage Resources. Resources for playful learning are currently limited, but there are organizations available to support you. Partner with organizational partners (listed in Appendix 1) to leverage resources for your classroom that advance playful learning.

Connect with your peers. Several educators across the district understand the value and importance of playful learning experiences. Find like-minded educators within your network. Share best practices, coordinate resources, and work together to inform your peers on the power of playful learning.

Get feedback from students and families. Students and families were clear that they want educators to reach out to them to determine how to incorporate playful learning into daily instruction. Students and families have great ideas that educators can put in place in their classroom.

Incorporate playful learning into curriculum and instructional practice. Educators should continue to expand playful learning in daily curriculum and instructional practices. If educators are new to infusing playful learning into daily practice, they can reach out to organizational partners and other district champions highlighted in this report to gain a better understanding of how to implement playful activities in the classroom environment. Educators are also encouraged to seek student feedback to see what types of playful learning opportunities would be most important to them.



Recommendations: for organizational partners

Communicate. Many organizations are doing wonderful activities to advance playful learning in the RCSD. Despite this, many families do not know about these opportunities for their children. Organizational partners must invest in better communication pathways with parents and caregivers. This can include better online presence, Facebook events, sharing opportunities with RCSD communications, putting flyers into students’ backpacks, and developing an online program or resource locator for families.

Eliminate silos. There are many bright spots where people are advancing playful learning in RCSD. Families and students want organizations to start working together more consistently to braid resources and allow for equitable distribution of these opportunities across the district.

Give parent and student leaders a seat at the table. Involve parent and student leaders in all aspects of decision-making. As you develop your programming to disrupt traditional balances of power and ensure that their voices are heard and honored. Looking to apply for a grant? Include family and student leaders in the process to gain their perspective on how best to use funding. Creating a new program to advance playful learning? Lean on student leaders to learn what they want to see happen inside and outside of the classroom.



About Healthi Kids

Since 2008, the Healthi Kids Coalition has been advocating for safe and accessible play spaces in schools and neighborhoods. Healthi Kids is an initiative of Common Ground Health and a grassroots coalition with more than 80 members. We embrace the diversity of all family structures in our community and believe in the power of youth and resident voices to co-create solutions. Together, we advocate fiercely for policy, system, environment, and resource transformation to support the physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development of all kids from birth to age 8.

Our advocacy agenda, developed by the community for the community, was created to advance healthy-learning environments, early childhood foundations, equitable communities, and the power of play. To move forward our agenda, the coalition recognizes we must abolish inequities caused by racism, adverse childhood experiences, poverty, ableism, and community violence to support our youngest children.

We unapologetically advance policies to ensure all kids regardless of ZIP Code, economic status, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, or ability have the supports they need for the healthiest start in life.

A history of playful learning advocacy

Our work to advance play and playful learning began by working with students and families in 2009 to create a recess report card demonstrating disparities between the RCSD and suburban districts across Monroe County that assessed whether recess was happening regularly in schools. Partnering with students and families, this work led to the creation of a 20-minute, mandatory daily active recess policy in the RCSD.

In 2014, we partnered with the RCSD Parent Advisory Council and called for a district-wide solution to ensure no child would be denied recess:

1. Every child, regardless of ability, would be provided opportunities for daily active recess.
2. Recess would not be taken away as a form of punishment.

Through our advocacy to advance playful learning in the district, we leveraged funding to support implementation of these policies. We supported schools by providing technical assistance, resources, and materials, and we partnered with leading national experts to provide ongoing professional-development opportunities to administrators, staff, and teachers across the district.

The PlayROCs campaign

Since 2015, the Healthi Kids' PlayROCs campaign has advocated for policies, systems, and environmental changes to advance the power of play. This grassroots campaign is led by resident leaders and 65 partner organizations that have come together to advocate for safe and accessible play in both schools and neighborhoods across the City of Rochester. Safe play includes addressing barriers to traffic safety and neighborhood safety, while accessible play ensures all children regardless of age, ability, or ZIP Code can maximize the potential of play in their school and neighborhood environments. PlayROCs members include neighborhood associations, block clubs, churches, community organizations, and nonprofits in the Rochester community.

PlayROCs successes

For the last six years, the coalition has advocated for play and playful learning to be adopted into Rochester 2034, the city's comprehensive plan. We have piloted innovative-built environment strategies such as story walks, a downtown Play Walk, and other tactical urbanism installations. We worked with the City's Department of Recreation and Human Services to transform their approaches to become more supportive of neighborhood play, piloting play streets and creating a playful sidewalk policy.

Play is a quality-of-life indicator for residents across the city. The campaign has amplified the voices of residents in neighborhoods and has catalyzed City residents to bring play back into the daily lives of Rochester's children.



Spotlight



Family leader spotlight: Heather Feinman

Heather Feinman is a mother of seven children and lives in the Southwest Quadrant of the city. Her daughters Shanelle (15), Avalon (10), Arwyn (7), and Aurora (5) attend School #2, School of the Arts, and Rochester School for the Deaf.

Heather has been a member of the PlayROCs Advocacy Committee and Healthi Kids Coalition for five years. The work is important to her. “We are making things happen. I have seen so many changes take place and I’m so happy to be a part of it. I have learned so much and so have my kids.” She says she is passionate about this work because her kids and family are both involved, and because she is seeing changes in her neighborhood. Heather urges other families to amplify their voice so that we can continue to advance change in the district.

Spotlight



Student spotlight: Mekhi Kingsly

As a senior at School #58, Mekhi Kingsly understands the power of play through experience. “For me, play is important because I think I learn better with hands-on things rather than paper and pencil.” Mekhi has loved School #58’s model of expeditionary learning that emphasizes getting students outside and active. It was only when opportunities for play disappeared during the pandemic that Mekhi fully realized the value of creativity in education. He desperately wants a return to pre-COVID education as he enjoys school most when it is active, experiential, and playful.

Spotlight



Student leader spotlight: Ja'Yonna Lewis

Ja'Yonna Lewis powerfully advocates for play in education. A student at School #53, some of her fondest memories include playing tag and gaga ball on the playground. She values play so highly because it has allowed her to form close friendships and taught her crucial teamwork and sportsmanship skills. Ja'Yonna sees herself as an “advocate for the students that come after me” hoping to make schools and administrators recognize the value and importance of play.

Spotlight



Family leader spotlight: Evette Colon

Evette is a mother of two children in the RCSD. Ariana (16) attends Franklin High School and Yadiel (11) attends School #22. Evette believes that playful learning is critical to all children in our community. To support playful learning in out-of-school time, she has partnered with community partners like Ibero-American Development Corporation and Healthi Kids to offer play-streets programming, movie nights, and unstructured play activities at the vacant lot near her home. The lot – once a haven for illicit activity – is now a vibrant place for kids in the neighborhood, with interactive murals, play equipment, and a community garden.

Spotlight



RCSD bright spot: UPK/EPK

Throughout Robin Hooper’s time as RCSD’s Executive Director of Early Childhood, her department has been committed to allowing their Pre-K students to follow their own interests through play. When she joined the department 14 years ago, there was no formal curriculum that put play front and center. Today, the RCSD’s Pre-K program serves as an excellent model of playful learning with its High Scope curriculum, which fosters play-based and child-led learning. Daily math and ELA lessons put children at the center of the learning process allowing them to make choices for themselves and direct playful experiences. Robin believes in the power and benefits of play because she has seen them firsthand.

RCSD’s Universal Pre-K Program is a bright spot demonstrating playful learning can be incorporated into curriculum and instructional practices.

Spotlight



RCSD bright spot: Martin Luther King Jr. School #9

Martin Luther King Jr. School #9 has been a leader in implementing out of school time (OST) play opportunities. Partnering closely with Healthi Kids and the City of Rochester Department of Recreation and Human Services, the school has offered after-school, weekend, and summer programming that prioritizes playful learning experiences. Demitria Lawton-Greggs, the community schools site coordinator at the school, stated that even during the height of COVID-19 and virtual learning School #9 offered virtual OST options. As the school has transitioned to in person learning, the activities are now offered via a hybrid model for students to take advantage of after school.

School #9 partners with multiple community organizations to ensure their families and students have access to playful learning outside of the school day.

Appendices

Landscape of PLAYers in Rochester: Schools

Name	Focus	Activities
Children’s Institute	Play in Schools	<p>Children’s Institute partners with community agencies and schools to strengthen the social and emotional health of children in a variety of different ways. We assist with the implementation of evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs; provide a range of trainings, assessments, and services to support those who work with children; and conduct research and evaluation to continuously improve efforts that support children’s growth and development.</p> <p>Primary Project: A national evidence-based program that helps children in Pre-K through third grade adjust to school, gain confidence, social skills, and focus on learning. Through play, Primary Project addresses children’s school adjustment difficulties and increases their chances for success.</p> <p>Whole Child Connection: Builds the capacity of child-serving organizations and individuals to embrace and implement a whole child approach when working with children. Currently funded by the Greater Rochester Health Foundation, the Whole Child Connection supports 8 schools in RCSD with professional development, coaching, and resources to implement whole child health practices and systems at the building level.</p>
Generation Two	Play in Schools	<p>Generation Two employs play and intergenerational friendship to enhance the child’s social, emotional, and intellectual development. In weekly sessions each child meets with an adult volunteer trained in child-centered play, creating a collaboration that becomes a medium for personal growth.</p> <p>G2 Currently works in schools across the RCSD and other districts to support child-centered play.</p>
Playworks	Play in Schools	<p>An Oakland-based national nonprofit that supports learning and physical health by providing safe and inclusive play to low-income students in urban schools. Playworks works with schools to design curriculum and activities that offer play opportunities during recess, lunch, and after-school programs.</p> <p>Playworks has been working with RCSD since 2011 and is funded locally by RCSD through Title IV(a), Ralph C. Wilson Foundation, and other partners. They have provided training and technical assistance to all schools in the RCSD to advance daily active recess and physical activity throughout the school day.</p>
Strong Museum of Play	Play in Schools	<p>The Strong explores play and the ways in which it encourages learning, creativity, and discovery, and illuminates cultural history - through collecting and preserving, interpreting and education, and reaching out.</p> <p>The museum partners with RCSD to support a play-based pilot for all K teachers. The pilot provides professional development training, coaching for teachers, and passes for classrooms to attend the museum.</p>
RCSD Wellness Task Force	Play in Schools	<p>The Wellness Task Force works to build on best practices and strengthen collaborations between the district, our schools, and local health partners. The overall mission of the group is to recommend and support increased opportunities for students, families, and staff to establish life long healthy nutrition and physical activity habits. The group meets throughout the school year to review physical education and activity goals, nutritional guidelines, standards for our Child Nutrition programs, and other district-wide practices and procedures related to health, nutrition, and physical activity. Current priorities of the Wellness Task Force include health education, recess, and communication of the district wellness policy.</p>
RCSD Office of Early Learning	Play in Schools	<p>RCSD has been supporting playful learning professional development and the implementation of the Next Generation Standards in PreK-3rd grade. In 2020-2021 the office distributed play kits to all PreK-K students to support playful learning in their home environments.</p>
RCSD Department of Health, PE, Athletics	Play in Schools	<p>RCSD’s Department of Health, PE, and Athletics provides support to all RCSD staff in the implementation of the district’s wellness policy. They provide technical assistance, resources, and support to implement daily active recess, physical education, and manage all extra-curricular athletics provide by the district.</p>
Aria Strategies	Play in Schools	<p>Consulting firm that provides mission-driven solutions for nonprofits. We help organizations build capacity through our areas of practice and associated services. Currently holds a contract with the Greater Rochester Health Foundation’s Healthy Equitable Futures Strategy to provide technical assistance to grantees.</p> <p>From 2013- 2021 has provided technical assistance & project sustainability at Rochester City School District Schools to advance nutrition, physical activity, and whole child effort at schools: 10, 12, 19, 23, 33 & 46.</p>
Greater Rochester Summer Learning Association (GRSLA)	Play in Schools	<p>GRSLA is a regional consortium that brings together both public and private educational institutions and community organizations to collaborate and champion high-quality summer learning. Serving 1,595 students in the greater Rochester area, the Summer LEAP program offers high-quality summer programming to children. Throughout the pandemic, GRSLA offered interactive virtual programming to kids that included the distribution of play kits to families.</p>

Landscape of PLAYers in Rochester: Schools & Neighborhoods

Name	Focus	Activities
Healthi Kids Coalition	Play in Schools & Neighborhoods	<p>Healthi Kids is a grassroots community coalition and initiative of Common Ground Health. Together, we advocate for policies, systems, and environmental changes to advance whole child health in Rochester and the Finger Lakes region of Western N.Y. Our advocacy agenda has four portfolios of work including the power of play. For the last decade, Healthi Kids has been advancing the power of play in homes and schools and has convened various groups and taskforces to advance our advocacy (e.g., Play Walk Planning committee, Play BEST committee, Peace Walk Planning team, 10 Minute Walk to Park Advisory Council, Story Walk Planning Committee).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PlayROCs Advocacy Committee: A current active committee of the Healthi Kids Initiative at Common Ground Health. The grassroots resident-led committee advances the PlayROCs Campaign and advocates for both safe and accessible play in homes and schools.
ROC the Future	Play in Schools & Neighborhoods	<p>ROC the Future is a community cradle to career collaboration for improving academic achievement for children in the city of Rochester, N.Y. Our work is based on the data-driven Strive Together framework. Our efforts are currently focused on School Readiness, Early Grade Literacy, and High School Graduation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• School Readiness Outcomes Team: Has evaluated several factors that contribute to school readiness and the data and trends in the RCSD to determine goals and strategies. In 2014-2020, a subcommittee of this team advocated for the implementation of play-based curriculum and offered a series of trainings to RCSD educators to advance NYSED Next Generation standards.• Early Grade Literacy Outcomes Team: Works to ensure that Rochester, N.Y., students are reading at grade level and developing writing, critical thinking, and oral speaking skills. <p>Playground Project: ROC the Future secured funding from Kaboom. Working alongside Healthi Kids, Beechwood Neighborhood Coalition, and Connected Communities a new teen adventure course was installed in the Beechwood neighborhood in summer 2021.</p>
Greater Rochester After School & Summer Alliance	Play in Schools & Neighborhoods	<p>GRASSA is a volunteer committee of funders, policymakers, researchers, and after-school family and provider representatives. Started in 2001, its main goal is to strengthen the quality, quantity, and accessibility of out-of-school-time programs for school-age youth in Monroe County.</p> <p>The Greater Rochester After School & Summer Alliance believes that out of school time opportunities incorporate any before, after school, or summer programs and activities that support kids and students. They also believe in the power of play.</p>
WXXI	Play in Schools & Neighborhoods	<p>WXXI Education is focused on anytime, anywhere learning resources to support educators and families whether learning is at school or out of school. Our online learning resources like PBS Learning Media, virtual training and events, live streaming of WXXI-TV & WXXI Kids 24/7, and on-demand players provide educators, students, and families with rich choices for learning. In addition, offline learning activities and outdoor learning are provided to use individually or in groups.</p> <p>WXXI provides a series of resources for educators, families, and students and in summer 2021 partnered with the Rochester Public Library to host a series of play day pop ups in parks.</p>
Rochester Public Library	Play in Schools & Neighborhoods	<p>The library has provided many different programs that relate to the power of play. Each branch has advanced play in different ways, but examples include creating playful sidewalks, hosting pop-up play days at each branch, and more.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Central Library: Currently has a Play Everywhere grant to redevelop their children’s room.• Toy Library: Rochester Public Library’s toy library at Lincoln Branch is also a valuable resource that provides play lending kits to educators.• Children’s Services: Children’s Services at the Rochester Public Library offers many opportunities for kids to play at their local library. From individual programming at each branch like Lego club, game days, play days, crafts, or family story time – to developing STEAM learning kids and nature backpacks, there’s always something fun and interesting to do. Children’s Services also participates in a national “Talk, Read, Sing” campaign to boost early learning and brain development of children birth through age five. The campaign provides caregivers and families fun ways to play and learn together.
Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities	Play in Schools & Neighborhoods	<p>Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) is a member of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), a network of interdisciplinary centers advancing research, education, policy, and practice for and with individuals with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities, their families, and communities.</p> <p>Provides professional development opportunities to advance inclusive play and physical activity in classrooms for children of all abilities.</p>

Appendices

Landscape of PLAYers in Rochester: Schools & Neighborhoods		
NAME	FOCUS	ACTIVITIES
Rochester Accessible Adventures	Play in Schools & Neighborhoods	<p>Rochester Accessible Adventures transforms recreation businesses to ensure individuals with disabilities can access inclusive active recreation and sports opportunities.</p> <p>Provides professional development opportunities to educators, businesses, and organizations to advance inclusive play and physical activity in classrooms for children of all abilities.</p>
Out of School Time Providers	Play in Schools & Neighborhoods	<p>Out of school time providers across the community continue to advance the power of play through various avenues, such as after school, before school, or summer programs, experiential learning experiences (e.g., visiting local cultural institutions), access to organized sports, school clubs and other opportunities that can provide a well-rounded educational experience for students.</p> <p>Out of school time partners include: Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, Charles Settlement House, Community Place, Quad A, Action for a Better Community, Cameron Ministries, Living Word Temple of Restoration, Ibero, Center for Youth, City Rec, Baden Street, and many others.</p>
City of Rochester Department of Recreation & Human Services	Play in Schools & Neighborhoods	<p>R-Center Programs: The City of Rochester’s Department of Recreation and Youth Services provides playful learning opportunities to students across the RCSD. With five located R-Centers: Frederick Douglass R-Center at School 12, Adams St. R-Center and Dr. Alice Holloway, Trenton and Pamela Jackson R-Center at School 9, Thomas P. Ryan R-Center at School 33, and Willie W. Lightfoot R-Center at School 19. The R-Centers provide both unstructured and structured playful learning activities and opportunities for students to explore. The R-Centers are invaluable to many families across the city as much of the programming offered is free of charge, or at minimal cost. Participants in DRHS free afters-chool programs can enjoy open gym, boxing, swim lessons, group games, team building games, Kuumba dance classes, step team practices, theater arts programming, organized sports, playground pick-up games, and more.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10 Minute Walk to Park: The Mayor of Rochester (former Mayor Warren) signed on to the Trust for Public Land/National Park and Recreation Association’s 10 Minute Walk pledge that aims to increase investment and engagement in City parks. DRYS supports the pledge by implementing strategies that supports these safe routes to parks throughout the city.• Play streets ROC: A new program and initiative of DRYS. The program provides technical assistance, support, and materials to establish play streets in neighborhoods across the City of Rochester.• Connecting Kids to Nature: The Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) initiative creates more equitable and abundant access to nature in cities through a collaboration between the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families and the Children & Nature Network.• Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights: In summer 2021, Youth Voice One Vision developed a Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights that is a guide to parents, educators, and kids on how to spend more time outside. Rights include opportunities for every child to participate and enjoy the outdoors. Examples include learning how to swim, playing in clean rivers and lakes, exploring nature in neighborhoods, and playing outdoors in the wintertime.

Landscape of PLAYers in Rochester: Neighborhoods		
NAME	FOCUS	ACTIVITIES
Best Buddies of Western New York	Play in Neighborhoods	<p>Creating a global movement of opportunities for friendship, employment and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Provides several inclusive play-based activities for kids of all ages throughout the summer.</p>
Barton & Loguidice (B&L)	Play in Neighborhoods	<p>B&L is a privately held, full-service consulting firm that provides services in practice areas that include engineering, environmental science, planning, and landscape architecture.</p> <p>B&L has provided planning support to The Story Walk at Phillis Wheatley Library, Lexington Avenue Farm, and other playful infrastructure.</p>
Cameron Community Ministries	Play in Neighborhoods	<p>Cameron Community Ministries is an Urban Outreach Community Center in the Lyell-Otis Neighborhood of Rochester, N.Y. 98% of residents in this neighborhood live in poverty.</p> <p>Cameron currently implements pop-up play days, works alongside the kids to host annual Peace Walk’s highlighting their students’ right to play; and in 2021 implemented playful sidewalks connecting their Teen Center to the main building.</p>
Connected Communities	Play in Neighborhoods	<p>Connected Communities is a non-profit public/private collaboration of neighborhood, business, government, and non-profit leaders partnering with residents to address the various needs of the EMMA and Beechwood communities through the implementation of a holistic approach. We are utilizing the proven principles of the Purpose-Built Communities framework to address the need for mixed-income housing, cradle-to-career education, community health and wellness, and long-term economic development, and ultimately reduce poverty.</p>
Faith Community	Play in Neighborhoods	<p>Faith leaders across the community continue to advance the power of play through various avenues.</p> <p>The following churches have participated in PlayROCs your Neighborhood – a citywide coordinated play day facilitated by Healthi Kids, and continue to advance ways to support play in the neighborhoods they are in and the congregations they serve:</p> <p>Joint Heirs Kingdom Ministries, Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, Abundant Life Faith Center, Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church, Redeeming World Christian Center International, Glory House Church, Greater Harvest Church, Power House COGIC, Central Church of Christ, Mt. Olivet, St. Mary’s and First Universalist.</p>
Foodlink	Play in Neighborhoods	<p>Foodlink has operated an urban farm in northwest Rochester since 2012. The Lexington Avenue Community Farm serves 65 families, most of which come from the local refugee population (Nepalese, Bhutanese, Burmese, and Somali), and sits on 1.33 acres of land near the corner of Lexington Avenue and Curlew Street.</p> <p>Play Space: In 2018, Foodlink used grant funding to build a pocket park and play space in the land adjacent to the community garden, nearest to Lexington Avenue. The space, which was once a dirt and gravel lot, now includes a storage area for sports equipment, a Little Free Library, a tire playground, and a front lawn. The space will eventually hold nutrition education workshops. Foodlink has leveraged support from Excellus and the Play Everywhere Challenge to support the implementation of additional playful elements at the farm.</p>
Highland Planning	Play in Neighborhoods	<p>Highland Planning helps communities create a vision for progress and helps make it a reality. As both top-level project managers and active producers, we compile demographic and market data, write and administer grants, handle all aspects of fundraising, facilitate strategic planning, and evaluate the impact and progress of the initiatives on which we work.</p> <p>Staff currently serve as a City of Rochester street liaison for both SE and NW neighborhoods. Their work in partnership with Healthi Kids and neighborhood champions has led to the implementation of playful sidewalks in the South East Clinton corridor and at Lyell Branch library.</p>

Appendices

Landscape of PLAYers in Rochester: Neighborhoods		
NAME	FOCUS	ACTIVITIES
Ibero American Development Corporation	Play in Neighborhoods	IADC currently has a grant focused on park improvement, play, and neighborhood capacity building. First is through the Greater Rochester Health Foundation that will support park activation in Don Samuel Torres Park, Conkey Corner Park, and the El Camino Trail. The grant supports neighborhood activities, park activation, and piloting playworkers in park. Finally, investments in Don Samuel Torres, El Camino, and La Marketa are transforming the neighborhood.
DUNWOODĖ Visual Consulting	Play in Neighborhoods	DUNWOODĖ “duhn-woo-dee” Visual Consulting is a multi-award-winning design-based strategic art team that takes a creative approach to brand enhancement for organizations in the public and private realm: Innovate, inspire, and implement original concepts and bring them to life. DUNWOODĖ Visual Consulting has advanced the power of play in neighborhood environments by collaborating on several community projects including: The Story Walk at Phillis Wheatley Library, the Play Walk in Downtown Rochester, ROC the Riverway, School 12 Playful Sidewalks, Beechwood Community Story Walk, Musicians Walk, and more.
South East Area Coalition	Play in Neighborhoods	The South East Area Coalition, Inc. (SEAC) is a Neighborhood Preservation Company that facilitates community and economic development in southeast Rochester. We help the citizens who live and work in southeast Rochester to accomplish goals and initiatives for their neighborhoods and businesses. SEAC has created playful sidewalks throughout southeast Rochester and continues to find ways to activate their network to support playful opportunities in their neighborhoods.
Neighborhood Associations and Block Clubs	Play in Neighborhoods	Neighborhood associations and block clubs across the community continue to advance the power of play through various avenues. The following groups have participated in PlayROCs your Neighborhood – a citywide coordinated play day facilitated by Healthi Kids, and continue to advance ways to support play in their neighborhoods: 14621 Unity NE Block Club, First Place Block Club, Marketview Heights Collective Action Project, FLRT Block Club, El Camino Neighborhood Association, Imagine Me Community Outreach, Lyell Otis Neighborhood Association, Maplewood Neighborhood Association, Maple Ave. Block Club, Edgerton Neighborhood Association, Edgerton Community Kids Block Club, EMMA Neighborhood, Beechwood Neighborhood Coalition, SWAN, PLEX, South Wedge Planning Committee, 19th Ward Neighborhood Association, Susan B. Anthony Neighborhood Association, Neighborhood of the Arts, Grove Place, C4 Community Coalition, and Fifth St. Block Club.
University of Rochester - IZone	Play in Neighborhoods	The University of Rochester IZone is a creative problem-solving space, program, and community designed to empower students to explore and imagine ideas for social, cultural, community, and economic impact. In 2020, IZone was awarded a KaBOOM! Play Everywhere Grant to develop a play space in the 19th Ward. IZone is currently partnering with 540WMain and the 19th Ward Neighborhood Association to develop an inclusive play space in the 19th Ward.
City of Rochester Department of Environmental Services	Play in Neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ROC the Riverway: Play Walk appears in ROC the Riverway Plans, and we continue to work with the city to incorporate playful infrastructure in new capital improvement projects.• Playful Sidewalk Policy: In 2016, Commissioner Norman Jones adopted a Playful Sidewalk Policy that allows residents to paint their own playful sidewalks in their neighborhoods for free. The City provides the paint.• Playful Infrastructure in neighborhoods: The Commissioner is supporting play-based infrastructure in neighborhoods and improvements in the build environment that support play. This includes mechanisms that support traffic safety, neighborhood safety, and additional capital improvement projects

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About the Healthi Kids Coalition

The Healthi Kids Coalition advocates for the creation of policies, systems, environments, and resources that advance the health and well-being of all children birth to age 8 in Rochester and the Finger Lakes region.

We advance policies to ensure all kids regardless of race, zip code, economic status, sexual orientation, immigration status, social status, gender, religion, or ability have the supports they need for the healthiest start in life.



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