PLAY MATTERS

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

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KaBOOM! National
Campaign for Play

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PREFACE
PLAY MATTERS

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.
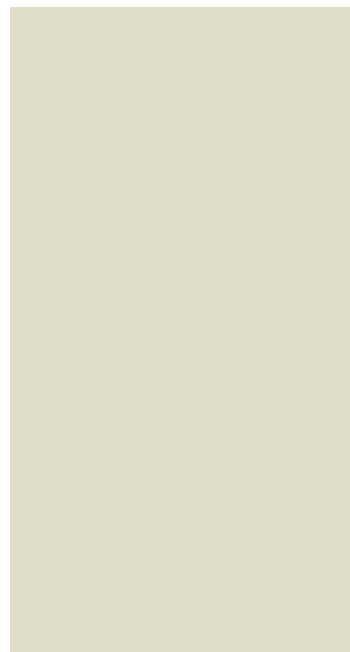
INTRODUCTION
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The opportunity to play is essential for the physical, social, emotional, and educational development of our children and for the health and well-being of our communities. Yet play is disappearing from children's lives.[1] Rising obesity 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.

Health

Environment

PLAY

Education

Economic Development

Community Development

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.

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.

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.

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

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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

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.

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.

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 media[15], 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 Pediatrics[25], the Institute of Medicine[26], and Stanford University[27] 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.

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.
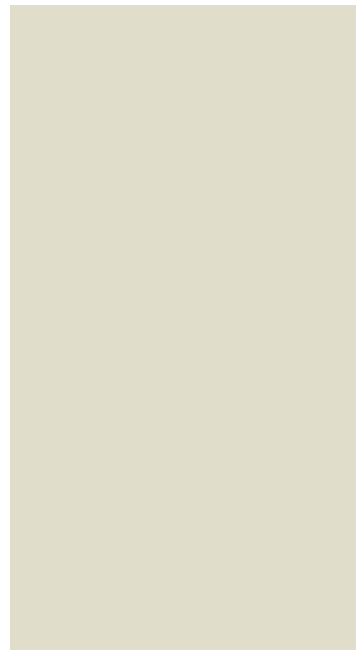
The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, in recent years known by the name No Child Left Behind, is due for reauthorization. That debate will also offer opportunities for advocates of play. The current law's emphasis on standardized testing of literacy and math skills has had the effect of narrowing 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.

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

Legend:
- Municipal Best Practices (orange)
- Best Practices Expansion (blue)
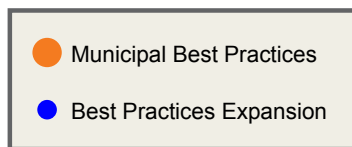
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Minnesota

Wisconsin

Michigan

Iowa

Illinois

Indiana

Ohio

Missouri

West Virginia

Pennsylvania

New York

Maine

New Hampshire
Vermont

Massachusetts

Rhode Island

Connecticut

New Jersey

Delaware

Maryland

Virginia

Kentucky

Tennessee

North Carolina

Arkansas

South Carolina

Mississippi

Alabama

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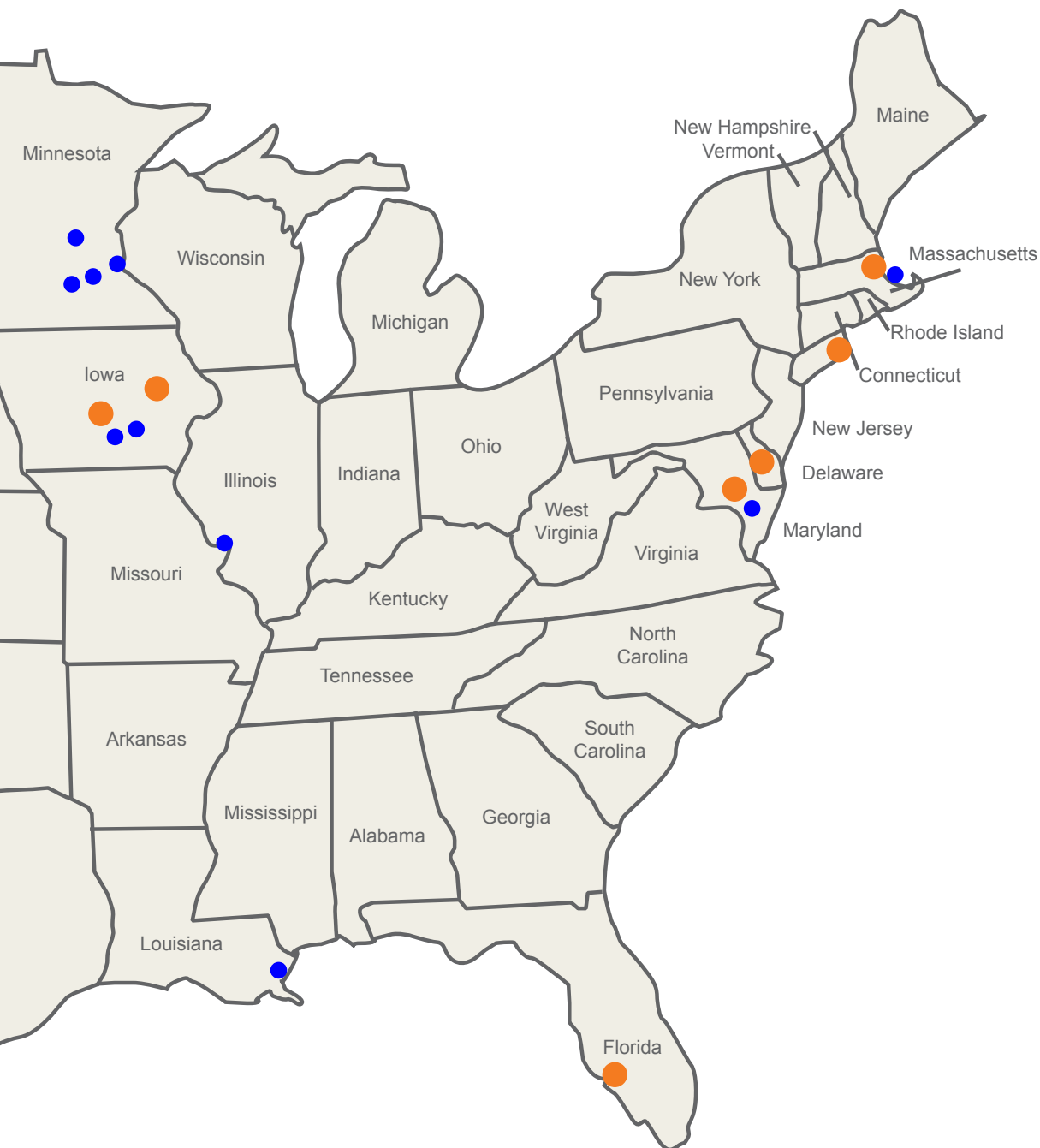
ANKENY, IOWA: PARKS AND RECREATION
GOVERNING THROUGH CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT
PUBLIC-PRIVATE COLLABORATION BUILDS POLITICAL CAPITAL IN A GROWING COMMUNITY

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.

CONTEXT: A SPORTS-MINDED CITY

Ankeny, a community of 42,287, is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Iowa. Since the late 1980s, the city has added an estimated 1,500 new residents each year. Many of these new residents are families with young children. Because of this population increase, Ankeny has had difficulty keeping up with the demand for public facilities, including parks and playgrounds, and recreational services.

The community enthusiastically embraces structured sports. By the mid-1990s, neighborhood parks once reserved for neighbors and unstructured recreation and play became a destination for team practices and games. Ankeny's parks and playgrounds were basically taken over by team practices and games. Public officials and citizens wanted to address the unmet demand for play spaces.

Looking Beyond Public Funding: A Failed Bond Measure Inspires a Cultural Shift

In the late 1990s, the city of Ankeny introduced a bond measure of $5.5 million to fund a 124-acre sports complex in the heart of the city. The city had acquired the necessary land in the early 1990s. The bond resources would fund development of the land to accommodate athletic teams and provide additional play space and, in turn, return neighborhood parks and playgrounds to neighbors.

Survey results indicated that while the sports complex had a high favorability rating with voters, there was little public information that justified investing tax dollars in the complex. As such, the measure was vulnerable to organized opposition. Rick Hermann, who was then a City Council member, organized an anti-bond effort based on the principle of fiscal conservatism—he argued that citizens should not be required to pay higher taxes to support what he perceived as "fringe amenities."

"At the time the process was coming from the top down versus the bottom up. The city had limited interaction with the sports groups as to what their needs were," Hermann says. "Second, I thought it wasn't the city's responsibility to fully fund this sports complex. There needed to be more conversation about who was going to benefit, and how they would benefit."

Residents agreed, and the bond measure failed by a large margin.

That failure, however, inspired a community-wide cultural shift. Mayor Merle Johnson (1998-2006) charged his staff with creating a culture of community engagement. Rather than initiating top-down solutions, the mayor asked his staff to look for ways to involve citizens in decision-making. The mayor's new slogan was that nobody joins a community because of good streets, they participate because of a sense of connectedness and joint decision-making. City staff now call the failed bond measure a "blessing in disguise." Deb Dyar, Ankeny's public relations officer, says the initial failure "helped us to re-focus on governing through citizen engagement and input."

It was in this context that Mayor Johnson and his staff began to develop mechanisms for community engagement. A significant aspect of that engagement involved creating public-private partnerships to accomplish community goals.

THE INITIATIVE: CREATING A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

In the aftermath of the failed bond measure for the Prairie Ridge Sports Complex, Mayor Johnson began a year-long process of reaching out to constituents who both supported and opposed the bond. He and other supporters developed consensus around building the complex through a public-private partnership.

In response to the high favorability rating of the sports complex in citizen surveys, Mayor Johnson reached out to key constituents to present the project, solicit feedback, and build consensus around solutions. The mayor's compelling argument for the complex was that Ankeny's current play facilities could not accommodate Ankeny's growing population, at that time 15% per year, and the high percentage of youth. The mayor's core argument was that "youth in Ankeny have no place to call home for organized sports play."

In order to move toward consensus and to determine funding mechanisms, the mayor convened meetings with different constituent groups, including stakeholders who had opposed the bond. According to Mayor Johnson, he met with everyone he could possibly pull in.

If there was community support for the complex and an alternative way to fund it, the mayor learned that he could count on the support of fiscal conservatives in the community, including Hermann. Hermann became a key early partner in developing the plan for a public-private partnership. Hermann, Mayor Johnson, and other key stakeholders came up with the idea of using challenge grants. There was broad support for government in the role of a catalyst for fundraising; the government could leverage public dollars through a matching program to inspire citizen investment.

Mayor Johnson appointed a committee in the fall of 1998 to review all aspects of the Prairie Ridge Sports Complex proposal. In January 1999 the committee returned to the City Council with its recommendations and a funding plan, which included specifics on how a matching program might work. In March 1999 the Council agreed to contribute $3 million in city funds. The community would then be responsible to generate $1.5 million in private donations.

Mayor Johnson formally introduced a community challenge grant to build the sports complex that subsequently raised $1.6 million. He told residents the city would donate $2 for every

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Population under 18:
11,460

$1 raised at the community level. "To make this project reality," he said, "the responsibility is on your shoulders." He encouraged every constituent affected by the project to contribute and to promote it. He recognized that not only were big donors important to the effort, but also the people contributing $10. The city promoted the call-to-action message on its website and through the municipal television channel.

In the first two days of fundraising, the city collected $500,000 from local community leaders and business owners.

Hermann helped the city reach out to the business community and political elites. "We had a basic fundamental belief that those who benefit should pay. So all the sports teams jumped on board and created a special user fee, which generated about $367,000," Hermann says. "With that we were able to go to the business community and say, we need your help. Closing with that approach was very successful."

Hermann first approached a friend, local businessman Denny Elwell. "Denny is a salesman by heart. He's a multimillionaire. All I did was ask for his support, and he started calling others," Hermann says. "It's reaching out strategically to those people who can help you, and having them reach out to others as well." Elwell donated $100,000 and connected Hermann and city staff to other members of the business community who would do the same.

The city chased high-dollar donors first and set specific goals before each ask. "We targeted each business for what we thought they should pay. If we left it open, we weren't going to get an answer," Hermann says. "We asked for $10,000, $20,000, $30,000, or $40,000. And we went after the whales first—in a casino, the 'whales' are the big spenders. We started with the $100,000 donors. And then we went after the smaller donors."

Another element of creating a successful public-private partnership was prioritizing in-kind donations. "In-kind is just as valuable as cash. It's just the same," Hermann says. In-kind donations from local contractors provided preliminary engineering, site reviews, water retention, drainage studies, and grading. Donors developed a sense of ownership. For example, Wayne McAninch—whose firm does a lot of the city's grading work for streets and sewers—donated $100,000 in site grading. "He hadn't been to a dedication in a long time," reports Hermann, "but he was at ours."

The sports complex, positioned in the center of Ankeny, was completed in 2002. The facility covers 124 acres and initially consisted of 15 baseball fields, 11 soccer platforms, six softball fields, three football fields, an aquatic center, and a skate park. It quickly became a magnet for citizens of all ages. According to City Manager Carl Metzger, the complex was initially built to accommodate sports teams, but "we discovered pent-up demand for a community gathering and recreation space." That enthusiasm has led the city to scale up the complex to meet residents' needs.

Neighborhood parks have been and continue to be very popular in Ankeny. A 2006 survey done with the Iowa State University Community Data Laboratory indicated that continued development of neighborhood parks was one of residents' top three priorities.

"The uses of neighborhood parks have changed. Without a doubt, more unstructured play now occurs in these parks due to the development of the sports complex," says Parks Director Todd Redenius. "Prior to Prairie Ridge, neighborhood parks were the only practice sites

and often also hosted games. While neighborhood parks still are used for practice activities, the sports complex has allowed neighborhood parks to be reclaimed to a certain extent by neighborhood users."

Assessing Economic Impact

While the sports complex delivered a return on investment for the quality of life in Ankeny, it also delivered a return on economic investment. "We knew going into the complex development that the user fees would probably not be enough to maintain the complex and pay the workers, so we had to be sure that it was generating money for the community," says Redenius.

His department partnered with the Iowa Department of Tourism to assess economic impact. They found that for every $1 invested by the city in the sports complex, $5.09 is returned to the community through investment in local business, including restaurants, hotel rooms, and shopping. One reason for this high return on investment is that the sports complex regularly hosts events. Visitors from 11 states and Canada have used the complex since its completion.

According to Metzger, the city has used this economic data to help persuade the business community to continue investing in the city's parks and playgrounds. The high return on investment also helped to build support with the City Council members, most of whom are businessmen.
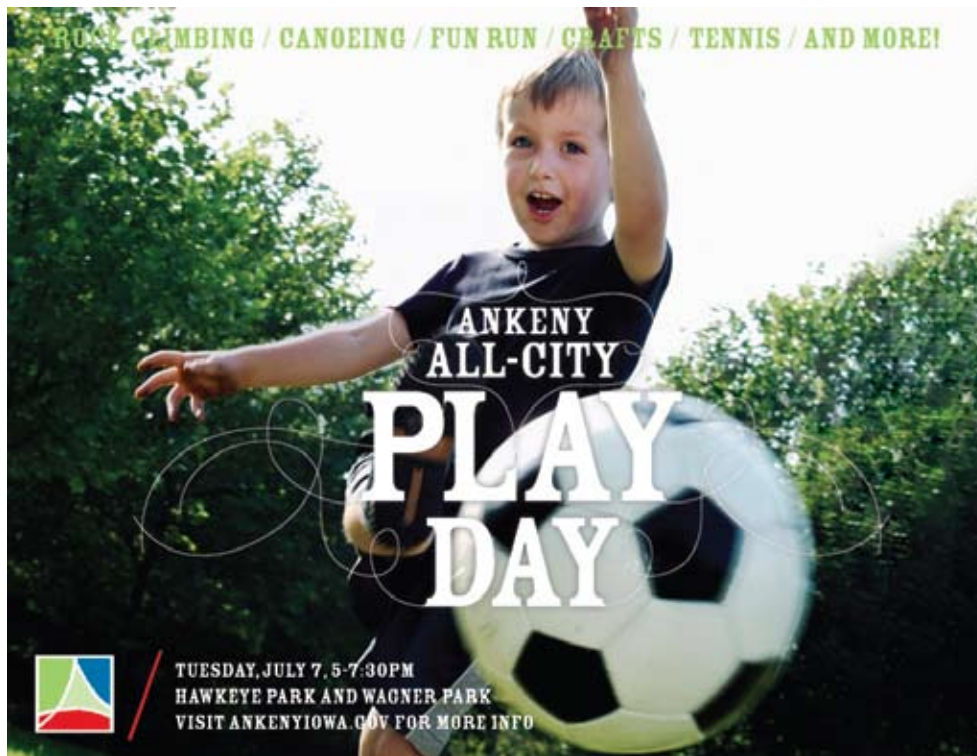
One of several promotional pieces from the Ankeny Play Day.

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ANKENY, IOWA: PARKS AND RECREATION

SCALING UP

Ankeny's city officials say the process of engaging citizens and the business community was instructive. The outcome of this focus on civic engagement can be measured in high citizen satisfaction rates, along with increased private funding partners, volunteerism, and program participation.

These resources have helped the city execute and sustain identified projects at both the sports complex and throughout the community's inventory of parks and playgrounds. The city has since used this model to implement other parks and recreation initiatives, significantly increasing opportunities for play in Ankeny. The cultural shift has occurred across the board; city staff say they now use surveys and focus groups to inform every city initiative.

Cultivating Volunteers

The city's new approach to engaging residents has led to increased participation in its volunteer programs. Redenius estimates that, before the sports complex process, roughly a dozen residents regularly volunteered to help maintain the city's parks. Now, there are 200 to 300 community members involved in landscaping, flowerbed adoption, and other projects.

The city has been very deliberate about cultivating volunteers. "We make sure we celebrate when parks get finished. We capture names and e-mail addresses during that process, and then include those people on our monthly e-newsletter to help establish our volunteer base," says Redenius. "If we can get people to share ownership in the park, they're more likely to get involved with landscaping projects and, at some point, their interest turns into dollars—they're donating trees, or providing in-kind services that we'd otherwise have to pay for."

Community Meetings and Playground Design Votes

The development of new public facilities, and specifically parks and playgrounds, was identified by city leaders as an opportunity both to engage citizens in decision making and to build the community. City leaders say the process of citizen engagement helps to accelerate assimilation in a city that is rapidly gaining new residents (Ankeny's population has grown from 18,500 in 1990 to 42,287 in 2009, with 55,000 projected by 2020).

To be consistent with the city's new culture of citizen engagement and to promote opportunities for residents to meet one another, the Parks and Recreation Department began convening community engagement meetings in all neighborhoods identified for park and playground development. The meetings are designed as an opportunity for neighbors to provide input on the design of a park or playground. Where playgrounds are involved, each member of the community, including children, has an opportunity to vote on their choice of play equipment, selecting one of four designs. The winning playground plan is then implemented.

These community engagement meetings have generated significant awareness and attention for parks and playgrounds. According to Metzger, when citizens are a part of the process, they become more invested in the outcome, both for their own neighborhood and for playground developments across the city. Metzger reports that many citizens who participate in one playground vote tend to follow votes happening across the city. Once votes are cast and tallied, the city sends a news release to the local media, residents, business owners, and other stakeholders to promote the playground.

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Engaging Youth: The Mayor's Youth Council and Skate Park

The mayor and his staff made a concerted effort to engage youth in civic participation. In 2000, Mayor Johnson established the Mayor's Youth Council. This 15-member organization of Ankeny teenagers serves as an advisory board on youth issues to the mayor and City Council.

The group serves as a direct conduit between the city's young people and its decision makers. Before its creation, "the youth in Ankeny didn't know who to tell if they wanted something in the community," says Kelsi Sawatsky, 18, the council's president. "This gives them someone to talk to. The mayor is always at our meetings, and then he or one of us can take it to the City Council."

The council has spearheaded several events and contests to represent and serve the city's youth. Most notably, the Youth Council was the impetus behind the City Council approving and constructing a signature skate park in Ankeny, which has attracted youth from neighboring communities.

The Youth Council initially proposed to the mayor that Ankeny develop a skate park. The mayor then encouraged some of the city's most active skateboarders to develop and present this idea to the City Council. According to Metzger, the youth were prepared, articulate, and persuasive. He noted that their dress and appearance, including dyed hair, helped to underline the argument that their interests and needs are different from youth who participate in organized sports—they helped the City Council realize that "the skate park would serve a population that was not currently being served." The council approved $250,000 to develop the park, drawing on revenue raised through the city's hotel tax.

Intended to serve teenagers in Ankeny, the skate park has also attracted elementary school children and young adults, and it serves a population well beyond Ankeny's city limits. According to city officials, the skate park is used throughout the day and by people of varying ages. The skate competition is a signature event at Ankeny's annual Summerfest, drawing up to 200 attendees. According to Dyar, "These young people and their choice of play have become a part of the community culture."

After seeing residents so thoroughly embrace opportunities for unstructured play at the sports complex, City Council members fully funded the skate park through public resources to be sure every segment of the city's population was being served.

Using Existing Facilities to Expand Opportunities for Unstructured Play

The city is also creating more diverse opportunities for play at the sports complex. The site was initially designed as practice and game fields for structured play. But today, says Redenius, on any given weekday afternoon 300 or 400 residents can be seen engaging in unstructured play, whether that means flying kites, fishing, jogging, biking, swimming, or using one of the site's two playgrounds. Because of the critical mass attracted to the complex, the city has started adding a trail system that currently includes four miles of linked trails, along with two playgrounds, additional parks, fishing ponds, bike racks, and other amenities to support unstructured play.

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11,460

ANKENY, IOWA: PARKS AND RECREATION

Measures of Citizen Engagement and Satisfaction

Ankeny's ability to inspire citizen participation and build political support for parks and playgrounds can be measured in public satisfaction and participation. In bi-annual surveys, the residents of Ankeny have reported "remarkably high" and "incrementally increasing" satisfaction rates with parks and playgrounds. For 2008, 95% of the citizens of Ankeny rated their programs "good" or "excellent." City residents report that the increased infrastructure continues to maintain a high standard of quality.

The Park and Recreation Department reports a 54% increase in the number of volunteers in the last two years. Their Annual Play Day attracted more than 700 attendees in 2008.

SUSTAINABILITY

It was in this context of increased attention to parks that the city developed a 223-page Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan. The document took more than a year to create, and marked the first time Ankeny had detailed its goals for recreational amenities.

The Parks and Recreation Department worked in partnership with the Parks Board to develop the plan, convening 15 different stakeholder focus groups. Staff also collaborated with the Iowa State University's Community Data Laboratory on a survey to identify citizen priorities. "The community wanted three things," says Redenius. "They wanted to see a second aquatic center, more trails, and development of neighborhood parks."

The initial plans for the sports complex failed, according to Redenius and other city staff, because they were developed without significant and broad-based community input. Extending the more resident-driven input process to all park planning, he says, has resulted in plans that more effectively meet residents' needs.

As a result, the final plan detailed designs, including new mini neighborhood and community parks, which are based on a comprehensive assessment of individual neighborhoods' needs. The plan includes an average of three new playgrounds each year and trails to connect playgrounds throughout the city.

With the new political capital developed to support parks and playgrounds, the Parks Board and the City Council approved the capital improvement recommendations, providing for $1.5 million for new park and playground development each year.

Ongoing Private Investment

The city continues to leverage its ongoing relationships with the business community to support capital improvements for the sports complex. Just a few years after the initial build, the city has launched a second phase of its campaign, raising another $500,000 for sports complex improvement.

Todd Redenius says the city uses the challenge-grant process for other parks projects as well, most notably for infrastructure and gardens at its neighborhood parks.

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A local skate park in Ankeny.

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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 roughly 20,500 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.

ANKENY, IOWA:
PARKS AND RECREATION

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.

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.

Recognize partners. Individuals and businesses who donate to the city's projects are recognized during ribbon-cutting and on the city's cable access channel. Everyone who donated money or in-kind donations to the sports complex has their names engraved on a prominent pillar at the site.

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.

Establish standards for playground access. Ankeny city staff set a goal of every youth within a half mile of a park, playground, or trail.

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.

Assign senior staff responsibility for policy execution. Mayor Johnson directed his senior staff to find mechanisms for engaging citizens; he modeled this form of governance, personally convening the Youth Advisory Council.

Use technology to build support. The city collects e-mail addresses of residents who donate or turn out for ribbon cuttings. The city then regularly communicates with these residents to sustain and build interest and engagement.

Continue outreach after meeting initial goals. The city uses e-newsletters, direct mail, citizen surveys, focus groups, neighborhood meetings, press releases, websites, and school partnerships to continue engaging residents. The parks director credits this outreach with increasing the volunteer and donor base for neighborhood parks.

Use economic impact data to encourage private support. For every $1 the city invests in the sports complex, there is a $5.09 return for local businesses. The city has used this data to encourage the business community to continue its financial and political support for the city's parks and playgrounds.

Start fundraising by securing high-dollar donors. The city reached out to the wealthiest members of its business community first. The city then leveraged early success with high level donors to build credibility and reach out to other donors in the community.

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?

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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.

CONTEXT: TAKING BACK THE PLAYGROUNDS

The Playworks program was launched in Oakland, California, in 1996 as Sports4Kids. Having founded a local arts program, Jill Vialet was building a reputation as a social entrepreneur addressing children's community-based needs. Vialet developed the program to help school personnel address conflict and violence on school playgrounds. In order for children to return to the classroom ready to learn, it was important for them to have engaged in safe, healthy play during recess.

"Recess is our largest selling point," says Vialet. "Sometimes the playgrounds have been used by people in the community for things other than play, and not always for uses we would like to encourage. But when the kids begin playing on their playground, people respect it more. It's almost like the kids take back their playgrounds, especially the junior coaches."

After 13 years of operation as Sports4Kids, the organization changed its name to Playworks in 2009 and has expanded the services it offers to schools. Vialet expects the move to help the organization achieve its goal of providing safe and healthy play to a million kids a day by 2012.

The goal of the Playworks program is to improve children's mental, physical, and cognitive health and well-being by increasing their opportunities for physical activity and safe, meaningful play. In all of the schools where Playworks operates, 50% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. There are five components to the Playworks program: recess/lunch, class game time, a junior coach program, an after-school program, and interscholastic leagues.

Site coordinators, most commonly known as "coach" to the students, are present during the school day. The coaches teach and lead games during recess, establish games areas on the playground, distribute sports equipment, teach the rules and strategies of games, help students resolve conflicts, and encourage participation. For the junior coach program, site coordinators work with teachers to identify older students to participate in leadership development activities. Junior coaches assist site coordinators during recess by leading games, helping to resolve conflicts, and managing equipment. Playworks site coordinators are also available to lead games during classroom time, and are responsible for running an after-school program and interscholastic leagues throughout the year.

Three children jump roping with a Playworks employee.

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One successful Playworks conflict resolution strategy has been the use of Ro-Sham-Bo (also known as Rock Paper Scissors). As conflicts arise, coaches encourage children to use this game to quickly resolve differences and then move on. As a result, differences don't escalate into conflicts and there is more time for play. Children come to respect and rely upon this tool as the final arbiter, empowering children to resolve their own disagreements.

Energetic and well-trained Playworks site coordinators are critical to the program's success. Site coordinators introduce and facilitate play and help all school children avoid fights and keep games moving. The site coordinator becomes part of the school community, working from 9 to 5 each school day—during recess, class time, and after school.

While Playworks offers a variety of services, the program has been in particularly high demand because it effectively addresses a pressing need: effective supervision and staffing for recess. Over eight years, Playworks expanded to 65 schools in San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland. In 2004, Playworks implemented a national expansion plan, beginning with Baltimore.

THE INITIATIVE: INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND REDUCING CONFLICT

In spring 2004, Johns Hopkins University invited Vialet and Playworks to present at its Summer Learning Institute to discuss the program's success in California. Jill saw the meeting as an opportunity to engage stakeholders in the Baltimore area.

Medfield Heights Elementary School Principal Debbie Thomas was a key driver for the launch and expansion of Playworks in Baltimore. She learned of Playworks through colleagues who attended the John Hopkins Summer Learning Institute.

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Principal Thomas was looking for solutions to address her students' need for more physical activity and play, as well as ways to reduce conflicts on the playground. Recess had become unmanageable at her school. This was true for many schools across the city, leading some principals to simply eliminate recess.

"Each day after recess we had 10 to 15 office referrals as a result of conflicts or accidents on the playground," says Thomas. "Our kids wanted to play and our parents wanted them to play but recess, as it was, was not providing this."

Thomas was interested in finding a solution. "Our kids need the opportunity to have a break and release energy—they have to have the opportunity to be a kid," she says. "The playground is where kids learn how to interact; it gives them an opportunity to learn how to work and play together."

She describes herself as a risk taker who is willing to be the first to try new approaches, including this new model for recess management.

Demonstration of the Model: Inspiring Stakeholders

A successful Playworks tactic for inspiring the engagement of key drivers and stakeholders is site visits. Potential partners need to experience a program's model to understand how it works and gauge its potential impact. While the Playworks message and track record may spark principals' interest, it's the site demonstrations that move administrators from interest to commitments.

According to Paul McAndrew, the Playworks city director at the time, breaking new ground is difficult. It requires what he calls a "hard sell." Principals have competing interests and priorities, and it is hard to fully appreciate the potential of the Playworks program unless you experience it firsthand. McAndrew found that demonstrations are a way to illustrate how, in one day, the program can reduce conflicts and facilitate play.

Principal Thomas met with Playworks leaders and agreed to set up a time for a demonstration at her school. She also recruited other schools as demonstration sites. Her message to principals was "if they can [successfully manage recess] in Oakland, we can do it in Baltimore."

As a result of Thomas's leadership, Playworks conducted demonstrations at six schools in Baltimore over the course of a week. At each site, coaches from California schools facilitated play during classes, recess, and after school. The demonstrations solidified Thomas's determination to bring Playworks to her school. She wanted her children to spend "less time arguing and more time playing," and she saw this occurring on the playground during the demonstration.

Thomas assisted McAndrew in promoting the program with local principals and school board members. She then helped him build a relationship with the city's procurement offices. According to McAndrew, working with this office was essential to getting the necessary legal documents drafted to ensure that Playworks would be able to operate and get paid by the schools. While principals have some discretionary resources, Playworks does not fit standard budgetary line items. This relationship with the procurement office helped to establish the legal language and process for implementing Playworks within school budget constraints.

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At the time of the launch, the cost per school was $19,000 per year; it has now increased to $23,500. This cost covers on-the-ground program expenses. The national office of Playworks, primarily through foundation funding, covered the Baltimore program's administrative expenses. Safe and Sound, a campaign to improve the lives of youth and families, donated office space for the launch year.

Playworks started the 2005–2006 school year with a presence at six Baltimore schools.

The Launch: Medfield Heights Elementary School

In order to integrate Playworks into the school, Thomas took careful steps to educate teachers and the broader school community about the program. She used professional development time to conduct a Playworks recess for teachers. "We all put on a sweatshirt and got in the gym to learn the Playworks way." To help defray program costs, she also engaged the support of a local church and some local businesses.

With good up-front information and strong leadership, the launch of Playworks at Medfield Heights was both smooth and highly successful. Within a month, office referrals after recess dropped from 10 to 15 per day to zero. After a year, Thomas reported that even the most challenging children had a noticeable increase in respect levels for their peers and teachers. "We had some students who were very explosive. But they have calmed down. I've seen the difference," she says.

Medfield Heights teachers have voted to retain Playworks year after year. When faced with a budget cut two years after the launch, the teachers at Medfield Heights voted to give up field trips in order to continue Playworks.

SCALING UP

Playworks has expanded across Baltimore at a consistent rate, adding six schools each year. In 2009, Playworks served 10,000 students in 24 schools. This rate of growth can be attributed to an effective network of principals who promote the program among their peers, well trained and effective site coordinators who become a part of the school community, a strong "showcase" school, and an effective program model that consistently delivers measurable improvement in student behavior and performance.

Key Stakeholders as Catalysts: The Principal Network

Playworks has identified principals as ideal stakeholders and champions for the program. While principals across school districts have varying degrees of staffing and budgetary discretion for their schools, they are often in a position to make the decision about whether or not to incorporate the program. They have also proven to be the best word-of-mouth marketers. Principals who experienced the program firsthand became the catalysts for expanding the program to other schools.

According to McAndrew, the former city director for Playworks, having an "unofficial principal network" was crucial to scaling up in Baltimore. While McAndrew recognizes that support from superintendents can be useful, he has had some challenges with overinvolvement of superintendents who want to manage the rollout of Playworks in their districts. Developing a primary relationship with principals sets the program up for success, and also allows

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Playworks as an organization to retain more autonomy for making decisions on how and when to scale up within the district. According to Vialet, Playworks is "99% principal oriented." Peer-to-peer principal referrals are particularly effective.

Principal Thomas's supervisor, Sue Cutter, facilitated promotion across this network of principals. Before the program launched in 2004, Cutter incorporated a Playworks demonstration into one of her monthly principal team meetings. After the program's first year, she offered $5,000 out of her budget to fund Playworks for any school in her area that was interested in participating; interested principals were then responsible for funding the remaining $14,000 from their budgets. Both she and Thomas regularly spoke about Playworks at events within the district. By the second year of the program, almost half of the city's participating schools were within Cutter's area of supervision.

While Playworks has received some national press and has developed more sophisticated marketing tools, local word-of-mouth marketing through principals continues to be the most effective mechanism for program promotion. The current Baltimore City Director, David Gilmore, believes that the promotional video Playworks now uses would have been helpful in marketing the program in Baltimore during its first three years. Now that the program is established, though, he says on-the-ground results are the best selling tool.

"As this program grows and builds confidence among principals and administrators, there is less that is needed to be done to convince principals of its benefits," says Thomas. "The program just makes sense."

Playworks builds stakeholder recognition into its program by honoring a "principal of the year." In 2009, this was Tammie McIntire-Miller at Baltimore's Gardenville Elementary School. "You can't beat it," she says, pointing to the program's economic value. "Where else can you get a full-time staff member, interscholastic coach, and after-school teacher for that rate?"

Leveraging Federal Funding

Playworks helps to offset some of its personnel costs through AmeriCorps, a federally funded national service program. AmeriCorps members serve in intensive 10- to 12-month placements. In the case of the Playworks program, AmeriCorps volunteers are placed in schools as site coordinators.

On average, 50% of the site coordinators in Baltimore are AmeriCorps members. According to Gilmore, virtually every first-year site coordinator is an AmeriCorps member. This federal funding covers 18% of Baltimore's total personnel budget.

Integration into the School Community: Coaches

Playworks coaches become an integral part of the school community into which they are placed. Their ability to develop a deep rapport with the community is critical to effective implementation of the model.

Principal McIntire-Miller, who introduced Playworks to Gardenville Elementary School in 2007, credits her school's Playworks coach, Laura Deeprose, with transforming the school's culture. "The climate is just different," she says, because of her coach's "inspirational"

relationships with students. Similarly, Principal Thomas credits Medfield Heights coach Honour McClellan with building strong relationships with parents and children and helping to secure the success of the program. "She earned the trust, respect, and affection of the children and the broader school community—and she became a part of the community. Her son now attends our school."

In teaching students new ways to manage conflict and cooperate on the playground, Playworks coaches are also modeling new skills that can be adopted by teachers and parents.

As Vialet says, "The program helps to improve the overall morale of the school staff and students because it is safe and inclusive. We are changing the climate at school so much that teachers will use some Playworks techniques, such as Rock Paper Scissors, to help with classroom management."

Creating a Showcase School

McAndrew credits the strong performance of the coach at Medfield Heights with providing an early and strong "showcase" program that helped accelerate the scaling up of Playworks in Baltimore.

Site visits to new schools give interested principals a sense of the program. But it generally takes a year or two to create "the magic"—a transformed school climate—of the Playworks program. This transformation happens when there is a good match between a coach and the school community and a committed principal. But it generally takes some time for students and teachers to fully manifest this new approach to play and conflict resolution.

At Medfield Heights, however, McAndrew reports that there was a particularly strong match between the school and coach Honour McClellan. As a result, the school was a showcase program within the first year. Placing McClellan at Medfield Heights was a strategic decision. McAndrew judged that McClellan, though a first-year coach, had particularly strong skills. He tapped her for Thomas's school, knowing the two women's enthusiasm for the program would be a powerful combination. In order to build the program, he says, "I knew that I needed the program at one school to run to perfection, and quickly, so that we would have a showcase ready."

Engaging Beneficiaries: Junior Coaches

Junior coaches are older students who are given responsibility for helping to run games, resolve conflicts, and clean up, and they are generally asked to be positive role models among their peers. Parents and teachers value the junior coaches program as a way to provide leadership development training for young people. In one parent's words, "My daughter is constantly talking about the third graders and the games that she has created to make their recess more enjoyable and her task of keeping the peace between students during recess." With no student government at Gardenville Elementary School, Principal McIntire-Miller says that junior coaching has become the school's leadership training program.

Youth Inform Play Activities

While Playworks site coordinators are given training tools and a clear curriculum to implement, how this curriculum develops is, in part, influenced by the children and the school culture.

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For example, children are encouraged to introduce their own games on the schoolyard. At the end of each school year, site coordinators submit new games into a growing 200-page "playbook" of students and site coordinator-developed games.

According to Gilmore, the City Director, "every Playworks school has a four-square court, but the rules for the games and even the language are developed by the students and reflect the culture of the community." Students both introduce their own games and adopt games introduced by Playworks as their own.

Collecting Data on Effectiveness

Playworks evaluates program success based on several data sources. Internally, Playworks surveys teachers and principals at the end of each school year. It also uses the data collected by the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS).[30]

In surveys of principals and teachers, 98% report that they would like the program to continue at their school, and 94% say it "significantly increases" student participation in physical activity. Yet some of the most striking data pertain to the impact of Playworks on incidents of violence, suspensions, and expulsions.

In school climate surveys conducted from 2006 to 2008, participating Playworks students, teachers, and parents reported significant behavior changes. While all schools surveyed reported improved behavior, Belmont Elementary reported a significant decrease in violence. When the program first arrived at the school in 2005, 100% of staff reported fighting among students at the school. Within two years of Playworks operations, the proportion of staff reporting fights was down to 32%. Gilmore credits the scale of change to higher levels of initial violence and a particularly strong match between the site coordinator and the school. There were also decreases in the number of parents and teachers reporting that disruptions in the classroom were getting in the way of learning. With students physically active and engaged during recess and with constructive tools for conflict resolution, students return to the classroom better prepared to learn.

Belmont Elementary

	2006	2007	2008
Students who agree there is fighting among students	66.4%	50.0%	44.9%
Staff who agree there is fighting among students	100%	80.6%	32.4%
Parents who agree that disruptions in the classroom get in the way of student learning	72.2%	56.5%	52.7%
Teachers who agree that disruptions in the classroom get in the way of student learning	93.3%	90.0%	84.2%
Students who agreed that students pick on each other at school	61.3%	52.0%	52.3%

While it is difficult to directly attribute improvement in academic performance with Playworks programming, principals consistently report that the program improves the school culture and the learning environment. In some cases, principals report that the program has an influence

on school attendance. Principal McIntire-Miller of Gardenville Elementary says, "As a result of Playworks our children want to come to school."

Playworks received a $150,000 grant from George Soros's Open Society Institute as part of an initiative to reduce suspensions and expulsions in Baltimore. The funding focused on Belmont Elementary and three other schools. Collectively, these schools experienced 482 total incidents involving disciplinary action during the 2005–2006 school year. As a result of these incidents, 236 students were suspended and two were expelled. After a year of Playworks programming, the total number of suspensions for all four schools was 107, a decrease of 45% from the previous year. In elementary schools across Baltimore, suspension rates remained relatively flat during this same period of time.

Playworks tracks data related to suspensions in schools, including the number of "office referrals." Office referrals are made because of nonviolent bickering, pushing in line, or language/behavior that the teacher or adult in charge deems disrespectful.

Office Referrals

	2006*	2007	2008	Net Change	% Decrease
Belmont	258	609	212	-46	-17.83%
Garrett Heights	79	16	27	-52	-65.82%
John Ruhrah	75	79	61	-14	-18.67%
Mt. Royal	70	24	34	-36	-51.43%
Total	482	728	334	-148	-30.71%

Only Belmont had Playworks in 2006

From 2006 to 2008, there was a 30% net decline in office referrals at these four schools. Of particular note, the number of office referrals at Belmont School increased during 2007. According to the city director of Playworks, this increase was a result of more supervising adults to identify and report inappropriate behavior. In 2008, the school made an aggressive effort to incorporate the Playworks program into the school culture, including introducing a Social Learning class. As a result, office referrals declined from 609 to 212 over the course of the next year.

SUSTAINABILITY

Playworks Baltimore provided a model that is replicable and sustainable. The program has earned the support of its school communities within its first year of implementation and consistently delivers results. In a downward economy and with budget cutbacks, the program continues to be a priority for participating principals and teachers, with one school voting to forego field trips in order to continue funding the program.

Playworks national headquarters provides funding for the administration expense of the regional programs for the first three years and as each city program is launched and established. During this period, a Playworks city director is responsible for identifying and

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developing local sources of funding to eventually replace financial support from the head office. The national headquarters provides some strategic and tactical support for the effort, but the ultimate accountability for fundraising resides with the city director.

The implementation and funding model developed to expand from San Francisco to Baltimore was quickly replicated elsewhere. Playworks is currently running programs in Boston, New Orleans, Oakland, San Jose, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C., and there are plans to expand to Los Angeles, Newark, Portland, Oregon, and Seattle. Recognizing the program's success, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation awarded Playworks an $18.7 million grant in 2008 to expand programming to 27 cities.

Playworks in Baltimore is making a concerted effort to diversify funding sources and, in particular, to build corporate relationships and an individual donor base. Beyond school fees to cover on-site expenses, local foundation support and AmeriCorps funding accounts for the majority of the Baltimore Playworks $1 million in revenue. Private and individual donations accounted for approximately $3,500 in 2008. One tactic for increasing exposure and diversifying financial resources is the development of a Local Advisory Council, a committee of Baltimore residents who can lend marketing, communications, and fundraising expertise or contacts. The program is also planning fundraising events, such as a corporate kickball tournament.

OUTCOMES

Playworks was introduced in six schools in Baltimore in the fall of 2005. The program has now expanded to 24 local 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. Principal Debbie Thomas of Medfield Heights Elementary 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.

Engage key stakeholders. With experience developing the program in the Bay Area, Playworks launched in Baltimore with a clear focus on school principals as the key stakeholders for this program. Developing a principal network in Baltimore provided for a successful launch and scaling up of the program.

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.

Effectively managed recess has multiple benefits. Data illustrate that a well-managed schoolyard program—which, in this case, was delivered at recess—can increase levels of physical activity, improve student behavior, and reduce office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions.

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.

Recognize key stakeholders. Playworks acknowledges a principal each year through its "principal of the year" award.

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.

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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.

CONTEXT: LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Many Boston schoolyards were paved over in the 1950s when city leaders discovered that asphalt cost less to maintain. As a result, many of the city's schools—which serve roughly 56,000 students, 72% of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—had no available green space. Many of the playgrounds that were built after the 1950s were set on asphalt surfaces.

In the 1980s and 1990s, nonprofit entities and individuals expressed interest in investing expertise and resources in the development of green space in Boston. Boston schoolyards became a beneficiary of this green space movement.

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

The nonprofit Boston GreenSpace Alliance was founded in 1985 to promote the protection, creation, and use of Boston's parks and open spaces. In the early 1990s, the Alliance offered grants of $3,000 to organizations and other entities to implement greening projects. Kirk Meyer, the Alliance's former education director, reached out to schools. According to Meyer, these grants "primed the Boston public school system for the larger schoolyard renovations that Boston Schoolyard Initiative would eventually undertake."

Concurrently, The Boston Globe Foundation was looking for ways to improve the city's overall environment by increasing the percentage of grants they awarded to small community groups and to scientific and environmental programs. As part of this mission, their executive director, Suzanne Maas, established the Urban Land Use Task Force to identify creative ways of making the city a better place to live. The task force was made up of private and public health, housing, and community organizing groups, along with school administrators, community members, environmental advocates, health professionals, and other funders. During meetings held by the task force to discuss common concerns, schoolyards surfaced as one of the groups' five top priorities. Members noted that schoolyards were the city's largest untapped resource for communal green and play space.

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

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In the local philanthropy community there was also interest in funding schoolyard improvement initiatives. The Boston-based Philanthropic Initiative had a donor who had been making substantial contributions to schoolyard renovations. Progress was slow, however. Without better systematic attention to schoolyard improvements, the Philanthropic Initiatives's executive director expressed concern that donors might withdraw support.

The Boston GreenSpace Alliance and the Urban Land Use Task Force formulated a proposal: a collaboration of public and private groups could revitalize the city's neighborhoods by improving its school playgrounds. Recognizing the need for a key political ally, they reached out to Mayor Menino. The groups secured a meeting with Menino shortly after he took office in 1994.

Engaging a Political Ally

The Boston GreenSpace Alliance, the Urban Land Use Task Force, and private funders presented Menino with their findings: multiple environmental, health, and community organizations were interested in improving open space and play space. They cited the interest that schools were showing in the GreenSpace Alliance's small grant program and spotlighted groups around the city already working to improve school grounds. In order to integrate and align these efforts and improve on the efficiency of the schoolyard renovations, they argued that public leadership was necessary.

The group explained that their proposed collaboration already had private foundation and individual funding sources, constituent support, and organizational backing. They were seeking political rather than financial support from the mayor. The groups needed his help in coordinating city departments involved in renovation and helping to rally support

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS: BOSTON SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE

for their initiative. In response, Menino created the Boston Schoolyard Initiative Task Force to advise the city on the best way to fund schoolyard projects and hasten their completion.

Engaging Key Stakeholders

Mayor Menino appointed top-ranking city officials to his task force, along with staff from all relevant city departments: City Services, Neighborhood Development, Boston Public Schools, Maintenance, and Transportation. According to Maas, who was asked to be one of the task force co-chairs, engaging these stakeholders streamlined the process and facilitated inter-department communication.

The mayor's task force spent a few months doing site visits to assess schools and neighborhoods and meet with community residents, environmental groups, educators, and city officials. The task force engaged multiple stakeholders in the fields of health, education, and the environment to determine how best to proceed.

A Comprehensive Solution

In 1995 the Boston Schoolyard Initiative Task Force presented its findings and recommendations on how to turn the city's schoolyards into creative, engaging spaces that incorporate outdoor educational components. The task force proposed that the city establish the Boston Schoolyard Initiative (BSI), which would work directly with schools to design and complete projects. It would be supported by a private entity, the Boston Schoolyard Funders Collaborative (BSFC).

BSI and BSFC were launched in 1995 as part of a five-year initiative. The mayor committed $10 million in city funds over five years to BSI. According to Meyer, the mayor's commitment was critical. Public funding was a catalyst for further private sector investment.

THE INITIATIVE: A STREAMLINED PATHWAY TO SUCCESS

The mayoral task force made specific recommendations: to create a separate entity to streamline projects and resources, engage beneficiaries to develop comprehensive outdoor spaces, and create a sustainable maintenance strategy. The schoolyards were intended to be accessible and open to the community so neighborhood children could benefit as well.

To streamline the process of designing, funding, and constructing the schoolyards, the BSFC was set up as the private fundraising arm and the BSI was established as a public-private partnership between the BSFC and the city, with planning and community organizing responsibility.

The Funders Collaborative was supported by the philanthropic community. Allowing the BSFC to serve as the primary fundraising entity raising funds simplified the funding process, according to Julie Stone, BSFC's program director. Schools who apply for funding through the BSFC's Fund for Boston Schoolyards deal with a single source rather than having to apply separately to individual foundations for support.

Boston Schoolyard Initiative staff work on all the different components of each schoolyard build, including application, design, and construction, streamlining the process for both the

schools and the city. For example, BSI oversees both the bidding process and construction, limiting the amount of time school administrators have to spend coordinating these efforts.

Selection Criteria

Schools are chosen by a selection committee composed of representatives from the city, the school district, and the BSFC. Their applications are evaluated on five criteria:

• School commitment
• Physical condition/geography
• Impact on school community
• Impact on health and recreation
• Stewardship

These factors help determine if there is evidence of principal buy-in, a long-term commitment to using the school grounds, an engaged school community, and plans to provide students with opportunities for outdoor physical exercise through recess and other programming. This helps to determine the school's level of engagement and buy-in.

Engaging Beneficiaries in Developing Sites

Once a school is selected, the school receives a $7,500 BSFC planning and community organizing grant. The grant pays for a part-time community organizer who can build human capacity and covers initial overhead for community outreach, such as phones, mailings, translation services, and events to attract potential stakeholders. The organizer also puts together a schoolyard group of beneficiaries.

The schoolyard group meets to discuss common community and school goals, concerns, and general issues. According to BSI, these often involve issues of security, along with the impact the improvements will have on nearby traffic patterns. Community engagement beginning at the planning stage creates a real sense of ownership and pride, says Meyer: "The Boston Schoolyard Initiative has proven that smart urban development can be a democratic process." Community members are more invested in looking after these spaces once they are completed. Russ Lopez, a researcher at Boston University, attributes the project's success largely to community and parental involvement.

From the beginning, BSI envisioned these playgrounds as both play and educational spaces. "Their proximity to schools cries out for a higher degree of interactivity, and they offer us the opportunity to combine recreation, creative play, and academic learning," BSI notes in its literature.

BSI worked with teachers, school administrators, environmentalists, attorneys, students, and community organizations to design a basic model of what the spaces should look like. Each playground is colorful, unique, interactive, and uses engaging focal points geared toward both students and local residents. Each of the redesigned playgrounds includes built structures and play equipment. Some include natural elements like boulders, trees, grass, and other plants. Features in the schoolyards are integrated into the curriculum. Tracks around the school offer math teachers the opportunity to teach students about circumference. Timing children as they run around the track helps teach calculation skills.

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BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS: BOSTON SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE

The features of each space are unique and specific to its community. Some spaces have brightly colored artwork. In some schools children elect to have maps of the globe painted on the asphalt. Meyer attributes the diversity in design to the diversity of Boston's student population. More than 24,000 of the system's 56,000 students speak a language other than English.

Once the design features are determined and the plan is selected, BSI construction projects go out for public bidding. To keep costs low and engage the community during the construction phase, many schoolyard groups hold "build days" where they paint, plant, and help install play equipment. The cost of a remodeled schoolyard ranges from $100,000 to $300,000, including design, groundbreaking, construction, and structures.

Shared Use of Schoolyards

One of the initiative's goals is to create spaces that will be used by the entire community. With a federally mandated busing program in Boston, many children attend schools outside the neighborhood where they live. Schoolyards were largely abandoned after school hours and there was minimal connection between schools and local communities.

As the project developed, schools adopted a dawn-to-dusk policy, which opened schoolyard gates and allowed access after school hours. In rare cases, schools have been forced to lock their schoolyards due to serious safety concerns or vandalism.

Meyer and Julie Stone believe the benefits outweigh the occasional problems of this open door policy and that it generates a sense of community ownership. Recess volunteers at the Perkins School in South Boston agree. These parents and grandparents report there are enough people in the neighborhood who care about the space that troublemakers would be reported or punished.

Building Political and Financial Capital

The Boston Schoolyard Initiative is popular with residents and has generated positive press coverage for the city and the school district.

"The Boston Public Schools usually had really unfavorable press," says Meyer. "There were always stories about crime or shootings. This was a really great break from the norm. And it wasn't only elected officials talking about doing something, it was the city, school district, and private sector collaborating to improve schoolyards and extend children's learning environment to the playground."

Initially, Mayor Menino promised five years of public funding. With continued private sector interest and support for BSI, the mayor chose to extend the city's financial commitment.

SCALING UP

In developing the model, BSI identified the need to create a stronger connection between the schools' curriculum and the outdoor environments. In the early 2000s, BSI and the Funders Collaborative received a grant from a private funder interested in a high-visibility project at Boston elementary and K-8 schools. The funding enabled BSI to develop its outdoor classroom program, providing a rich environment for learning, curriculum resources, and professional development.

Celebration of the new playground opening.

Population of Boston:
589,141

Population under 18:
116,649

Programs for both students and teachers are structured around five content areas: natural environment, built environment, human communities, design and engineering principles, and community service. This comprehensive approach matches the guidelines of a large number of foundations and philanthropic organizations. In the past five years, BSI has developed nine pilot outdoor classrooms. Three more are on track to be built this year.

Outdoor classrooms with plants and trees offer lessons in biology and ecosystems. Natural elements such as log stumps become chairs. Tools such as rainwater collectors and compost bins teach sustainable gardening. Students might measure the schoolyard's perimeter to add a real-world dimension to math classes, or plant and care for trees to gain a better understanding of biology. Observing birdfeeders can lead to exercises in journaling and drawing.

The BSFC hired a full-time education director, Kristin Metz, to develop grade-appropriate resources, including activity guides, internet links, print and audio-visual materials, and opportunities to participate in local, national, or international projects.

Metz consulted with the head of the Boston Public Schools science department, ensuring that the activity guides complement the city's curricula. The outdoor classrooms have earned the program support from teachers and principals. The Boston Globe reported in 2008 that the children who respond best to the outdoor classrooms are often the ones who struggle most indoors. Julie Stone of BSFC says, "The schoolyard is a pivotal part in assisting children with learning challenges, whatever they might be."

Schools that renovated their schoolyards had a slight increase in students passing state tests over their peers at schools without BSI schoolyards, according to a 2008 study. University of Massachusetts researchers looked at fourth grade standardized math scores and controlled for school demographics. The study concluded that improving the outdoor environment of a school may improve students' performance.[31]

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS: BOSTON SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE

Teachers report that these spaces also improve children's social skills. Metz says that outdoor classrooms encourage students to interact with one another and become independent learners in a way that can't be replicated indoors.

SUSTAINABILITY

The mayor's support for BSI has been critical to the sustainability of the program. He has jurisdiction over the city's schools and has made funding BSI a priority and part of his educational reform agenda.

In the face of budget cuts, some school leaders and city residents have questioned the mayor's priorities, asking, "*Why are we spending money on these now?*" says BSI Program Director Julie Stone. BSI has responded by trying to educate school leaders about the value of high-quality schoolyards and the impact of these playgrounds on learning.

Annual investment in BSI is estimated at $1.2 million from the city and $600,000 from the Funders Collaborative. The BSFC committed another $600,000 to $800,000 to underwrite outdoor classroom programs. As of June 2009, the project was on track to complete 85 schoolyards by August 2010.

School consolidation and the completion of schoolyard builds have reduced the volume of BSI applicants from upwards of 30 per year to fewer than 10. BSI now completes an average of six schoolyard projects every year. This decrease means each project can be completed within a year.

By many accounts from both the public and private sectors, the mayor's support for BSI has been critical to its success. Menino provided close to $16 million in public funding and attended nearly every ribbon-cutting ceremony for new schoolyards. These events generate local media attention, which continues to build awareness and public sector support, says Meyer.

Maintenance

Since the program was first launched, BSI has developed systems to ensure program and site sustainability. These include a proactive maintenance program led by local users, specialized maintenance crews, ongoing education programs, and community and school engagement efforts that have led to each site's users taking ownership of care and maintenance. At each school there is a "schoolyard friends group" with primary responsibility for care of the space. With support from the BSFC, many custodians and members of the schoolyard friends groups have completed greenspace management workshops, which BSI and Boston Public Schools have held over the past two years.

The creation of outdoor classrooms provided some initial maintenance challenges. In the early years of BSI, the school system's regular grounds crews and "friends of" groups played a much larger role in maintaining each property. It became clear, though, that these spaces—especially those with outdoor classrooms—had more specialized needs. One outdoor classroom, for example, was almost entirely cut down because maintenance staff thought the natural grasses were weeds, according to Ross Miller, an artist and designer of the outdoor classrooms.

In response, the Boston Public Schools' Office of Facilities Management created the Boston Schoolyard Maintenance Crew. They are trained to use the special irrigation and maintenance equipment required for the outdoor classrooms and work with horticulture specialists to learn how to best care for these plants. The office spends about $400,000 a year on maintenance and repairs.

Replicability

Other cities are looking to replicate the Boston model. Oakland, California has launched the Oakland Schoolyard Initiative, which aims to transform 50 schoolyards over the next 10 years. Like Boston, Oakland plans to tailor each schoolyard to fit the specific needs of its community.

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 this 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. BSI 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: BSI 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

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, BSI helps to ensure that these spaces will meet the needs of the community and cultivate community ownership and pride.

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BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS: BOSTON SCHOOLYARD INITIATIVE

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 BSI 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 schoolyards 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

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 SBI be able to weather the current economic crisis as high-dollar donors cut back on giving? Menino is seeking a fifth full term as mayor in 2009. When he does eventually leave 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?

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.

CONTEXT: AN ENVIRONMENT- AND HEALTH-CONSCIOUS CITY

Boulder's proximity to rivers, mountains, and other places for outdoor play is a significant draw. The city has one of the nation's highest concentrations of tri-athletes and Olympians. Many Boulder residents are quick to tie the benefits of an active lifestyle to larger national issues of obesity, environmental protection, and energy independence.

Boulder is surrounded by more than 31,000 acres of recreational open space and nature preserves. The city actively promotes cycling, with nearly 100 miles of linked bikeways within city limits. A number of major roads provide bike lanes.

It was in this context that Rob Nagler, a parent and entrepreneur, decided his children should be biking to school as often as possible, rather than relying on their parents for car rides.

THE INITIATIVE: USING TECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE RIDERSHIP

Nagler owns Bivio Software, an online service for investment clubs. He was having a difficult time persuading his children to ride their bikes to school, less than a mile away. He walked to school when he was a child, and now commutes to his office by bike. Nagler wanted his sons to take responsibility for transporting themselves and enjoy the side benefits of better health and reduced carbon emissions.

"They were whining about riding their bikes the whole half mile to school," says Nagler. "I got tired of being the dad saying no. I'm an out-of-the-box thinker, so I thought, let's just give them prizes for riding to school."

Nagler was riding to school with his children anyway, because his youngest child was in first grade. He started by offering punch cards to his children and their friends every morning to track riding rates, and then handing out inexpensive prizes to those who rode the most each week. Crest View Elementary School Principal Ned Levine was an enthusiastic supporter, encouraging Nagler to reach out to students through school bulletin boards and the weekly newsletter to parents, and by visiting classrooms.

Three students prepare to bike to school.

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One of Nagler's main early partners was Tim Carlin, a fellow entrepreneur and bike enthusiast. They say they weren't looking to start a movement, but word of mouth traveled fast. "You would see a crowd of people, and parents would say, 'Hey, what are you doing?' And we'd say, we're trying to get kids to bike more, and to reduce congestion at the school," Carlin says.

Nagler quickly realized he had stumbled upon an effective way to motivate children to ride. His sons began to ride to school regularly, and soon about 20 children were participating. By the end of the year, 75 children were riding during good weather. Nagler used a basic website to track the data, which he would print out and post in the school. He coined the name Freiker because it was a short URL and frequentbiker.com was already taken. In June 2005 they held a pizza party to celebrate the participating students and hand out bigger prizes to those who had completed the most rides for the year.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

To increase participation in the following school year (2005–2006) Nagler boosted the incentives. He surveyed children to determine what they wanted and, in response, introduced iPods as prizes. Children who reached 153 rides—or 90% of the year's school days—entered a raffle to win one of 12 iPods. The new prize helped spike students' interest. About 150 children participated and made about 7,500 round trips, or about 46 rides per school day.

Nagler started to notice some side benefits of the program. Many parents were starting to bike to school with their children. On any given morning, there are now dozens of parents gathered at the bike racks chatting with one another. "Freiker has turned out to be a great community builder," Nagler says.

So many children were participating that two adults and several children were required to punch in all the riders. The resulting queue meant some children were late getting to class. Since both founders have a technology background, it seemed natural to automate the program. Carlin suggested printing out bar codes and getting children to scan and upload the data. "Half of that was possible," he says. "It was easy to print the bar codes, but it was hard to buy an affordable hand-held scanner that kids could use."

Technology Facilitates Expansion: The Freikometer

Carlin and Nagler realized that the program had tremendous potential to modify children's behavior and instill a habit of biking as an alternative form of transportation. They also realized it could be exported to other schools if the process were simplified. The bar code technology sped things up, but it was still too complicated for a student to manage. The men were eager to find an alternative. "There was a vision that this might be something bigger than just our little school," Carlin says. "So Rob went down to his basement—he's the proverbial entrepreneur tech guy; he's up there on the genius scale. He came out at the end of the summer with this Freikometer."

The Freikometer is a wireless, solar-powered, eco-friendly radio frequency identification (RFID) tag reader that registers RFID tags placed in the students' helmets. The wireless component has allowed Nagler and his team of volunteers to avoid power lines and trip hazards for kids and also limits problems with the installation at schools. A Freiker rides under the Freikometer, which rings to let the Freiker know that his or her tag was registered that day. The Freikometer uses the school's wi-fi connection to upload the rider's data to a server, allowing parents and children to log on to a website to view the number of rides accumulated. Regardless of weather and without any parent or volunteer oversight, the Freikometer reliably gathers and tracks this data. They launched the Freikometer at the start of the 2006–2007 school year at Crest View Elementary.

Around this time Rob introduced other incentives, including one to encourage biking during inclement weather. The Freiker website is programmed to randomly choose one person who biked in the previous week, and the Freikometer is updated to play a fun little beat when that child passes underneath. The winner gets a bike gear, painted green and hung from a ribbon. The children are told that since fewer people bike in during rain or snow, they will increase their odds of winning in rough weather. Fifth-graders tend to stuff the gear in a pocket, but second-graders usually wear it all day, according to program volunteers.

By December 2006 Nagler and Carlin realized the technology would enable them to expand to additional schools. They launched Freiker at Foothill Elementary and Horizons School (a K-8 charter school), both in Boulder. By June 2007 they reached 17,000 round trips, roughly 90 per day, at the three schools. And 500 kids were sporting Freiker RFID tags on their helmets.

Testing and Expanding the Model

To expand to the two new schools, Nagler built two additional Freikometers and installed them at Foothill Elementary and Horizons School. He estimates that he and his team spent about 200 hours and $7,000 developing the first three Freikometers. To date, Bivio Software has donated about $150,000 in time and materials to the program.

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"Foothill seemed a natural fit, since they have a very active 'Walking/Wheeling Wednesday' program as part of the federal Safe Routes to Schools program," says Carlin. Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) funds community programs that encourage alternative transportation to school. Another benefit of using Foothill as a test school is that Boulder County Commissioner Will Toor and his wife, Mariella Colvin, have a son there. Colvin chairs the school's alternative transportation committee, and she offered to introduce the Freiker program there. "Foothill is the next school over from Crest View. So if Crest View does something, Foothill hears about it," Colvin says. "We liked the idea from the start, and used some SRTS funding to rent the machine and get the administrative support. There was a lot of buzz the first year. We've done it for the past two years now, and ridership has increased dramatically."

Colvin acknowledges that many of those riders are probably students who used to walk but "switched over to biking because of the prizes." But students are also gaining a deeper understanding about the impact of their choices. Foothill posts photos of award winners on a bulletin board, along with a quote about why they participate. Colvin reports that two-thirds of students are motivated by helping the environment.

According to Sue Brittenham, the physical education coordinator for Boulder Valley Public Schools who also has a child at Foothill Elementary, parents over the last decade have become more fearful of "stranger danger" and have stopped letting their kids walk to school. She says the monthly walk-to-school days helped warm parents up to the idea of alternative transportation. "You could sense that a movement was happening and parents at Foothill grabbed hold of this," she says. With an active parent community, there was sufficient support for rolling out and managing the Freiker program. As with the walk-to-school days, parents often participated and biked alongside their children. In over two years of the program, there have not been any accidents or other safety issues.

Foothill has overcome a few challenges in implementing the program. Colvin believes that it was difficult to introduce Freiker because Foothill is a paperless school; she says sending fliers home would have caught parents' attention more effectively than e-mails. Also, Freiker supplied prizes the first year, but schools are responsible for supplying their own prizes after the launch year. The school received some SRTS funding to rent the Freikometer ($1,500) and cover start-up costs ($2,000). Since then, Colvin has received donations from an indoor cycling facility and a local running shop, but she questions whether this is a sustainable approach.

After the first year, the school stopped giving high-dollar prizes. "We can't afford them, and there was some grumbling from parents," Colvin explains. "Are they doing it for the benefits, or for the prizes?" She believes the iPods are useful to generate buzz about the program's launch, but that they become less important after the program is up and running. At that point, she says, children are motivated because they start understanding the health and environmental benefits of riding rather than driving.

In November 2006, before Freiker, an average of 26% of Foothill students walked or biked to school every day. By the end of that first full year, the number rose to 28%. By the start of the second implementation year, when Colvin says more students were aware of Freiker and signing up for the program, 37% of students were biking every day.

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BOULDER, COLORADO: THE FREIKER PROGRAM

SCALING UP

In three years, Freiker expanded from three schools in Colorado to 10 schools, including programs in three other states and Canada. The program also achieved 501(c)(3) status, established a board of directors, and hired a part-time executive director.

Initial growth was close to home. Foothill and Horizons joined in 2006, followed by two other Boulder Valley School District schools in 2007. In 2008, Freiker was introduced to several schools in Longmont, a neighboring city. Later that year, it was rolled out in Eugene, Oregon and Madison, Wisconsin. In early 2009 Freiker was launched at Almond Elementary in Los Altos, California. Two schools in Canada bought the Freikometer and plan to launch in 2009. Tim Carlin, who is now the executive director, is currently working with the Denver Public Schools to further expand the program.

Before launching in a new school, the Freiker staff assesses key factors, including volunteer availability, presence of sidewalks and trails, and distances from students' homes to school. These variables have proven to be key factors for success.

The Freiker team says that the program is highly adaptable. Each school decides what parts of the program to implement and what the prize structure will be, and develops its own methods to encourage participation. Many communities have highway systems that limit safe access to school by bike. A parent at Burlington Elementary School in Longmont, Colorado developed an adaptation to the Freiker model that allowed the program to be adopted in a community where highways are an impediment to biking to school.

The Longmont Rollout

Longmont is just northeast of Boulder. Although median incomes in the two cities are roughly the same, Longmont is more diverse. The Freiker team was eager to expand to the Longmont schools, particularly those serving low-income communities. "We knew there was a big difference between Boulder and Longmont," Carlin says. "But it was near enough that we could get there if there were any technical problems."

Tricia Grafelman, a parent at Longmont's Burlington Elementary, was looking for ways to decrease childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes in her community. She learned about Freiker from a family friend whose son had enthusiastically participated in the program. Grafelman approached Nagler and Carlin about launching the program at Burlington.

The rollout in Burlington was met with some initial reluctance. "Parents were nervous about their kids biking on the road," Grafelman says. So she invented Freiker Stops, locations where children can be dropped off and then bike in to school with a teacher or parent. At Burlington, as many as 30 children will bike in as a group from a Freiker Stop. The approach has proved effective as a way to ease parents' safety concerns, and it is appropriate in rural areas and where it makes sense to have an adult escort children to school.

Burlington's principal required that students attend an after-school bike safety course before participating. According to the Freiker staff, this affected participation rates because registration was more cumbersome. At the start of the 2008–2009 school year, they decided to show a bike safety video in all the classrooms. Grafelman credits the change with adding 100 more students to the program over the previous year. In addition to higher participation rates, the approach also heightened bike safety awareness throughout the school.

Dozens of kids park their bikes outside the Foothill Elementary.

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To qualify for SRTS funds, and because of safety concerns, Burlington became the first Freiker school to include walkers. Other schools now follow their example, with children using everything from scooters to in-line skates to get to school. Nagler describes the Longmont school as their most successful launch yet, and he attributes the high rate of participation to the inclusion of walking rather than simply biking.

Although Burlington is about 42% open enrollment, with some students living 20 miles from school, the program proved popular. Out of 400 students, 228 are signed up for the program.

Based on Freiker's success at Burlington, Grafelman tried to introduce the program at Longmont's middle school, where she found the students less responsive. The principal asked her to survey students' interest; only 30 surveys were returned out of 600. Grafelman is hoping to run the program at Burlington for a few years and then move it up to the middle school as children age.

Grafelman also helped Freiker select two other Longmont schools in 2008. One of those, Eagle Crest, has an 80% participation rate. This is a significant increase from 30% of students walking or biking to school before Freiker.

According to Jason Goldsberry, the Eagle Crest physical education teacher, the high participation rate can be attributed, in part, to students living close to school. All students at Eagle Crest live within two miles of the school. Goldsberry would like to see every student sign up, but notes that about 20% of the students live in a low-income, government-assisted housing complex. "To get signed up they need parents to take the initiative to sign them up, plus a computer at home," he says.

Goldsberry is working with Freiker to give school staff administrative rights to sign children up through the school. "I really think we could pull in some kids who don't have that support at home, so they could be part of the program," he says.

BOULDER, COLORADO: THE FREIKER PROGRAM

The principal of Eagle Crest Elementary says, "I would definitely say that Freiker has motivated our students to walk, ride, or skate to school no matter the weather. It has also made it a habit of mind that will last well beyond Freiker."

A Look at the Numbers

In the four years that the Freikometer has been at Crest View Elementary School in Boulder, the number of bicycle trips has doubled from 10,000 to 20,000 per year. On any given day, 25% of the students ride their bikes to school. Principal Ned Levinesays, "Our bike racks are overflowing. Everybody here loves the program and the extra encouragement it provides students who bike to school."

At Eagle Crest in Longmont, about 80% of the students walk or bike every day, up from about 30% before Freiker. Physical education teacher Jason Goldsberry reports that he sees roughly 10% fewer drowsy kids in the morning, and that tardiness has dropped. He attributes prompt arrival at school to the fact that the Freikometer shuts off at 8:50 a.m.

Crest View Elementary Freikers
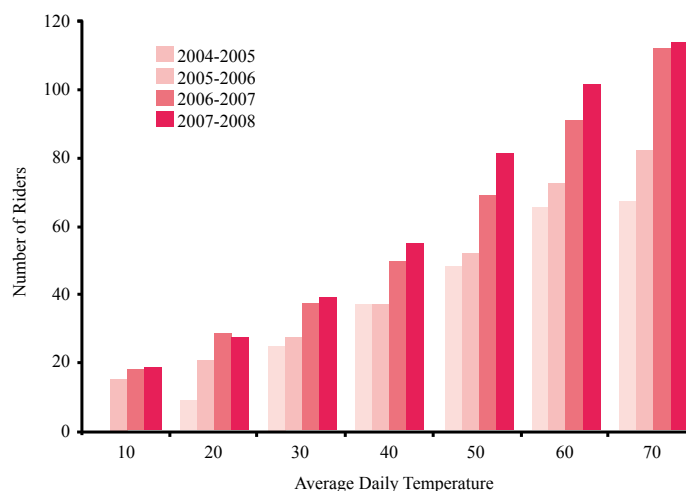
Heavy traffic and unsafe pedestrian crossings were commonplace before Freiker. Now, school administrators say, the difference in vehicle traffic is profound. In 2004–2005, 75% of Eagle Crest Elementary School's students commuted by car. Today it's 22%.

An unexpected benefit of the program is parent participation. As many as 20 or 30 parents per school ride in daily with their children. Volunteers report a higher level of parent involvement in school programs across the board, because Freiker parents tend to congregate around the bike racks in the morning and become more engaged in the school community.

Cross-Sector Engagement Builds Capital

Several of the Colorado schools have funded the Freiker program through SRTS. Freiker has also begun to engage local corporate sponsors, including technology companies, biking businesses, and the local Google office to fund the program.

"We don't want it to cost schools, we want it to increase ridership," says Grafelman. "So our ultimate goal as a board is to get it to the point where we give this system away."

The majority of funding for Freiker has come from cash and in-kind donations and sponsorship from individuals and businesses. In 2008, Trek Bicycles became Freiker's first national sponsor, with a $25,000 commitment. In 2009, a California bike shop offered to sponsor an entire school, leading to the launch of Freiker at Almond Elementary School in Palo Alto.

SUSTAINABILITY

A key asset of the Freiker program is its versatility. The model can be adapted to meet the needs of participating school communities. Zach Noffsinger, an executive at Freiker, says they have no interest in controlling who the schools allow to be part of the program, award thresholds, or any other criteria. He believes schools are more keenly aware of their needs and what challenges might face their student body. Children are constantly providing feedback to volunteers, who can then modify the program accordingly. Freiker is also now considering including a child on its board of directors.

The program's data-driven approach is attractive to sponsors and also gives children immediate feedback on their progress. Each parent or child can track activity for the day, as well make corrections if a ride is missed. The website is also used as a communications tool. Volunteers can post news and notify participants about upcoming events and deadlines.

The program's use of volunteers to market and manage the program has helped manage costs, but it has also produced varied results. Noffsinger believes that the strength of the volunteer engagement and experience accounts for the difference between moderate and very high participation rates. Schools that have incorporated Freiker into their curricula (e.g., bike safety classes) and those where the P.E. teacher is an enthusiastic volunteer tend to have higher participation rates.

Freiker as a 501(c)(3)

As a model that is proving highly cost efficient, easily replicable, and effective, the Freiker program is beginning to attract national attention, earning grants from Trek Bikes and the Bikes Belong Coalition.

With demand for the Freiker program continuing to outpace supply year after year, capacity building became a priority. In 2007, the I.R.S. granted Freiker 501(c)(3) status, laying the foundation for building organizational capacity and raising both private and public funding. Freiker then developed a board of directors to guide program growth and hired three part-time staff.

Planning for Future Growth: Diversity and Affordability

As a volunteer-managed program with almost no maintenance costs, Freiker is highly efficient for communities to manage and sustain. But to meet the goal of reaching 90% of the nation's schools, Freiker is modifying the model so it can be introduced in more diverse communities, particularly in low-income, inner-city, and underfunded school districts.

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Freiker is creating a Safe Routes to School grant template that can stand alone or be incorporated into a larger grant proposal. It is also trying to develop a direct grant program to be able to offer the program for free. Freiker has hired a grant writer and is actively seeking foundation support.

To reduce costs, Freiker will hire an outside engineering firm to mass produce the Freikometers; they believe they can get per-unit costs down to $600 from $1,500.

Freiker is also modifying its incentives program to make it more accessible and sustainable. "There's nothing more heartwarming than watching a street full of kids riding in the rain to earn an iPod," Carlin says. "But it's not a sustainable model—you can't give every kid in the country an iPod for walking or riding to school." One option is less expensive prizes modeled after the LiveStrong bracelets or the stickers that Little League teams earn for accomplishing certain goals.

The program is also exploring web-based competitions and ways to measure and celebrate individual and group participation levels. The program is tracking, through miles biked or walked, who can ride to the nation's capital first, who can ride to the moon and back, or which Freiker school can most significantly reduce CO_2 emissions. Nagler is working on technology to track and promote these accomplishments, such as a daily dashboard that tracks rides, emissions saved, calories burned, and distance traveled. "So just by participating in the program, you'll see the connections to health, the environment, and energy, rather than getting some prize," Carlin says.

Further developing the model for replicability across diverse communities is a priority. The team is translating materials into Spanish. To address computer access issues in underserved communities, the program is developing a grant-funded model whereby a part-time Freiker facilitator at each school would sign up children online and then regularly post the school's results.

The program is also looking for ways to address inner-city safety issues. During conversations with Denver school officials, Carlin says he was told that bikes left in completely enclosed fences might be susceptible to damage or theft. Schools with these types of safety issues may implement a walking-only Freiker program.

Refining the Message and Goals

Those involved with Freiker are clear that the program is not solely about play. "It is about the joy of the outdoors, it's about reconnecting with our neighbors. But it's a very real solution to very critical issues," Carlin says. He and the board members demur when someone calls Freiker a bike to school program. "It's not a bike to school program," he says. "It's a tool to educate kids and their families that every decision you make about transportation has an impact, whether you realize it or not."

The Freiker founder notes that recycling started small, with Boy Scouts volunteering to pick up newspapers, but that it now influences daily life, with every product bearing the signature "reduce, reuse, recycle" logo. "That's the kind of change we need," Carlin says. "I think this program has the opportunity to have that same kind of power."

OUTCOMES

Bike riding rates among students and parents have significantly increased as a result of the 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 CO_2 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.

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.

Population of Boulder:
94,673

Population under 18:
13,569

BOULDER, COLORADO: THE FREIKER PROGRAM

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 rollout?

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.

CONTEXT: TESTING A FAMILY-BASED INITIATIVE

The National Institute on Media and the Family is an independent, nonprofit, research-based organization focused on the impact of media on children and young adults. The Institute's mission is to help parents and communities maximize the benefits and minimize the harm of media on the health and development of children and families.

The Institute has been increasingly focused on the impact of screen time on the health of children. Since 1990 caloric activity and physical activity rates have held steady, but screen time among children has increased 37%, according to Professor Douglas Gentile of Iowa State University, the Institute's research director for Switch. A 2004 Kaiser Family Foundation report notes that when looking at childhood health and wellness, "Children's use of media is an important piece of the puzzle."[32]

Sarah Strickland, the Institute's executive director, reports that that the media attention to childhood obesity helped to create an investment climate supportive of additional research into children's health and wellness programs.

The Institute determined that three factors—physical activity, screen time, and fruit and vegetable consumption—were principal factors in improving the health of children and their families. The Institute developed a program to address these variables simultaneously.

The Institute's primary corporate funding partner on this initiative 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 initiatives, particularly in the areas of health, nutrition, and education. The Institute and Cargill had previously worked together on a number of early childhood development programs for caregivers and families.

THE INITIATIVE: DESIGNING A COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE

In 2004, Strickland and Dr. David Walsh, the Institute's president and founder, worked with a team of their senior staff and leadership, including an educational consultant, to design a comprehensive program entitled "Switch—Active Lifestyles from MediaWise." The motto was "Switch What You Do, View, and Chew."

Students stretch, preparing for outdoor play.

Population of Cedar Rapids:
126,396

Population under 18:
30,967

The program is designed as a family-based initiative that can be reinforced outside of the home, either within community-based organizations, such as the Boy and Girl Scouts, or in schools. With limited "teaching" requirements, Switch can be integrated into a school's existing curricula. "We developed a set of activities teachers could use at their discretion that would reinforce the information, such as crossword puzzles that could be done in physical education or science class," Strickland explains. "They were designed to be supportive, but not mandatory." Postings on the classroom bulletin board or slogans for the media center can be effective reinforcements for work that children and families are doing at home.

"Switch is designed to hit four different ecological levels—the individual, the family, the school, and the community—with overlapping supporting themes, so kids are getting these messages all at once," says Gentile. "We wanted to create a sense that the entire community is supporting these goals. So it wasn't just that we're coming into the classroom and telling you to do something, but that your family is telling you to do something and that your family is supported by the community. We were trying to change the inertia, so that everybody was going in the same direction."

Switch is structured as a five-month program. Children receive an initial start-up kit, which includes a pedometer, an instruction book, a magazine containing interactive games, forms for tracking all three behaviors, an activity jar that provides alternatives to screen time, and a Screen O' Meter for tracking screen time. On a weekly basis, children track how many hours they spend in front of the television, playing video games, and on the computer; how much physical activity they engage in; and how many servings of fruits and vegetables they consume each day.

After tracking these three variables, the program asks children to adjust—or switch—their behavior by turning off the television, video game, or computer; increasing the amount of time they spend playing, walking, or doing other physical activities; and selecting fruits and vegetables when choosing snacks and meals.

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA: THE SWITCH PROGRAM

Reading and promotional materials are designed to encourage and incentivize participation. Switch sends families a magazine each month. The publication encourages families to set weekly behavior goals and complete Switch activities (e.g., using the activity jar, pedometer, activity cards, meal planners, and Screen O' Meter) designed to teach them how to lead healthier lifestyles. Positive behavioral change is reinforced through incentives which include pencils, carabineers, Switch magnets, jump ropes, water bottles, t-shirts, book bags, and wristbands.

The Switch Team recognized that positive evidence-based results would be necessary in eventually scaling this program beyond the initial pilot program. Gentile designed and implemented a scientific study to assess the program's impact on behavior. The Switch Team selected six elementary schools in Cedar Rapids and four elementary schools in Lakeville, Minnesota for the research project; half of the schools in each district were demonstration schools and the other half were control schools. Approximately 1,300 students participated in the year-long trial.

The Cedar Rapids Pilot

The school district was a key partner in the implementation of the Switch program in Cedar Rapids. The Institute worked directly with Gregg Petersen, director of the district's elementary schools, to introduce the program to key stakeholders. Petersen assembled the superintendent, school board members, and the school district's physical education and health curriculum facilitator, Joe McGillicuddy, to review the program.

School district officials were interested in ensuring that the program achieves its stated impact. The vetting process included phone calls, meetings, and presentations. The Institute's track record of success and their business plan for Switch, as well as Dr. Walsh's previous work with the Centers for Disease Control, positively factored into Cedar Rapids' decision to move forward with the program. According to Petersen, it became quite obvious that Switch, and the individuals behind the program, were capable, committed, and had a vision for improving the quality of life for American children.

School administrators asked questions about integrating the program into the school curriculum. "Our teachers' plates were full with existing curriculum and other requirements, so we were concerned that this might be seen as 'one more thing' and implemented half-heartedly or with resentment," Petersen says. "That was not the case at all. For the most part, teachers and principals saw this program as an important, promising opportunity to help children and families, and indirectly assist students with our main task of learning."

Switch launched in the Cedar Rapids school district during the 2005–2006 school year. The Institute hired and directly compensated three part-time staff and retired Cedar Rapids physical education instructors, McGillicuddy, Jim Patterson, and Hal Garwood, to help run the program.

The Program Launch

The launch of Switch at Wilson Elementary School was typical of launches throughout the district. Cedar Rapids selected students in grades three through five to initially participate in the program. In the Institute's assessment, this age demographic was old enough to understand and respond to the program's tool.

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Principal Kathleen Conley at Wilson Elementary School met with teachers in these grades to explain the program and clarify expectations for teacher involvement. Teachers were asked to remind students to sign up for the program and then encourage the students to return materials. Each participating teacher was provided with Switch classroom activities that could be integrated into existing curriculum. According to Conley, implementing Switch required minimal teacher time. Due to increased paperwork, however, the Institute paid the teachers $15 to $30 depending on how many students they had participating.

The teachers were supported by the part-time Switch staff. Patterson visited classrooms at Wilson Elementary to help introduce Switch to students. Patterson passed out take-home information so parents could decide if they wanted to participate in the voluntary program. Families that signed up agreed to spend about an hour a week tracking the students' behaviors and progress.

Inspiring Physical Activity and Play: The Play Jar

One of Switch's goals is to encourage children to engage in self-directed play and activities. Each child participating in the program has a Play Jar. The jar contains pieces of paper with suggestions for playful activities or games, such as "red light, green light" or "pickle in the middle." Many of the ideas for play encourage children to get outside and to take advantage of neighborhood parks.

"Our sons think it is so cool to be able to open the jar, pull out an activity, and have Mom read it to them," reports Stacy Karam, a third-grade teacher and parent whose students and own children participated in Switch. "It has been a great incentive when we need a transition to move on to something else, or if the weather causes us to spend a whole day indoors. The activities are appropriate for kids of all ages, and many can be adapted to suit your needs at the moment. As a mother of preschoolers, it can be difficult to entertain two young children all day and keep them engaged in activities. This jar has been an excellent way to do that."

Leveraging Local Leadership with Retired Physical Education Teachers

Petersen credits the Switch Team, which included McGillicuddy, Patterson, and Garwood, for building the momentum of the program in Cedar Rapids. With their combined years of experience in the community, they have deep relationships with the school district and families. Their endorsement and leadership established an immediate level of confidence in the program with principals, teachers, parents and students.

The Switch Team was also instrumental in building community support and helping to expand the program across Cedar Rapids. With their support and through their relationships, Switch was able to eventually able to raise private resources for this purpose.

Building Public Awareness and Momentum

In order to build awareness and momentum, the Institute and the Switch Team engaged the press, recruited community partners, conducted presentations and rolled out a promotional program.

The Institute executed a compelling media campaign to promote the program. They invested in paid advertising on billboards and on the radio. Each ad was devoted to one of the three

Population of Cedar Rapids: 126,396

Population under 18: 30,967

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA: THE SWITCH PROGRAM

program goals. The behavioral message was clear and it was accompanied by professionally developed visuals. The program also benefited from earned media in local newspapers.

The Switch Team led efforts to boost public awareness. The team offered monthly adult education classes at business, PTA meetings, the YMCA, and other community gatherings. "There was a real attempt made at increasing adults' access to information and opportunities," says Gentile. The team also recruited community partners. Businesses offered reduced rates for services to help promote the program. For example, the local roller rink held a "Switch Day" where every skater could enter at a discount.

Incentives and prizes became another motivation for boosting awareness and participation. Children earn a Switch wristband when they sign up for the program. As children turn in their trackers on a monthly basis, they earn additional prizes, such as a t-shirt. The incentives encourage participation and help to build awareness as participants, wearing and carrying Switch gear, become promoters for the program.

Initial Results

The pilot behavior trackers indicated that the program had a positive impact on each of the three targeted behaviors. In examining the data, the Institute and Iowa State found that Switch helped children decrease the average number of hours spent watching TV or playing computer or video games by more than two hours a week; increase their steps by about 350 per day; and increase their consumption of fruit and vegetables by an average of two servings a day.[33]

Families were asked to evaluate the impact of the program. In follow up surveys, 34% of parents perceived that their children were more active since starting Switch. Gentile reports that this is a greater rate than that reflected by the objective measurements, but he suspects these evaluations might be more accurate. Pedometers, he points out, are a terrible way to measure activity since very few children actually comply with wearing them 10 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Switch Team reports that the school staff, parents and children responded favorably. Although teachers and parents sometimes complained about the paperwork, the teachers were generally excited about the program and conveyed this excitement to their students. "Some of the teachers would get together and do their own contests to parallel what the kids were doing," Strickland says. "That's the kind of leadership kids need, and that third and fourth graders love. People's enthusiasm is contagious, and role modeling makes a difference for kids."

There was unanticipated data point in the results—there was some indication Switch was affecting BMI. Six months after the program ended, boys in the demonstration group had a lower rate of growth in their BMI than boys in the control group (BMI levels were comparable at the start of the program). "The fact that these behavioral changes seemed to have snowballed into a change in BMI was very encouraging," says Gentile.

The Institute hired a market research firm to evaluate program awareness and to collect self-reporting data on the program's impact. The firm conducted a pre- and post-program survey of 800 parents in Cedar Rapids. The random survey did not target Switch families. Of the survey respondents, 15% of the families had taken part in Switch. After one year, Switch had a 25% name recognition rate among parents, exceeding the number of respondents who

Program materials created to build public awareness and momentum.

Population of Cedar Rapids:
126,396

Population under 18:
30,967

actually participated. Of those who had heard of Switch, the following percentages of respondents reported that the program had a positive influence on their behavior:

• Screen time (36%)
• Fruits and vegetables (34%)
• Physical activity (33%)
• Family activity without media (33%)[33]

SCALING UP

After completing the first year, the Institute ran Switch in the Cedar Rapids control schools during the following school year. The program continued to be successful, with improvements in healthy behaviors and positive community feedback. Supported by school district leaderships, the Switch Team decided to expand the program throughout Cedar Rapids and to several schools just outside the district.

Developing Private Capital: The Local Switch Team

This scaling would require private capital. The Institute was committed to paying for part-time staff, but the Switch Team was responsible for raising any additional resources. They did so by securing a lead corporate sponsor and then leveraging this commitment to engage other local businesses.

The Switch Team approached the local arm of Cargill, Inc., which had funded Switch's initial research and development. Ann Stark, an employee of Cargill–Cedar Rapids, was a school board member in Linn-Mar, just outside of Cedar

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA: THE SWITCH PROGRAM

Rapids. She brought the program to the company's attention and set up an opportunity for McGillicuddy to present Switch to the Cargill Cares Committee, which makes local funding decisions.

According to Randy Busch, one of the Cargill Cares Committee members, Switch fits with the firm's core values: education, nutrition, and community betterment. Cargill–Cedar Rapids offered $25,000 and helped the Switch Team obtain a $25,000 matching grant from the national headquarters.

McGillicuddy was then able to point to this initial, significant investment when approaching other potential funders. He secured an additional $56,000 in financial commitments from local businesses in the health and education sectors. McGillicuddy successfully secured funding from both large hospitals, such as St. Luke's and Mercy in Cedar Rapids, and smaller health care providers and businesses. With this fundraising success, the program in Cedar Rapids scaled up within two years.

Program Development and Going to Scale

Cedar Rapids expanded Switch to 900 students in 37 public and parochial schools during the 2007–2008 school year. Based on feedback from the previous two years, the Switch Team fine tuned the program. The materials were streamlined, cutting back on costs and decreasing the paperwork required of teachers and parents. Additionally, the "Screen O' Meter" device, which tracks children's screen time, was developed to be more user-friendly.

The Switch Team decided to focus on third graders. According to Sarah Strickland, the research pointed to a diminished interest in older grades. By focusing on one grade, the program administrators could streamline the materials and expand into more schools.

To simplify operations, the Switch Team appointed one lead volunteer—a teacher, parent or administrator—in every school. "When we had the research program, we did all of the rah rah," says McGillicuddy. "When we had gone from six schools to 18 schools, we were just running ragged. When we expanded again, we knew we had to have strong leaders in every school. The volunteers made sure children were turning in their tracking forms, and they helped keep them motivated."

Financial Sustainability

Following a series of major floods in June of 2008, there were limited resources to sustain a fourth year of Switch in Cedar Rapids at previous levels. Many of the schools suffered moderate to severe damage. The floods closed many roads, local businesses, and caused an estimated $5.6 billion in damages to Cedar Rapids. Cargill–Cedar Rapids' Cares Council elected to devote more than 75% of its local community financial resources to flood damage restoration efforts and many members of the school community wanted to reprioritize and simplify the district's programs.

Despite the scarcity of resources, enough private funding was secured for Switch to run in 20 schools during the 2008-2009 year. Cargill National continued its support of the program with a $100,000 grant and the Switch Team recruited additional donors.

Now in its fourth year in the Cedar Rapids metropolitan area, Switch is running in 20 elementary schools with more than 700 third-graders and their families participating. Roughly 56% of all eligible third-graders in the city and the surrounding area are participating. The local YMCA is also beginning to incorporate Switch in its preschool programs.

Year	Proposed Budget	Actual Budget	Eligible Students	Student Served	# of Schools	# of Funders[34]
2007–08	$318,000	$133,302	2126	900	37	13
2007–08	$133,302	$133,302	1250	700	20	9

National Expansion

The program is expanding across Iowa and to cities outside the state. With the financial support of Cargill, three other communities in Iowa will implement Switch beginning in fall of 2009. Switch has also been adopted in Burnsville, Minnetonka, and the Prairie Lakes District in Minnesota.

The Burnsville mayor, Elizabeth Kautz, launched a Healthy City Initiative with the goal of becoming the "healthiest city in America." The city provides exercise classes, calendars of events, walking sites, and trail books to promote physical activity. As part of this broader campaign, the city has partnered with two local elementary schools and has enrolled almost 200 third- and fourth-graders in Switch over the past two years.

"Our goal is to create a sustainable, ongoing distribution model for Switch that isn't dependent on a national institute securing funds for communities," says Strickland. "Our goal is to promote and distribute Switch as much as we can—our job is to make sure the communities interested in it are able to secure funds and have the best models to do that."

SUSTAINABILITY

Switch is a highly cost effective model. The program is administered by part-time employees financed by the Institute and supported by community-based volunteers. In the case of Cedar Rapids, these are school-based volunteers. As the program expands, the Institute will look to Cedar Rapids to incur expenses for the part-time staff. The program costs are $50 per child for the start-up kit, supplies, and incentives. After the first two years, Cedar Rapids was able to fully fund program costs, primarily through grants from local companies and businesses.

In order to manage costs and sustain the program in Cedar Rapids, the Switch Team is looking to expand the volunteer program. One tactic for this expansion is the development of corporate volunteers. For example, some volunteers will be supplied by Cargill–Cedar Rapids, which runs a program encouraging volunteerism outside of work hours.

In addition, the Institute continues to facilitate follow-up research and surveys. In the most recent survey 94% of parents said that they would recommend the Switch program, which according to Principal Conley is a huge indicator of success and staying power. "It's next to impossible to have that many parents agree almost anything," she says.

Population of Cedar Rapids: 126,396

Population under 18: 30,967

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA: THE SWITCH PROGRAM

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 a 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 behavior modification.

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. Cedar Rapids recruited three physical education teachers. Other Switch communities rely on nurses, physician's assistants, athletes, and other health care professionals.

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, 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?

Population of Cedar Rapids:
126,396

Population under 18:
30,967

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.

CONTEXT: A DEGRADED SCHOOLYARD ENVIRONMENT

Denver was at a turning point during the 1990s. The city's schoolyards primarily consisted of asphalt and pea gravel, with few play structures and limited green space. Most did not meet ADA requirements, provided little protection from the sun, and had limited lighting. They were underutilized, and gravel-related accidents were common. A significant investment would be necessary to replace what playground equipment existed, install irrigation systems, and develop safe, age-appropriate spaces and structures.

During this same period of time, federally mandated busing was lifted from Denver Public Schools and children once again began attending schools in their own neighborhoods. One result was greater awareness of the degradation of the local neighborhood schoolyards.

THE INITIATIVE: CREATING A REAL CONNECTION

In 1992, Lois Brink, a parent at Bromwell Elementary School and a landscape architecture professor, initiated and led a grassroots effort to improve the school's playground space. Brink engaged some of her landscape architecture students to design a playground tailored to the needs of the school and members of the community.

Brink came to the University of Colorado at Denver in 1988 as a practitioner with a particular passion for utilizing the art of landscape architecture to effect real change in communities. She challenged the University and her students to move beyond "superficial beautification" to find ways to promote education and learning in their designs. It was in this context that she engaged her students in an independent study program to re-design the Bromwell playground. The University's Urban Agenda, focused on neighborhood and community engagement, supported both Brink's work and her personal commitment to community outreach.

Brink and her students developed a model they call a "Learning Landscape." A Learning Landscape is an outdoor area that supports physical activity, learning, and improved social interaction. The process of developing a Learning Landscape is a community undertaking as local residents provide input during the design process and then participate in the build. The intention is for these spaces to be unique, dynamic, and colorful and to provide engaging focal points for the community, drawing together not only students but area residents across generations.

● kaboom.org/bestpractices

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

Population of Denver:
588,349

Population under 18:
143,557

Fundraising for the pilot playground at Bromwell was a multi-year process. Various tactics were used to raise the $250,000 necessary to complete the project, including parent donations through brick sales, cold calls to local businesses with flyers, local press appeals, and significant in-kind donations for materials.

Early Engagement and Alignment with Key Public Officials.

Early in the process, Brink reached out to officials from the city and Denver Public Schools (DPS), building trust and engaging them in the process. They were invited to planning meetings and to participate in the build. Mike Langley, former executive director of DPS's facility management, described the process of bringing volunteer parents and community members to the school to assemble the playgrounds as "old-fashioned barn raising."

Langley became a key partner and champion, providing management oversight of future projects and budgetary decisions. Given limited resources, Langley contends that he would much rather invest in a learning landscape than in books. "If kids get in a fight on the playground and come in not ready to learn, then books will not be relevant," says Langley. According to Elaine Gantz Berman, a member of the school board at the time, "too often advocates try to work outside of the system or in an adversarial way and are not successful. Brink worked closely and respectfully with Mike Langley at DPS, and this relationship was key."

As part of this collaboration with DPS officials, Brink worked closely with the staff in risk management to test materials and overcome concerns. Through this collaboration, Brink was able to develop risk management solutions. For example, there was a perception that climbing boulders present safety risks. She and DPS officials in risk management agreed to define climbing boulders as a piece of play equipment and place the boulders in play pits with the same fall zones that are provided for other kinds of climbing structures.

DENVER, COLORADO: LEARNING LANDSCAPES

Bromwell provided the test case for what is possible when a local champion is clear in her vision and persistent. Brink did not compromise on her vision of a full-scale renovation of the playground. And it was precisely the scale of change and the degree of citizen engagement—as volunteers and financial donors—that inspired broader support from public officials. The 2000 launch not only generated excitement and energy among civic leaders and DPS officials but also fueled interest in seeing if this model could be replicated beyond the affluent area that is home to Bromwell School.

Testing the Model's Viability: Garden Place Elementary

Garden Place Elementary, located in a heavily industrial neighborhood, became the first test case in an underserved area of Denver. According to Brink, there were prison yards in better shape than Garden Place's playground. The project was successful, in large part, because of the vision, passion, determination and resourcefulness of the school's principal at the time, Alvina Crouse.

Following construction of the Bromwell learning landscape, there was some DPS interest in trying the model at another school but there was insufficient political will at the district or city level to fund the attempt. While the Bromwell model provided an example of what could be achieved, it had yet to be proved possible in a school community with fewer resources. In order to fully test this model, local leadership would have to raise seed funds for the project.

Crouse became the driver in this process. She understood the value of play, and she had the time, resources, and relationships to implement an aggressive and year-long campaign to renovate the schoolyard. She viewed building high-quality play space as central and essential to her job as an education administrator, rather than secondary or peripheral, saying that "our children get into trouble because they don't have anything to do on the schoolyard…play is children's work and where they learn interpersonal skills."

The willingness of Crouse to commit $10,000 of her own money to the project at its outset was critical to overcoming initial skepticism and securing the support of DPS. When Craig Cook, then DPS CEO, asked Crouse how the schoolyard would be maintained, she offered to commit an additional $5,000 per year to ensure its maintenance. This unusual dedication on the part of a principal was instrumental in moving the Garden Place playground initiative forward.

Developing Champions

To raise resources necessary for the $283,000 project, Crouse relied on members of her school community to tell the story of Garden Place's unacceptable playground conditions. Hosting regular school visits became a successful tactic.

Early in the process, Crouse realized that potential funders needed to experience the poorly equipped and unsafe playgrounds and hear directly from the students themselves in order to move past resistance and misconceptions—such as their lack of understanding of the educational value of play. Initial letter and grant writing was less successful than anticipated. Funders in the education field, for example, did not connect playgrounds with education. When Crouse first approached Tom Kaesemeyer, head of the local Gates Family Foundation, he told her their foundation supported only education-related initiatives. The principal learned that "people know how to give to libraries and hospitals, but they do not know how to give to playgrounds."

School visits became a successful tactic for developing champions. Inviting potential supporters to visit the schoolyard and experience the lack of safe, engaging play equipment gave Crouse an opportunity to showcase rather than simply write about or describe the need for change and the community will to bring it about. She credits a school visit with inspiring the engagement of Kaesemeyer, who became a key funder for the Garden Place playground.

Direct beneficiary advocacy was effective. The children were able to make a case for play in a way that the adults could not. The students wrote to elected officials about broken monkey bars, metal slides that were too hot to touch, and rusted swings that squeaked. They also appeared before the state legislature, city council, and school board to explain why they needed a new playground. At one school board meeting, the students brought in a wheelbarrow full of change to showcase their own fundraising and to challenge officials to step up to do their part. The students' testimonials, the example of their initiative, and the evidence of broader school and community backing inspired public support.

Principal Crouse took personal responsibility for mobilizing a group of school and community leaders to raise funds necessary to complete the project. Noel Cunningham, a restaurant owner and local philanthropist, hosted regular dinners to convene foundation and business leaders for the project. According to Crouse, her staff played a vital role in helping to organize events and mobilize the parent community.

Ultimately, Garden Place, launched in 2001, is the model that inspired political engagement and commitment, rather than mere interest. Crouse and her allies raised $283,000 to transform an asphalt surface into a colorful play space with a welcoming archway, student artwork, an irrigated grass playfield, a shade structure, trees, and gardens. The playground was designed and constructed in collaboration with members of the community, is accessible to students and neighbors, and serves as a source of community pride and a model for expansion. Garden Place proved that this model of community mobilization could be replicated beyond the more affluent and politically engaged neighborhoods in Denver.

SCALING UP

The mechanism for systematically expanding these play areas to underserved communities in Denver was an entrepreneurial public-private partnership called the Learning Landscape Alliance (LLA). As LLA was building grassroots support, the Denver Office of Economic Development (OED) introduced an initiative to invest in underserved communities and schools. The alignment of grassroots and grasstops initiatives accelerated the LLA's plan and provided a curbside and visual testament of these play spaces in targeted neighborhoods. This, in turn, generated broad citizen support and political pressure for scaling these play spaces to every schoolyard in Denver.

The examples of both Bromwell and Garden Place inspired key public and private sector leaders to form LLA in 2001. LLA's mission and plan was to recreate the Garden Place process and outcome at 22 underserved schools throughout Denver. The group was spearheaded by Kaesemeyer, Brink, and Langley. They recruited key stakeholders, including city officials, to serve on the steering and advisory committees.

Allegra Haynes, then a city councilwoman, credits Kaesemeyer with being the catalyst whose personal vision, commitment, reputation, experience, and assets accounted for the momentum

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and success of LLA. According to Haynes, Kaesemeyer saw "schools as the beacon of the neighborhood and effectively painted this picture for potential stakeholders and funders." He had a deep conviction regarding the project, the experience to manage a project of this scale—recognizing and avoiding pitfalls—and the credibility to engage key stakeholders, such as city council and school board members.

Kaesemeyer developed a detailed marketing packet, including an introductory letter, funding level options for corporations, a donor list, a budget breakdown for costs per site, and plans for upcoming playgrounds. He created a high-profile board of advisers to help the organization connect with Denver's business and political elites. And he constantly pitched the project. Like Crouse, Kaesemeyer encountered objections and a lack of appreciation of the role that play serves in the child's school day. To address these hurdles, Kaesemeyer developed a learning landscapes video. It was a reliable marketing tool; without a visual of the children and how they were benefiting, securing engagement was otherwise difficult.

Grassroots and Grasstops Alignment: Denver's Office of Economic Development

Denver's Office of Economic Development acted as a financial catalyst to accelerate LLA's plan. LLA was looking for seed money just as the city launched an $80 million Focus Neighborhood Initiative. OED's charge was to identify projects that would revitalize underserved neighborhoods, and they were particularly looking for school-based initiatives. LLA was well-positioned to illustrate public-private partnership development, significant community engagement, and civic pride—crucial components in securing funding. LLA, with Garden Place as a case study in school and community revitalization, was able to prove its model and secure funding. OED awarded LLA an initial grant of $1 million and then a total of $4.1 million over three years. These resources were leveraged to secure further private sector and in-kind donations.

Joint-Use Requirements to Expand Access

In order to obtain state funding for learning landscapes, schools were required to open the playgrounds to the community after school hours.

In 1994, Colorado voters elected to dedicate a portion of state lottery proceeds to projects that preserve, protect, and enhance Colorado's parks, trails, and open spaces. The grant program was called Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO). Beginning in 2000, LLA started writing and receiving GOCO grants in collaboration with the City of Denver Parks and Recreation Department. The GOCO grants provided materials such as plants and mulch. A key requirement of the GOCO grant was that schools receiving this funding needed to be open to the community after hours. LLA was able to leverage this funding to open up schools where principals had previously been resistant. As the project manager for these learning landscapes at UC Denver reports, the grants were "not a lot of money, but they did provide a lot of political power."

Community Mobilization Inspired Support

The Learning Landscapes model, which engages members of the school and community throughout the process, helps to build community, inspire civic engagement, and engender investment in the play areas. The effectiveness of this model, often showcased during the build and launch process, inspired the support of key stakeholders.

Community coming together to build a new playground through volunteer efforts.

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Colfax Elementary School, with one of the city's highest homeless family populations, was among the first schools targeted by LLA. It took three years to raise $500,000 and replace an asphalt playground with an irrigation system, greenway, sod, a track, age-appropriate climbing structures, trees, climbing rocks, shade structures, and wood chips. Parents, staff, local business leaders, and alumni participated in the fundraising. As part of the campaign, students filled up a jar with pennies and presented it to the mayor. When 80% of the school community at Colfax Elementary came out for the build day, civic leaders took notice. According to Langley, the head of facility management for DPS, entire families came out for the build, reflecting the sweat equity they had invested in the project.

According to Tom Burella, Colfax's physical education teacher, the Learning Landscape has changed the environment of the school. Students come early for class so they can play, they are more active, they can be active in hot weather, and they play better together. Burella is able to defuse conflicts by sending students to various areas and activities within the schoolyard. He had one schoolyard fight the first year of Learning Landscapes, down from multiple conflicts and injuries each month the previous year. There have been few incidents of vandalism, and Burella reports that the playground is well-used after school hours by students, their families, and the broader community.

In qualitative surveys conducted in 2003, principals, teachers, students, and members of the community report that the playgrounds are getting more use, that children are more active on them, and that they have become a source of community pride. Of teachers surveyed, 80% agreed that students were more physically active during recess as a result of the learning landscapes. Meanwhile, 68% of parents agreed that the playground is a focal point in the community.

In three years, LLA raised a total of $9 million, improved 22 playgrounds, and generated significant political support. No one group contributed more than 25% to the cost of any playground re-build and every school community is required to raise 1–2% of the cost of the project. LLA received in-kind support from AmeriCorps, Colorado Youth Corps, businesses, and each school community.

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According to OED's Jerry Garcia, significant pressure started to build as "every school wanted learning landscapes, but the city could not fund schools outside of their target neighborhoods." Elaine Gantz Berman, a school board member at the time, said that "there was initial skepticism about these projects—they almost sounded too good to be true. But when they actually delivered on them, everyone wanted one. These learning landscapes in the 16 focus neighborhoods were the 'spark plug' that ignited citywide political support for these play spaces." According to Langley the success of Learning Landscapes "turned the supply and demand balance [for quality play spaces] on its head."

Public Buy-In: General Obligation Bonds in 2003 and 2008

In response to this demand, the Denver Public School Board proposed two bond measures for $39 million to expand these Learning Landscapes to every schoolyard in Denver. The 2003 bond measure included $10 million for 24 additional sites across the city. It proved successful, reflecting the political momentum that LLA had developed in Denver. More affluent and politically engaged communities were aware of sites in the target neighborhoods, wanted to see them constructed in their neighborhoods, and backed the bond measure. With the 2003 bond and funding, the Learning Landscape Alliance dissolved. Under Brink's management, Learning Landscapes became a program under the UC Denver School of Landscape Architecture in partnership with the Denver Public School District.

In 2008, Denver voters approved a second bond measure of $29 million to finance learning landscapes in the remaining 37 schoolyards. In the view of former Councilwoman Haynes, the strength of the learning landscapes model is the extent of citizen engagement, motivation, and pride. She contends that to say "no" to the 2008 bond measure would have been to say "no" to citizen engagement.

Developing the Data

In 2009, Learning Landscapes received a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to examine whether playground redevelopment leads to an increase in children's physical activity levels and what aspects of playground design most impact children's physical activity. The results are currently in review at the American Journal of Public Health.

In this study, Learning Landscapes measured physical activity levels through the tool SOPLAY (System for Observing Play and Leisure Activity in Youth) at three schools with renovated playgrounds for at least two years, at three schools with a playground built within the year, and at three control schools without a playground renovation. Each of the playgrounds designated for observation was divided into activity areas to identify which playground variables had the greatest impact on children's physical activity. These observations were conducted before and after school hours.

The observation results illustrate that schools with a renovated playground had significantly higher levels of physical activity. The significant increase in energy expenditure on Learning Landscape playgrounds validates the importance of the quality of the environment in promoting a more active lifestyle in children. The increase in quantity and variety of elements may account for the rise in activity.

Average number of sightings per observation, by gender and school type

School Type	Number of Sedentary Boys	Number of Active Boys	Number of Sedentary Girls	Number of Active Girls	Total Sedentary Students	Total Active Students
Control	657	1,272	602	1,020	1,259	2,280
Built	910	2,103	1,074	1,771	1,984	3,874
Recent Built	1,151	2,691	1,305	1,951	2,453	4,642
Total	2,718	6,066	2,981	4,742	5,696	10,808

The study also found that certain play surfaces significantly increased the number of children who were active and without any bias for gender. Analysis by surface type—Hard Surface Structured (HSS), Hard Surface Unstructured (HSU), Soft Surface Structured (SSS), and Soft Surface Unstructured (SSU)—proved informative. Both boys' and girls' activity rates are significantly greater at the Learning Landscape SSS areas than in the control environments. These areas include a grass field and play equipment.

Percentage of "Active" observations according to surface type, school, gender, and their comparative p-values

Surface Type	School Type	% Active Boys	% Active Girls	% Active Combined	Boys vs. Girls p-values
HSS	non-LL	67.6	57.2	65.7	<.02
	LL	70.1	53.1	62.2	<.0001
	p-value	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	
HSU	non-LL	49.6	56.2	52.2	n.s.
	LL	63.3	54.0	58.7	<.0001
	p-value	<.0001	n.s.	<.003	
SSS	non-LL	70.6	65.2	67.9	<.006
	LL	73.6	68.3	71.2	<.0001
	p-value	<.05	<.058	<.003	
SSU	non-LL	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	LL	67.1	66.5	66.8	n.s.
	p-value	n/a	n/a	n/a	

SUSTAINABILITY

The scale of this initiative is significant. As such, the successful care and maintenance of these spaces requires ongoing cross-sector planning and collaboration.

In order to plan for the sustainability of the play spaces, Kaesemeyer brokered a deal with DPS regarding maintenance. Kaesemeyer's local foundation, the Gates Family Foundation, agreed to provide initial funding for the project, but only if DPS ensured maintenance of

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the spaces. As part of this initial agreement, DPS budgets roughly $25,000 per site per year for maintenance, which includes such activity as re-seeding, fertilizing, and watering. An estimated $26,000 worth of labor and materials is contributed by volunteers at each site per year.

The learning landscapes model assumes that the community will play a role in caring for the space. There are often lower incidents of vandalism on the schoolyard following these projects; community members who built the play spaces also take care to protect them. Projects led by a parent, rather than a teacher or principal, are especially likely to be protected by the community.

A key challenge has been the multifaceted nature of the spaces, in some cases requiring work that is beyond the expertise of DPS ground crews. For example, the crews are often not trained to care for the natural grasses and plants. Over time and with DPS funding, Learning Landscapes has taken responsibility for overseeing the maintenance that is beyond the capability of DPS personnel.

Continuity of champions of these play spaces has been another challenge. The initial community-based champions—perhaps a principal, teacher, or parent—may eventually move on. School closures are another factor. Once a school is shuttered, the community is left with a playground that is not supported by DPS maintenance resources. The learning landscapes model assumes that the community will step in and take a larger role in taking care of these spaces.

Development of more integrated master plans, considering DPS' priorities and plans as well as the broad park and playground needs of the community, would help mitigate closure of schools with learning landscapes in high-needs areas. Both Denver Public Schools and the Denver Park and Recreation Department are working more closely to coordinate their planning.

Finally, the initial model for learning landscapes called for these spaces to be integrated into the school curriculum. This aspect of implementation has been more difficult to introduce and institutionalize than was initially anticipated. Once institutionalized, the assumption is that the learning landscapes would have greater utility and, therefore, could sustain champions or supporters. To focus on the effort, Learning Landscapes has a partnership with the Denver Schoolyard Consortium to help to integrate these spaces into the curriculum. Learning Landscapes also has a grant from the Gates Family Foundation to create and implement a technical assistance training program for teachers.

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 buildt 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

Support a local champion to mobilize the community. External champions became important later in the process as learning landscapes spread across the city, but the launch of the Learning Landscape Alliance would not have been possible without the initiative and leadership of key local champions.

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 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. LLA 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 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 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.

Use private funding to spark public funding. While many private investors supported the Learning Landscape Alliance, the Gates Foundation was the leading contributor. By its accounting, an initial Gates Foundation investment of $1.2 million was a catalyst, through the bond measures, for $19 million in public funding.

Align grassroots and grasstops. 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.

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CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

The University of Colorado 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?

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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.

CONTEXT: A FEDERAL HOUSING EXPERIMENT

Greenbelt, Maryland, was the first community designed and built as a federal housing project in the United States. It was envisioned and created under the Resettlement Administration in 1935 and under the authority of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Emergency Relief Appropriation Act. Greenbelt was designed as a complete city, with businesses, schools, roads, and facilities for recreation.

Greenbelt was considered a physical experiment. Pedestrian and vehicular traffic were carefully separated, with a walkway system allowing residents to walk from their home to the town's center without crossing a major street. Two major streets were laid out above and below a crescent-shaped natural ridge. Retail, school, and recreational facilities were all grouped in the center of this crescent, creating a pedestrian-friendly downtown. The original planning and building of Greenbelt emphasized playgrounds, ball fields, and open space. Most of the original features of this planned community are still in existence.

From its inception, Greenbelt has valued community participation and civic engagement. The first families to live in Greenbelt were chosen based on income criteria as well as a demonstrated willingness to participate in the life of the community. In 1953, when the federal government turned over the housing portion of the town to the citizens, Greenbelt formed a housing cooperative, the Greenbelt Veterans Housing Corporation. The community of 3,500 continued to function in a collaborative way, forming a cooperative baby sitting pool, nursery school, and kindergarten.

With privatization of the homes in Greenbelt, some of the playgrounds became the property of the city while other playgrounds became the property of new homeowners and the housing cooperative. There were a number of small separate playgrounds that overlapped both city and housing co-op property lines.

THE INITIATIVE: PRIVATE HOUSING, PUBLIC PLAYGROUNDS

In the 1980s, the city of Greenbelt and the housing cooperative, now named Greenbelt Homes Inc. (GHI), formalized a joint-use agreement for playgrounds. Previous understandings regarding playground ownership lines and maintenance responsibility between the city and GHI had been informal.

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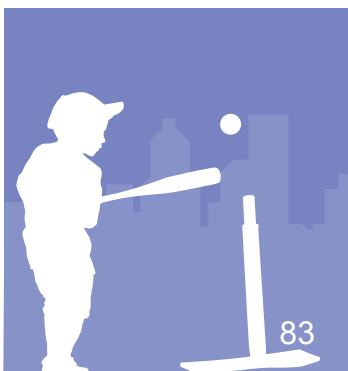
An updated playground for a Greenbelt HOA neighborhood.

Population of Greenbelt:
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5,167

As part of this joint-use agreement, the city agreed to be responsible for playground maintenance and GHI took responsibility for mowing grass and trash removal. In exchange for the city providing maintenance, playgrounds were opened to the broader public, not just GHI members, from dawn until dusk year round. At relatively minimal cost, the city increased playground access for the broader community of Greenbelt.

From 1987 until 2000, the City of Greenbelt expanded beyond GHI, adding new construction and additional homeowners associations (HOAs). By 2000, HOAs owned 25 of the 66 playgrounds in Greenbelt. These new HOAs organized to advocate for their own joint-use agreement with the city. The original 1987 joint-use agreement was born of necessity, as the lines of play space demarcation and ownership were unclear. The compelling argument for the joint-use agreement in 2000 was one of equity. Members of the HOAs argued that public investment in privately owned playgrounds should be consistent across all HOAs, or at least offered as an option.

SCALING UP

In 2000, the city of Greenbelt began to discuss a plan to renovate existing playgrounds. Given the standing joint-use agreement, this plan included development of playgrounds within the GHI, but not playgrounds within the boundaries of other HOAs. As a result of this planning process, which was transparent to the public, the inequity of funding some privately owned facilities but not others came to the attention of the broader homeowner community.

In response, the chair of the Greenbelt East Advisory Committee (GEAC), Sheldon Goldberg, sent a letter to the city advocating for playground joint-use agreements across all HOAs. The primary motivation of GEAC was economic, and their argument was one of equity. Investment in playgrounds improves the quality of the facility and can have a positive impact on property values. Sheldon argued that GHI, as the first HOA, should not have preferential treatment in city funding.

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In response to coalition advocacy from the homeowners groups, the city agreed to create joint-use agreements with all HOAs in Greenbelt. The result has been a significant increase in both the quality and access to play space in the city.

Public-Private Partnerships: The Joint-Use Agreement

A key to the success of these joint-use agreements has been significant upfront planning and community engagement. In response to the community call for equity in playground funding, the city staff researched and developed language for joint-use agreements. While the 1987 joint-use agreement provided a template, an updated and more comprehensive agreement was needed to address insurance and liability concerns and to provide more detail on roles and responsibilities. For example, the 1987 joint-use agreements did not specify how costs were to be divided. The city staff proposed that any new agreements specifically detail that the city would cover 75% of anticipated costs for new equipment, new surfacing materials and periodic replenishment of surfacing, and that the HOA would cover the remaining 25%. The HOA would be solely responsible for landscaping, trash, lighting, fencing, and benches. Since many of the playgrounds in the HOAs needed repair or replacement to meet the city's adherence with U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Public Playground standards, the city needed to assess playground development plans and costs as part of their upfront research.

Greenbelt has a history and culture of collaborative decision making; the three-year process of creating the memorandum of understanding (MOU) reflected this tradition. According to David Moran, the assistant city manager, the process of finalizing the joint-use agreements was "long, intense, and complicated." Once a template was developed, it was presented to city council and then debated through a series of meetings with HOA leadership, community members, and city council members.

In 2005, the city council approved the MOU and three of the five HOAs signed on to this new agreement: Windsor Green, Greenbelt Housing Inc., and Greenwood Village. This new agreement with GHI replaced the now outdated 1987 agreement. Most of the entities that chose not to participate reflect areas in Greenbelt with apartment buildings (where ownership changes hands on a more regular basis).

The council supported the joint-use agreements as a mechanism to increase access to play. With these agreements, seven new playgrounds were opened to the broader community. The long-term nature of the agreements gave the city some insurance on its investment. According to David Moran, assistant city manager, "We were making a substantial investment in the playgrounds so we wanted to make sure that, in return, we had long-term public access to the space." According to Greenbelt Mayor Judith Davis, Greenbelt has a history of "play spaces within vision where a parent could look out the front door or window and keep an eye on a child." Increasing access to playgrounds where every child is within a short walking distance of a playground is consistent with Greenbelt's founding philosophy.

The joint-use agreements increased access to play, but they have also helped to facilitate improvements in the quality of the playgrounds. When the MOUs with the additional HOAs were signed, the city began to make immediate and necessary improvements on the safety standards of these playgrounds. Many did not meet U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission standards, the standard of choice for Greenbelt. According to Derek Thompson,

former president of the Windsor Green Housing Association, the only improvements made to the Windsor Green playgrounds over the past 15 years had been the addition of more wood chips. While the joint-use discussion was in process, the Windsor Green HOA held back on any repairs in anticipation of public funding. When the joint-use agreement was finalized, the city removed some outdated equipment and has since remodeled three of six playgrounds within the boundary of the Windsor Green Homeowners Association.

Public Investment Spurred Private Investment

Public investment in capital improvements for playgrounds has spurred an increase in private investment. In the two decades leading up to the joint-use agreements, Derek Thompson, former president of the Windsor Green HOA, estimates that his community invested a few thousand dollars in its playgrounds. Playgrounds were in disrepair and not frequently used. Of the six playgrounds in Windsor Green, Thompson reports that only a few swings, two roundabouts, and a few spring animals met current industry standards.

Since the joint-use agreements, Thompson estimates that the Windsor Green HOA has invested or is planning to invest upwards of $150,000. The HOA has provided disabled access, improved on the drainage system, and installed benches for parents and grandparents.

According to Thompson, the key motivation behind this investment was an interest in maintaining and further developing the capital asset. While he recognizes the playground's value for this family-oriented community and, in fact, has a niece who benefits from the disabled access facilities, he was primarily interested in investing in a project that would maintain or increase property values.

The community has been able to attract outside investment. Attending a National League of Cities meeting, Councilwoman Leta Mach returned with information on how to apply for playground grants through KaBOOM! and spearheaded a successful application for a $5,000 grant. The grant helped to finance renovation of the South Ora Playground in 2006 and further stimulated public interest in playgrounds.

Community Engagement

According to both city officials and HOA leadership, these joint-use agreements have facilitated closer collaboration and a spirit of partnership between the city and the HOAs. Particularly in the planning and implementation of new projects, the city and HOAs meet regularly to discuss and make decisions on playground designs and implementation. For each new playground build, the city organizes a "Hope to Finish Day" and provides an opportunity for the community to participate in the build process, such as installing rubber mulch. According to Mayor Davis, this spirit of collaboration has always been a part of the "basic philosophy of Greenbelt; the playground agreements gave us an opportunity to form a public-private partnership and build on this tradition."

As playgrounds are completed, the city organizes a launch ceremony. The city publicizes launch events on its municipal access channel and through print flyers, the city newsletter and press releases. According to residents, press coverage helps to raise the profile of new playgrounds. Thompson reports that coverage of the South Ora Playground Launch in the Greenbelt News Review had a positive impact on its usage.

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SUSTAINABILITY

As a cost-effective and tested model, the joint-use agreements in Greenbelt have proven to be sustainable. The initial GHI joint-use agreement provided the template for the 2005 agreement that was offered to all HOAs in Greenbelt. At a marginal cost to the city, Greenbelt was able to provide the broader community with additional playground space, some of which has been significantly enhanced through both public and private investment. In return, the HOAs have well-maintained playgrounds that meet national safety requirements.

According to representatives from the city and the HOAs, two keys to the success of this public-private partnership were careful, upfront planning and citizen engagement. Clearly establishing and detailing responsibility for maintenance was crucial. Involving the broader community in the process helped build ownership and consensus. According to Greenbelt Parks and Grounds Superintendent Lesley Riddle, the collaboration on maintenance and playground development issues has been "easy, productive, and very successful."

The playgrounds have become a focal point of the community. Whether motivated by economic self-interest or a broader interest in expanding access to play space in Greenbelt, these playgrounds have political support. According to Riddle, "The city council is definitive about supporting these play spaces."

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 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 "Hope to Finish" days 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.

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?

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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.

CONTEXT: GREEN SPACE AT A PREMIUM

New York City has very limited green space, with a few exceptions such as Central Park in Manhattan and Prospect Park in Brooklyn. The city's population continues to grow, increasing by over one million people in the past decade. The city planning department estimates that New York will grow by another 15% over the next 20 years.

There is very little space to develop new parks or play areas and the public spaces that are currently available are overcrowded. In 2000, 51 neighborhoods had less than 1.5 acres per 1,000 residents; 97 neighborhoods had more than 1,250 children per playground; and 34 neighborhoods had more than 2,500 children per playground.[35]

THE INITIATIVE: URBAN SOLUTIONS FOR STREETS AS PLAY SPACES

The idea of claiming pavement as public space is not new. For decades, New York citizens have turned to their neighborhood streets for community gatherings, entertainment, and play—from the Police Athletic League's summer play streets beginning in the early 1900s to seasonal block parties in the 1960s and 1970s.

With few open spaces and innumerable apartment complexes, streets became places to play. Street play can be documented back to the early 1900s when the city officially cordoned off certain streets, along with parks, playgrounds, and settlements, for youth summer programs. These street closures were prevalent across the city. Over the past century, traffic and stricter regulations have limited street play.

But in the past five years New York has seen a resurgence of efforts to reclaim paved streets for uses other than cars and trucks. Much of this resurgence is organic and community-based. It has been driven by activists and nonprofit organizations who are tapping into the history of street play, the lack of undeveloped green space, and the increasing awareness of the value of space for communities and children to gather and play. Some groups are motivated by the opportunity for transportation alternatives, such as biking or walking. Some groups are explicitly advocating for more play space. In each case, initiatives to reclaim streets increase opportunities for children to be out playing.

The "Sunnyside of the Block Party" in Sunnyside, Queens. Photography courtesy of Emmanuel Fuentebella.

Population of New York:
8,008,278

Population under 18:
2,153,450

Creating Momentum Through Collaboration

Grassroots advocacy groups have emerged as one of the main public drivers for more family-friendly uses of the city's streets. Working individually and collaboratively, they are developing momentum. Block parties are evidence of this momentum. More than 3,000 block parties were held in 2008. Although advocates report that navigating through the municipal permit process can be a challenge, they are working with city officials to establish a more streamlined and transparent process.

The movement in New York for streets as public spaces for play picked up significant momentum with the launch of the New York City Streets Renaissance campaign. Three organizations collaborated to launch and run this campaign: Project for Public Spaces, Transportation Alternatives, and The Open Planning Project. The goal for the campaign was to promote healthy, vibrant, and playful urban streets.

The three participating organizations each offer unique assets to the campaign. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS), with its planning and design expertise, provides the vision and messaging. Transportation Alternatives (TA) provides on-the-ground advocacy expertise and services, organizing volunteers, staging protests, and engaging communities. The Open Planning Project (TOPP) and its Livable Streets Initiative offer expertise in online social networks and various technology-based mechanisms, such as blogs and videos, to share information, resources, and ideas about promoting innovative uses of neighborhood streets, plazas, and sidewalks.

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The campaign has four stated goals:

• Educate New York citizens about potential city policy proposals that could affect the quality of life of their neighborhood.

• Promote a rebalancing of public space away from private vehicles toward community need.

• Demonstrate to city officials the overwhelming public support of community friendly planning.

• Tap the potential of New Yorkers to re-imagine their own streets and re-claim them for their own use.

While the campaign's primary stated goal is to create a more livable and environmentally friendly city, campaign staff encourage event organizers to focus on child-friendly activities. "Kids are the most guaranteed constituents of closed streets—serving kids serves everybody," says Nathan John, who oversees TA's Block Party Program as part of the NYC Streets Renaissance Campaign.

Block Parties

The city is experiencing a resurgence in block parties. These one-day events range from all-day music festivals to simple communal gatherings. As streets are blocked off, children have access to the space for play. With a $15 permit, block parties are perhaps the most effective way to temporarily adopt public space in the city. There were more than 3,000 block parties held in 2008, up 300 from 2007.

Transportation Alternatives was a catalyst for these block parties. Beginning in 2008, TA awarded mini-grants to low-income groups interested in hosting block parties. Each $300 grant covers the cost of the permit, along with food, drinks, and other supplies. TA provides on the ground support to ensure that events run smoothly. Of the 30 grants awarded last year, most were awarded to neighborhood groups and individuals holding a first-time block party.

In the summer of 2008, Emilia Crotty received a TA mini-grant to host a block party in Sunnyside, Queens. Crotty works for an organization that teaches children how to ride bikes; bike riding became a focus for this block party. In addition to bikes, the community provided jump ropes, sidewalk chalk, and hula hoops, and offered games like life-sized chess. "The chess was actually my favorite part," she says. "At one point there was a whole family playing and it was really great to see them doing something together." Crotty invited the city's Parks and Recreation Department. The park staff brought a "street games" mobile unit to the block party to paint faces and facilitate games. The Fire Department also contributed to the event by opening a fire hydrant for the children to play in the water.

Crotty invited organizations to pass out literature and speak at her event. One speaker was an urban planner. As a result of that informal session, the neighborhood is hoping to get improvements to the sidewalks and streets so that there will be increased neighborhood use. Crotty estimates that up to 200 people came to the Sunnyside block party throughout the day.

Play Streets: Jackson Heights

In 2008, a group of community leaders successfully advocated for a street closure in the Jackson Heights neighborhood. Neighbors were interested in closing off the street next to Travers Park, an area of concrete the size of a football field. The goal was to expand the area of the park to reduce crowding and to increase play space. Transportation Alternatives provided advocacy support to assist Jackson Heights residents in overcoming liability issues and working through the city bureaucracy to secure a permit. The community succeeded in closing down 78th Street every Sunday from June through November.

Jackson Heights is a diverse neighborhood. According to the 2000 census, 64% of its population is foreign born and 26% report speaking English either "not well" or "not at all." Jackson Heights has one of the highest densities of children per acre of green space in New York (3,200 children per park or playground). The district places second-to-last in the amount of green space.

A few dedicated community groups, including the Jackson Heights Green Alliance, the Western Jackson Heights Alliance, and Jackson Beautification Group/Friends of Travers Park, have made Jackson Heights home to the most successful play street in New York since 1914.

Ron Hayduk, a member of the Jackson Heights Green Alliance, reached out to a friend of his in the city Department of Transportation to research street closure policies and process. He discovered that the original play street applications, dating back to 1910, were outdated and not on computer file. Hayduk also encountered some resistance on the part of city officials to issue permits for street closure. A key step in the process was securing the Community Board's support.

While the borough's Community Board initially identified liability and insurance issues as significant obstacles, Transportation Alternatives helped the community groups and the city development an agreement. The Department of Transportation would be liable for safety and maintenance while the neighbors would be responsible for opening and closing the street and maintaining a volunteer presence throughout the closure. This agreement required no actual change in public policy. Advocacy, public support, and historic precedence were key factors to moving the initiative forward.

The Jackson Heights play street provides space for children to play. According to neighbor Ed Westley, there are easily 1,000 people at the park on Sundays and all the children use the play street as an extension of the park. As parent Dudley Stewart says, before the play street there was "nowhere for my son to ride his bike without having to stop every 10 feet."

The success of the play street has attracted the attention of public officials. New York State Assemblyman Jose Peralta attended the street closure and gave away back packs to promote the effort. Stewart, a Community Board Member, play street volunteer, and parent, says he was astounded by the response. "Once the play street started, people came from all walks of life, everyone wanted to help," he said. "People donated money, equipment and just kept asking how they could help."

Despite the strong community and political support for the Jackson Heights play street, the neighbors are struggling to expand the initiative beyond Sundays. The community

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applied to expand the play street to the entire weekend throughout the summer, but this request was denied. A subsequent application for a weekend street closure was also denied. The neighborhood associations are now working with local businesses to develop a more comprehensive plan for presentation to the Department of Transportation.

Transportation Alternatives identified the city permitting process as one of the most significant obstacles to scaling and sustaining play streets. They are advocating with the city for a more uniform and transparent permit process that will benefit Jackson Heights as well as other neighborhood groups that have expressed interest in play streets.

Engaging Youth in Advocacy: Prospect Park

Transportation Alternatives established a youth summer advocacy internship program plan and implemented a youth-led advocacy campaign for a car-free Prospect Park. Prospect Park is one of the largest parks in New York City. There are two paved roads cutting through the park that were open to traffic and particularly dangerous during rush hour.

The youth used a variety of tactics to gather information and build support, including surveys of local residents to assess how neighbors were affected by the car traffic, blogs, and the collection of 10,000 signatures. The youth led a march of park users, along with their school marching band and two City Council members, across the Brooklyn Bridge to City Hall and presented Mayor Bloomberg with a mailbox of signed postcards advocating for the street closure.

In May 2009, the Department of Transportation agreed to close two more of the vehicular entrances to the park, significantly reducing traffic. One of the two closed entrances is located near a playground. Prior to the closure, parents were afraid to use the playground because of its proximity to traffic. The playground is now more accessible. Transportation Alternatives reports observed reductions in speeding near the playground.

Public Awareness: New Media

New media tools are effective tactics for this livable streets advocacy effort. The Open Planning Project utilizes blogs, films, a streetswiki (a community-generated online encyclopedia), and a social networking platform to build public awareness and support.

SCALING UP AND SUSTAINABILITY

The recent growth in the demand for block parties and the success of initial community-driven street closures points to a building movement in New York City to safeguard streets for play. This movement has its roots in early police department play streets, but its resurgence is driven by grassroots organizations and residents committed to more open space and areas for children to play. With more transparent, consistent, and streamlined permit processes, play streets and block parties are a cost effective and replicable way to increase access to play.

The challenge for communities and activists is building sufficient political support to affect clearer municipal systems and procedures for implementing these street closures and then ensuring that procedures and systems are transparent to the public. The permit process, as well as negotiation of details with the Department of Transportation and local Community Boards, are neither streamlined nor consistent across the city's boroughs.

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"We are currently in a position of bartering with the Department of Transportation," says Nathan John, the manager of the NYC Streets Renaissance Campaign. "It's as if our interests are detrimental to those of the city, when we are working to provide amenities to everyone in the neighborhood." He says he and other streets advocates would like the city to create a "functional policy" that would enable expansion of the play streets program.

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 a thousand people a 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.

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CORE FINDINGS

Develop strategic allies. The Project for Public Spaces, the Open Planning Project, the Livable Streets Initiative, and Transportation Alternatives brought unique areas of expertise to a single campaign ona 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 Livable Streets Initiative 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.

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?

PLAY MATTERS

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

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SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA: PARKSCAN
SMARTPHONES IMPROVING PLAYSPACES
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.

CONTEXT: A LACK OF PUBLIC ATTENTION AND SUPPORT

Facing budget cuts in the 1980s and early 1990s, the city of San Francisco significantly reduced its Recreation and Park Department budget. Bond measures in 1987 and 1992 provided some funding for basic improvements, but not enough to renovate the more than 4,000 acres of city parkland.

In 1994 a small group of citizens led by the Sierra Club worked with several city representatives to propose a landscape assessment district of $15 million for capital investments in parks. The district proposal was rejected by the Board of Supervisors. Although some residents and city staff were aware that the park system was underfunded, there wasn't sufficient public attention and support for broad-scale change.

THE INITIATIVE: BUILDING A POLITICALLY ADEPT ORGANIZATION

The movement for improving the city's playgrounds started with San Francisco resident Isabel Wade. An environmental planner and activist, Wade is a highly effective advocate and organizer. She started both a statewide tree planting project and a local tree planting organization in San Francisco, spearheaded the refurbishing of the city's AIDS Memorial Grove, and started a citywide composting project. In the early 1980s Wade founded the local park group, which organized volunteers to do monthly clean-up and maintenance. She worked on the 1994 landscape assessment district effort and, after it failed, wanted to find new ways to build visibility and support for parks in San Francisco.

Creating a Neighborhood Parks Council

Wade launched the Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC) believing that a well organized and strategically directed group could establish political capital with elected officials. She identified neighborhood and "friends of" park groups as key building blocks to developing the coalition. The coalition's role was to advocate for parks at the citywide level, influence changes in the operations of the city's Recreation and Park Department, and provide technical training and resources for its members.

ParkScan facilitates community engagement.

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A key asset for the NPC was Wade's political organizing skill. She created upfront requirements for participation in the NPC to ensure that this group would be, in her words, "activists rather than a coalition of non-profit organizations or society matrons motivated by parties and building campaigns." For participation in the NPC, each park group was required to identify three members who would participate and, ideally, attend each NPC meeting; adopt by-laws to commit to broad (rather than single-issue) park support and advocacy; and submit their contact database to the NPC in order for their members to receive newsletters, hearing notices, and invitations to special events. In return, the NPC provided training to the park groups to help build both their advocacy and fundraising capacity. At the first meeting in 1996, the NPC brought together eight "friends of" groups. From 1998 until 2001, the NPC grew from 8 to 90 park groups.

Engaging Key Stakeholders Early

To build the political strength of the NPC coalition, Wade recruited a steering committee of influential citizens and "leaders in waiting." This team shared a commitment to parks, as either part of their neighborhood association or larger, citywide efforts. The committee included leaders such as Anne Halsted, founder of the city's Open Space Committee, and Jill Fox, who later became the communications coordinator for the city's Department of Children, Youth, and Families. One of the leaders she recruited was Gavin Newsom, a prominent San Francisco business owner. A few months later, the mayor appointed Mr. Newsom to the Board of Supervisors, placing a park advocate within the system.

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The Community Parks Task Force

A key early challenge for the coalition was a lack of information on the scope of the problem—that is, the status of the park system. NPC partnered with SPUR, a planning and research nonprofit in San Francisco, to co-sponsor a community parks task force. The NPC and SPUR selected prominent civic leaders to co-chair the effort, including Supervisor Newsom. For six months, this diverse cross-section of citizens and city officials came together to discuss standards for the city's parks, create a plan to achieve these standards, and outline mechanisms for cross-sector collaboration in implementing the plan. The resulting park plan called for the creation of strategic and operational plans, significant new investment in park capital development, and development of clear maintenance standards.

The "Parks Package" Ballot

The community parks task force helped build awareness of the need for investment in the park system. With the data from the task force, the NPC was able to convince Mayor Willie Brown that it was time for parks to be in the lineup for bond funding.

As a result, the March 2000 election cycle provided an opportunity for residents to vote for a "Parks Package" that provided increased capital for park repairs and renovations as well as funding for maintenance. Proposition A provided neighborhood parks with $110 million. Proposition C provided ongoing funding for operations and mandated a professional planning process (covering strategic, operations, and capital plans) for the first time at the Recreation and Park Department.

In partnership with children's advocates and SPUR, the NPC raised $250,000 to run the campaign to pass the Parks Package. Wade took a leave of absence from NPC to coordinate the outreach and fundraising effort. A key tactic was a series of 14 house parties. Supervisor Newsom played a lead role at the parties, making a case for investment in parks.

The measure required a two-thirds majority of voters to pass. Almost 80% of voters supported the bond measure, overcoming what Wade calls a "50-year hiatus" in investment in city parks.

A subsequent measure put on the ballot by NPC in 2003 (also Proposition C) advanced the Operations Plan by requiring that the city create maintenance standards, issue park maintenance grades, and post the gardeners schedules online.

The San Francisco Park Maintenance Manual lays out what qualifies as a "pass" or "fail" in very specific terms. For example, if sand is used as the playground surface, it must be loose and at least 12 inches deep. According to Colleen Flynn, the NPC stewardship project manager at the time, the city did not have any clear park standards prior to Proposition C. With the maintenance standards requirement, citizen advocates finally had some leverage and an objective baseline against which they could measure performance.

Over the course of these campaigns, the NPC developed key alliances and relationships with the city's political elite. Shortly after the 2000 bond measure passed, the NPC asked the city to appoint a new general manager to implement the overhaul of the park system. The mayor announced his hire at his first meeting with the full NPC coalition, illustrating the group's growing political influence.

Playground Politics: "Park Friendly" Ranking for Candidates

The NPC began to engage in election activity by introducing a park survey for candidates and co-sponsoring debates. In 2000, the city started holding district elections for its Board of Supervisors rather than electing citywide supervisors. Seeing an opportunity, the NPC created a "Park Friendly" ranking for all candidates. Candidates simply needed to thoughtfully fill out a questionnaire to earn the ranking. The NPC partnered with other green-focused organizations to run a series of election debates. In these debates, candidates were asked questions about their park ranking. Since these district elections were won by as few as 1,000 votes, candidates had to engage voters on close-to-home issues, such as parks maintenance, to win. The NPC's visibility during the campaign was effective. Candidates began speaking about park issues on the campaign trail, and new supervisors continued speaking about such issues after the election.

However, despite the new resources, public awareness, elite political support, and growing momentum for parks, real change was slow in coming. The NPC helped to convene monthly meetings with Recreation and Park staff in all 11 districts to address maintenance problems. Despite this regular feed of information on needed improvements, however, the city's responsiveness and rate of change was unacceptable to park advocates.

Increasing Accountability: ParkScan.org

The NPC's assets included heightened public interest and support, strong coalition membership, and the support of some key political elites. But the organization lacked an effective way to mobilize this political support and human capital for public accountability, particularly on maintenance. So NPC developed and launched ParkSan.org, a web portal through which citizens can report, track, and analyze park and playground maintenance issues. The objective, transparent, immediate, and often visual nature of this data significantly improved public accountability for park and playground maintenance. This technology helped identify playgrounds, in particular, as residents' area of greatest concern.

NPC launched ParkScan after receiving a New York City–based Sloan Foundation pilot grant of $400,000 and then a subsequent grant for $1.2 million over four years. When it launched in 2004, ParkScan relied on coalition members, trained by NPC, to use a portable PDA (such as a Blackberry) to monitor and report on the conditions of their neighborhood park. By 2008, NPC modified the system to operate entirely through the web, allowing any resident or public official to report conditions from their home, office, or public computer. All reports are electronically submitted to ParkScan.org and then automatically routed to the responsible city department or staff at the Recreation and Park Department.

In 2009, to further increase accountability of the city for response to reports, the NPC partnered with the city's 311 customer service program, a non-emergency call-in program similar to 911. All ParkScan reports since May 2009 are now directed to the 311 system, which then routes the reports electronically to Recreation and Park or another relevant agency. Most important, 311 staff follow up to ensure the status of all reports—and they have the weight of the mayor's office behind them to get results. On a monthly basis, 311 sends ParkScan all reports from their system. NPC staff follow up directly with Park staff on more complex reports, and, beginning in 2010, both groups will now be making a joint report to the public on the status of all consolidated resident concerns about parks.

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The new partnership increases the efficiency of solving problems. Citizens are able to flag patterns of problems on the ground that are not visible to civic leaders or municipal staff. For example, while a gardener might visit a park weekly, neighbors will spot graffiti immediately. The system also allows the Recreation and Park Department to more efficiently manage citizen feedback and prioritize projects. And city staff has detailed information on problems before they go out to a site, allowing for better prioritization and planning.

ParkScan.org data is objective; photos are often included. A complaint is transparent to anyone who goes on the ParkScan.org site, and progress on complaints can be tracked by the city, the NPC, or any interested citizen. According to Jill Fox, the city's communications coordinator for the Department of Children, Youth, and their Families, ParkScan.org created a "non-threatening way for advocates to approach the city, since the data was unemotional and unbiased; it took an imperfect system and made it effective."

The NPC closely monitors ParkScan.org data, particularly the complaint closure rates. If a report is submitted three times without closure, the NPC directly engages the responsible city staff. In cases where persistent problems exist, the NPC takes responsibility for elevating the complaint, if appropriate, to the media.

The 24th Street mini park in the Mission District offers an effective example of the use of ParkScan. Alfredo Pedroza grew up playing at this inner-city mini park, which was overrun by 2002 with rampant drug use and prostitution. Pedroza, a member of his neighborhood park group, had been advocating unsuccessfully for park officials to take action. He says the Parks and Recreation Department initially denied that the city was responsible for the park and later dismissed the extent of the problem. With ParkScan data, Pedroza says he moved past years of unsuccessful advocacy to the residents "taking back their park." The city suddenly offered prompt engagement and action. Pedroza believes that the concrete data, visual images, and threat of media publicity of data and images were powerful levers.

The "Chronicle Watch"

The San Francisco Chronicle also developed a tool to assist park advocates: "Chronicle Watch." While this opportunity to report problems in the city applies to all aspects of city services, many reports relate to open space. The NPC advises park advocates to use this service when the city fails to respond to a problem over several months. "Chronicle Watch" includes a photo of the general manager of the Park Department, shows how many days a complaint has gone unresolved, provides any supporting visuals, and indicates the responsible member of the Board of Supervisors. This very visible media exposure further strengthens the hand of park advocates in attempting to secure maintenance.

Accountability of Public Officials

To increase accountability of the city agencies responsible for park maintenance, and to engage elected officials in this effort, the NPC began to analyze and broadly distribute ParkScan data by district and Neighborhood Service Area through an annual report. The report synthesizes data by each district and for the city as a whole. Each official can compare their district with others and with citywide trends. Reports are often publicly delivered to supervisors on site in one of their district parks. The NPC continues to distribute these annual reports to the mayor's office, the general manager of the Recreation and Park Department, the Recreation and Park Commission, the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services, and every member of

Based on feedback gathered by ParkScan this playground got a facelift.

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the Board of Supervisors. Each year, the NPC presents the ParkScan report to the mayor at their annual meeting so they can openly and directly discuss the contents of the report, priorities, and progress from the previous year.

SCALING UP

An interesting outcome of mobilizing park advocates, collecting data, and building a movement for parks in San Francisco was the development of strong political support for playgrounds. With both citizen-driven reporting and objective data, playgrounds surfaced as the category of greatest concern; people care deeply for the safety of children at their local playground, and this concern has become a priority issue in the city's park movement. In response, the NPC decided to use ParkScan as a data-collection mechanism and to promote the enforcement of at least minimal safety standards as the foundation for playground improvements.
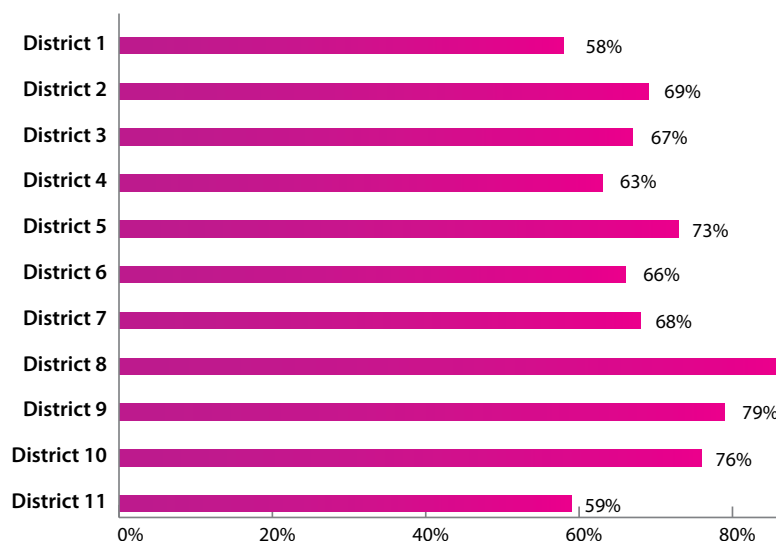
San Francisco Playground Final Grades 2006

A's 25%
B's 27%
Closed 4%
F's 13%
C's 24%
D's 13%
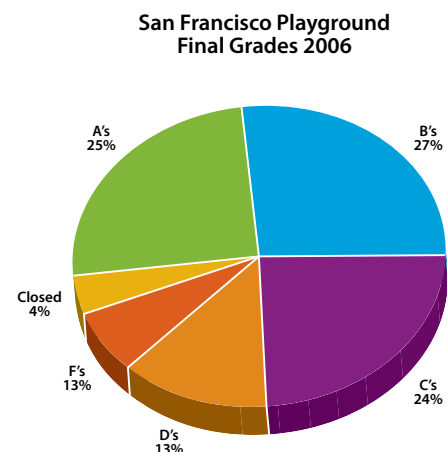
The Playground Report Card

In 2005, roughly 27% of the reports in ParkScan.org were submitted on playgrounds versus other categories (e.g., athletic fields or restrooms). This was the single largest category of reports. In response, the NPC decided to issue a Playground Report Card with the goals of increasing the visibility of playground issues and catalyzing public pressure for action. To implement the new initiative, they mobilized members of the community to inventory and rank the quality of playgrounds across the city.

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To collect data for the report card, the NPC hosted a 2006 Love Your Playground! event at four parks across the city. Volunteers who attended received training on how to conduct a playground survey in their neighborhood. (The survey was based on one developed by the National Program for Playground Safety.) The goal of the initiative was to secure volunteers to conduct playground surveys at each of the 144 Recreation and Parks Department playgrounds in San Francisco. Once those surveys were completed, the data provided baseline information on the state of San Francisco's playgrounds.

District Playground Rates

District	Rate
District 1	58%
District 2	69%
District 3	67%
District 4	63%
District 5	73%
District 6	66%
District 7	68%
District 8	
District 9	79%
District 10	76%
District 11	59%

With playground data from ParkScan.org and the playground survey, the NPC published its first (now bi-annual) Playground Report Card. It provides an A to F rating for each playground in San Francisco and outlines specific requirements for a compliance grade (e.g., an A grade requires that a supporting structure is securely anchored to the ground and equipment fasteners are all tight), what qualities are problematic (e.g., insufficient lighting, splinter risks with equipment, unclosed "S" hooks), and provides visual examples of non-compliance. The first year more than half of San Francisco's playgrounds received an A or B grade. No district scored an A average, and 27 playgrounds were rated D or F.

The data helped the NPC and the Parks Department identify and focus on priorities. They committed to work together to bring the 27 failing D or F playgrounds to at least a C standard, with the NPC organizing playground volunteer workdays to address pressing safety issues and the Parks Department training each of its neighborhood service area managers to become certified playground safety inspectors.

Clear Standards and Data Raise Equity Issues

The Playground Report Card drew public attention to inequities across the city and put pressure on politicians. While San Francisco's playgrounds scored an average grade of 80% or a B in the Playground Assessment, many playgrounds in low-income neighborhoods did not make a passing grade. Most of the 27 failing and unsafe playgrounds were in those

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neighborhoods. Capital investment was needed for these failing D and F playgrounds to replace decades-old equipment that was not compliant with national safety standards and was beyond repair.

Friends of Franklin Square

The Playground Report card was a catalyst for mobilizing neighborhoods, developing strategic partners, and raising financial resources, particularly in underserved neighborhoods.

The Franklin Square Park was rated one of the worst parks in the city. ParkScan.org documented illegal camping, drug trafficking, and prostitution at this forlorn play space. According to David Maltz, who serves on the Friends of Franklin Park Steering Committee, the contractors who later worked on the playground reported to him that they had never seen so many needles. The park was unsafe and unusable for children, and earned an F on the Report Card.

Citizens in the community mobilized behind good marketing, and what Maltz refers to as "old-fashioned arm twisting," to advocate for a new playground. The Friends of Franklin Square secured a partnership with students from the University of California at Davis and the University of San Francisco's landscape design programs to re-envision this park and playground space. Parents in the district then advocated for the playground with their district supervisor while he was running for re-election. Parks and playgrounds were not this supervisor's priority, according to Isabel Wade. But the parents managed to secure $450 to begin to implement the park's redesign. The next year—after showing up at a budget hearing as the supervisor was finalizing budget numbers—they were able to secure $750,000 from the city's general fund to complete the project.

The parents succeeded through smart timing and closely engaging the supervisor on parks issues. This example also illustrates that when citizens mobilize during an election year—or as budget decisions are made— and can speak with a collective voice, they can impact spending priorities.

Leveraging Political Capital to Raise Private Sector Resources for Playgrounds

This political momentum for playground development helped to lay the groundwork for success with private sector capital development. According to Wade, the advocates for playgrounds acted as a collective voice to continue to raise awareness through the press and elected officials. "We didn't let up, we stayed on it," she says. This attention helped to build private sector interest in playgrounds.

Over the past seven years, the NPC has raised $1.93 million for five playgrounds through foundations, individuals, and private donations. The NPC works in partnership with neighborhood groups and Park Department staff to identify playgrounds in need of repair, such as the Franklin Square Playground, and helps to develop the financial capital needed to fund these projects. ParkScan and the Playground Report Card data inform priorities, and then the political capital of the NPC is leveraged to raise financial resources.

Population of San Francisco: 744,041

Population under 18: 107,885

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA: PARKSCAN

Public Investment in Playground Capital Development

San Francisco's park advocates reached a turning point in 2008. After spending 10 years building public support for the city's parks and playgrounds, gaining political capital, and demonstrating effectiveness through the ParkScan.org process, Wade and the NPC decided to advocate for significant additional investment in the city's green space.

The city was anticipating a $200 million budget deficit in 2008, but the mayor introduced and NPC supported the $185 million GO Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks bond. Voters approved the measure by over 70%. The bond directed those resources toward failing playgrounds identified in the Playground Report Card. In addition, 14 new gardeners and 28 custodians were added to the Park Department budget. The staffing boost was largely justified by the ParkScan and Playground Report Card data, underscoring the need for more capital investment and operations staff.

City leaders credit the NPC for being the driving force behind the $185 million GO Clean bond. "It is hard to build and maintain momentum around neighborhood-based priorities," according to the city's director of neighborhood services. "The NPC provided the political muscle behind park bonds to make them happen."

Leveraging Political Capital and Joint-Use Agreements

Elected mayor in 2003, Newsom has proven to be a key ally and champion for parks and playgrounds, supporting the NPC's activities, attending the NPC's annual park gala, and reinforcing parks and playgrounds as one of his main priorities. He participated in the roll out of ParkScan.org, gaining media attention by carrying the NPC's PDA to document problems via ParkScan. According to Dan Holmsey, the mayor's former director of neighborhood services, Mayor Newsom holds his full management team accountable for access to decent and well-maintained parks and playgrounds—he considers these amenities a citizen's right, not a luxury.

Mayor Newsom's commitment to play is demonstrated in his policies. In 2007, the mayor introduced joint-use agreements between the San Francisco Unified School District and the Recreation and Park Department. This joint-use agreement resulted in a pilot project that opened 14 school playgrounds to the local community after normal facility usage hours. Isabel Wade helped to draft the language promoting this joint-use commitment in the mayor's first-term campaign literature.

The key asset for the NPC is its human capital. Wade leveraged neighborhood park groups to build a coalition and provided them with training and support to build capacity. The NPC provides training to coalition members and frequent communication and updates through their website, e-newsletter, and bi-monthly mailings. Since its inception, the NPC has grown from eight to more than 120 park groups with an estimated engagement of 4,000 volunteers per year. This human capital and infrastructure provided Wade and the NPC with the resources necessary to successfully implement mechanisms such as ParkScan and the Playground Report Card. Several hundred people collect data for the Playground Report Card every other year, and ParksScan.org averages 1,600 observations from city residents a year.

The versatility of the ParkScan technology has attracted a diversity of voices to park and playground advocacy. ParkScan is an effective equity mechanism as it provides an

opportunity for citizens with different skills and from different backgrounds—regardless of the neighborhood they may come from or the political connections they may have—to participate and have an equal voice in the political process. The tool evens the playing field by putting every park issue on the same matrix as other city maintenance issues. According to Jill Fox, even one person can make a difference in a neglected park area.

In terms of building political capital, organization by neighborhood and geography was strategic. Citizens can be more meaningfully engaged when the issue is a local and tangible issue, such as their park across the street, and organization by political jurisdiction allows for a stronger leverage with elected officials. The NPC regularly convenes meetings for coalition members with their supervisors and organizes the park and playground data from ParkScan by political jurisdiction.

This human capital, strengthened by greater numbers, diversity, and infrastructure, provided Wade and the NPC with the political capital and platform necessary to raise visibility, awareness, significant financial assets, and political capital for play. According to Holmsey, Wade and the NPC are effectively a "fourth branch of government—she is the identified voice of the neighborhoods when it comes to the ability to play outdoors."

SUSTAINABILITY

Now that the capacity, infrastructure, and systems of the NPC have been developed, the group's playground advocacy work is sustainable. The NPC has developed tools and systems for engaging citizens, for building capacity in neighborhood park groups, and for collaborating with city officials and staff to address both maintenance and capital improvement issues. And, as the NPC has developed its organizing expertise, it has diversified its revenue streams to include fee-for-service activities; the group now consults on tools such as ParkScan.

The ParkScan.org tool itself is both sustainable and replicable. Initial software development and maintenance costs were high. The third iteration of this software is open source and easily updated. The NPC can host and maintain the server and provide basic upgrades of the software for clients at $25,000 per year. This revenue stream helps to finance operational costs in San Francisco.

OUTCOMES

Over 13 years, the NPC 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

Population of San Francisco: 744,041

Population under 18: 107,885

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA: PARKSCAN

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. 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.

Engage key stakeholders early in the process. The early engagement of Mayor Newsom was particularly fortuitous, but Wade actively assessed and engaged up-and-coming political elites across neighborhoods. These stakeholders were crucial to the NPC's early traction and success with political leaders.

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.

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.

Using the press to promote public accountability. Publicity (and the possibility of negative publicity) through the San Francisco Chronicle's "Chronicle Watch" and other articles placed by the NPC gave the NPC traction when pressing city officials and staff to close pending maintenance reports.

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?

Population of San Francisco: 744,041

Population under 18: 107,885

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.

CONTEXT: TRANSFORMING SEATTLE'S PUBLIC HOUSING

The U.S. government developed federal housing projects in the 1940s to accommodate government workers in a postwar economy. In the 1950s, the federal government transferred ownership of housing projects in Seattle to the Seattle Housing Authority and with the explicit purpose of using these facilities to provide housing for low-income families.

The Seattle Housing Authority is a public corporation that develops low-income and affordable housing. The Housing Authority is primarily funded by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). A seven-member Board of Commissioners appointed by the mayor provides oversight for the Housing Authority. Two members of the commission are housing authority residents.

In the mid to late 1990s, the Seattle Housing Authority received two Hope VI Grants as part of a HUD program to transform public housing projects into mixed-income community developments. With these resources, the Seattle Housing Authority re-developed the Rainier Vista and NewHolly neighborhoods in Seattle. Both were former 1940s housing developments.

A key learning from these earlier redevelopment projects was the need for close cross-agency collaboration and community engagement. To implement a full-scale redevelopment project, intended to deliver on a "new urbanism" directive, and to deliver a more pedestrian friendly community, required close cross-sector collaboration, from planning through implementation. It also required the involvement of residents who were living in these communities, since they had a vested interest in the transformation.

Although widely regarded as a successful model for creative partnerships, the NewHolly housing project lacked the full community's engagement at the outset of the project and was not tightly coordinated across participating agencies. Tom Phillips, project manager at the Seattle Housing Authority, says that the NewHolly experience helped to inform the importance of resident participation. A collaborating partner at the Seattle Public Utilities Department, Jim Johnson, reports that the design and building process lacked coordinated effort. The experience was an impetus for agency participants to form an inter-departmental team to work on large scale projects like this going forward.

kaboom.org/bestpractices

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

THE INITIATIVE: CREATING A HEALTHY HIGH POINT

In 2000, the Seattle Housing Authority was awarded a federal grant to revitalize the neighborhood of High Point. The 1940s-era project offered an opportunity to apply the Seattle Housing Authority's experience and expertise from previous housing projects including the NewHolly and Rainier Vista projects.

Located centrally in West Seattle, High Point was cut off from surrounding neighborhoods and amenities due to insufficient public transportation and poor community design. The streets were winding and there were no sidewalks. Children played in the streets—even though there were several car-related injuries every year—since there was little open space to use as an alternative for play. During the 1970s and 1980s, the High Point community saw a steep climb in gangs, drugs, and unemployment rates.

The Seattle Housing Authority received a Hope VI grant of $37.5 million to redevelop this neighborhood. Additionally, it received $12 million in HUD block grants. The Washington State Housing Trust Fund provided $4 million for the project. With these resources, the Seattle Housing Authority was responsible for replacing all 716 public housing units and transforming High Point into a multi-income, intergenerational community.

To raise additional resources, the Seattle Housing Authority sold a portion of the High Point land given to it by the federal government in the 1950s. By 2010 land sales are estimated to generate nearly $72 million for High Point redevelopment.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON: HIGH POINT HOUSING PROJECT

Engaging and Collaborating with Beneficiaries

Learning from NewHolly and other previous re-development projects, the Seattle Housing Authority prioritized community participation from the outset. Phillips, Seattle Housing Authority's project manager, assembled a team of housing authority staff who embraced a democratic approach to community design. The housing authority team developed and then implemented systems to encourage community participation.

The Housing Authority recruited an advisory committee of community leaders to help steer the initial phase. Bonita Blake, a former High Point resident, was a lead member of that team. She says, "Tom and I worked together to get people to come out—we didn't allow people to get discouraged early on because we needed their ideas."

The team held a series of community meetings to solicit input on all aspects of the neighborhood design, including what services and amenities were important to residents. The Seattle Housing Authority held design workshops to discuss these variables. At the time, there were over 10 languages spoken in the neighborhood. Translators were present at key meetings to help ensure full participation in the process.

The voices and perspectives of children were also integrated throughout this process. Workshops tailored to children were held to review design options, particularly those related to play space. Children identified a desire for a swimming pool and other water amenities to keep cool in the summer. One of the landscape architects on the project suggested some modern play equipment. As part of the decision-making process, the housing authority took children from High Point to a playground to give them an opportunity to field test potential play equipment.

After breaking ground in 2003, the Seattle Housing Authority continued to work collaboratively with residents to ensure a smooth transition. Residents who were displaced during construction were offered relocation assistance, residents were given Section 8 housing vouchers and offered housing counseling to assist them in their move. These residents were also given first priority to move back into High Point once the houses were completed. The Housing Authority prioritized building the rental units first so community members who wanted to return were given priority over the potentially new home owners.

Public officials across agencies recognize the high and meaningful level of citizen engagement at High Point. "High Point is such a wonderful philosophy in housing development—listening and receiving the community voice and designing it directly into the model," says Ngozi Oleru of the Seattle and King County Health Department.

Community Engagement Engenders Political Support

Public hearings provided an opportunity for residents to provide feedback to City Council members on planning and zoning decisions, and for Council members to measure public support for pending projects. According to Julie Shaffer at the Seattle Housing Authority, it is common for residents to communicate concerns at these kinds of hearings. With the upfront and collaborative planning process, the 20 residents of High Point who attended the hearing spoke in favor of the plan. As a result, the plans moved ahead without delay and with broad public and political support.

Inter-Departmental Collaboration Creates Open-Space Solutions

In order to manage the construction process, a representative from each city agency involved in High Point formed an inter-departmental team. This team met approximately once a week for the first two years of the project. According to Johnson, the principal engineer from Seattle Public Utilities involved in the High Point project, it was the team's job to solve scheduling difficulties and make sure any departmental conflicts were solved before the project went forward. The team also went regularly to meetings with the private contractors, ensuring that the plans were being followed correctly according to each agency's commitment.

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) became involved in the High Point community project because, according to Johnson, the agency "saw it as an opportunity to do something a little differently." Rather than continue outfitting developments with the standard pipeline drainage systems, which are wasteful and costly, SPU urged the project team to consider a state-of-the-art natural drainage system that doubles as a park.

Working with private designers and the Seattle Housing Authority, SPU developed a drainage system that helped to restore the water quality of the neighboring waterway, Longfellow Creek.

The drainage system is surrounded by a retention pond, with rain gardens and swales next to sidewalks. The park includes a half-mile walking track around the pond and a heritage trail leading down from the pond to Longfellow Creek, encouraging residents to be outdoors. The innovative solution conserves water and also provides an open area and play space for residents.

The Design Model: Promoting Play and a Healthy Outdoor Community

In High Point, every child is within a few steps of an outdoor play space. The prevalence of spaces to play is a distinguishing feature of the community. Every Seattle Housing Authority project has green space and parks, but the prevalence and accessibility of play spaces in High Point is, in part, a reflection of a process that involved the community—particularly its children.

"One of the great things about High Point is the system of open spaces—there is a hierarchy of usable space fitting all needs," says Nancy Rottle, a professor of Urban Planning at the University of Washington who leads a city planning initiative focused on creating more open space across Seattle.

Parks and Playgrounds

While there are parks in other Seattle housing projects, High Point is unique in that there are "pocket parks" on every other block. The pocket parks act as small communal areas in front of groups of rental properties that wouldn't otherwise have front yards. As resident Jamila Bonaya remarks, "I have a playground in front of my house now!"

Pocket parks were designed for children who are too young to go to the playground or some of the larger parks by themselves. These play areas face the units and are designed so parents can be at their front window or on the front porch and watch their children play.

Population of Seattle:
594,210

Population under 18:
103,747

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON: HIGH POINT HOUSING PROJECT

In addition to the pocket parks, this planned community, which covers less than a square mile, also has 14 neighborhood parks and a community park designed to give families a place to gather. The trail circling the pond offers additional opportunities for outdoor recreation.

These easily accessible play spaces are well used. A resident, Mary Paaga, reports, "There are so many kids playing that it actually gets really loud."

High Point has three parks that are yet to be built. As it continues to build out the High Point project, the Seattle Housing Authority is working to identify other opportunities to integrate or adopt functional features of the built environment for play.

In 2007, High Point was awarded $10,000 as a finalist for the 2007 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence. The Seattle Housing Authority chose to use this resource to develop a play structure at Common Park, one of High Point's largest neighborhood parks. According to Shaffer, the decision to use the award for playground development speaks to the agency's support for playgrounds.

Streets and Sidewalks as Designed as Community Spaces

High Point's built environment is designed to encourage social interaction and to promote walking and pedestrian safety. The new design incorporates narrow streets and short blocks designed to encourage walking and slow down cars. There are wide grass and planting strips next to the sidewalks giving pedestrians a wide barricade from cars. The front porches are set closer to the sidewalk to encourage neighbors to interact with one another. Housing that was designed specifically for older residence faces directly across the street from the large neighborhood park, providing easier access for older residents and promoting intergenerational engagement. Ngozi Oleru of the Public Health Department affirms that this design is an effective way to build the "social capital" of a community.

Community Design Promotes Safety

Beginning with the redevelopment of High Point in 2002, there has been a noticeable decline in crime. In 2006, there was an initial spike in incidences as hundreds of people began moving back into the neighborhood. However, the level of crime is substantially lower than crime rates prior to the redevelopment of High Point.

One neighbor credits the built environment with some of these positive changes. The neighbor was concerned about the history of gang violence and traffic accidents but, as he said, "when they finished the streets and put in the parks, it was like a whole new neighborhood."

SCALING UP

High Point has received multiple awards and national recognition for its environmental components, health and wellness focus, and community-oriented design. It was named one of the Best Master-Planned Communities in 2007 by real estate consulting firm RCLCO. High Point won the American Institute of Architects' "Show You're Green" Award, and was one of five projects to receive the 2007 Urban Land Institute's Global Award for Excellence.

WELCOME TO THE **HIGH POINT** NEIGHBORHOOD
Seattle, Washington

NEW HOMES

TOWNHOMES

CONDOS

COMMUNITY

HOME
DIRECTIONS
GET INFO
NEWS & AWARDS
GREEN LIVING EXPO
ZINE
THINGS TO DO
WEST SEATTLE PERSONALITY
ARTS & MUSIC
AT HIGH POINT

Take the Plunge...In a Saltwater Pool

From a heated outdoor saltwater pool to an overnight stay in a rustic cabin, West Seattle's parks offer outdoor enthusiasts a myriad of ways to get out and play.

Discover the neighborhood's many parks, trails and beaches — there is literally something for everyone.

Alki Beach Park
1702 Alki Ave. SW

Picture a perfect summer day, and chances are your thoughts will take you to Alki Beach Park, a long beach strip that runs from Alki Point to Duwamish Head on Elliott Bay. It's a great spot for a 2.5 mile walk

Colman Pool, a heated

A screen capture of the High Point neighborhood website, showcasing the new community.

Population of Seattle:
594,210

Population under 18:
103,747

Community members comment that the Seattle Housing Authority often hosts visitors who are looking to replicate the High Point model elsewhere. "We're like every other neighborhood and, at the same time, like no other neighborhood because everyone's looking at us to see how we turn out," says Andrew Mead, a new homeowner.

Major Crime Totals for Census Tract 107

Number of reported crimes from 1997 to 2007
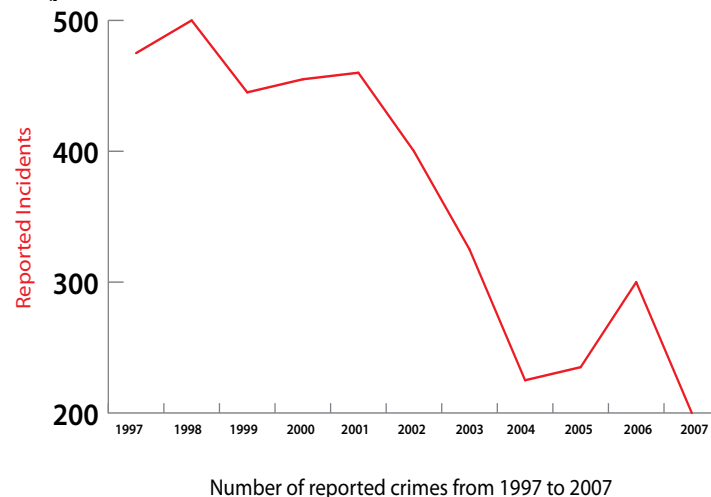
The Seattle Housing Authority intends to replicate and apply the High Point community engagement process and elements of healthy living across future projects. The Housing Authority is currently in the process of designing the Yesler Terrace community. An early step in the process was to form a citizen review committee.

SUSTAINABILITY

High Point's unique design and environmental features require a comprehensive, cross-sector maintenance program. High Point has three essential maintenance providers: the High Point Open Space Association, the Home Owners Association and the Neighborhood Association.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON: HIGH POINT HOUSING PROJECT

The High Point Open Space Association (OSA) was created exclusively for High Point in order to care for the unique design characteristics of the neighborhood. It is an entity that manages the natural drainage landscape, open space, parks and right of way. OSA is funded through the Homeowners Association and through a contractual agreement with Seattle Public Utilities. Seattle Public Utilities contributes $11,000 a year towards maintenance costs. The Open Space Association has an on-site manager and a landscape crew who have been trained to work with the community's unique environmental features. Says Julie Shaffer, "There were a lot of first-time attempts in this neighborhood. It was important to work carefully to maintain this investment."

High Point's Homeowners Association is responsible for neighborhood duties including garbage collection and common area repairs. The Homeowners Association is also responsible for collecting and distributing neighborhood fees. Each home owner pays a monthly base fee. The Seattle Housing Authority, as the owner of the rental homes, is responsible for the monthly assessment for the rental homes.

The High Point Neighborhood Association is equally represented by homeowners and renters. This association participates in neighborhood watch programs and community events. The community also plays a role in maintaining the space. Resident Mary Paaga reports that children in High Point volunteer and do community service every Saturday to help maintain the parks.

The Neighborhood House, a community social services provider, has partnered with 19 other local service providers to build a new community center in High Point. According to Ray Li, development director for Neighborhood House, "There is a different kind of ownership in the community—there is a real sense of pride around the new development."

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.

kaboom.org/bestpractices

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.

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?

Population of Seattle:
594,210

Population under 18:
103,747

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.

CONTEXT: IDENTIFYING A PLAY DEFICIT

St. Petersburg prides itself on its commitment to parks and green spaces. Since 1986, St. Petersburg has been consistently recognized as a "Tree City USA," and they display the sign on the front lawn of city hall. Voters indicated their support for capital improvement investments in parks by approving a 1990 public referendum dubbed "Penny for Pinellas," which increased the sales tax by 1% in Pinellas County. A significant majority passed a second referendum in 2000 to continue this 1% sales tax for another 10 years. According to Cliff Footlick, director of the city's parks department, the strong support for these referendums illustrates public satisfaction with and commitment to investing in the park system. Cliff points to citizen interest in a year-long celebration of the 100th anniversary of St. Petersburg's waterfront parks as further evidence of this pride.

While St. Petersburg excels in preserving and maintaining significant green space, parks and playgrounds were unevenly situated throughout the city. Not all residents enjoyed easy access to green space. In response, Mayor Baker developed and adopted a City Trails Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan in 2001 to link sidewalks and bike facilities to every school, park, and major destination in the city. As part of the City Trails planning process, the mayor also asked city officials to map out parks and green space, including playground space. The mapping surfaced a large inventory of playgrounds. But there were some significant geographical gaps, particularly in underserved communities, where there were no playgrounds. At that time, just 49% of city residents under age 18 lived within a half mile of a playground.

THE INITIATIVE: CREATING ACCESS TO PLAY

In 2001, Mayor Baker introduced his Play 'n' Close to Home playground policy, with the goal of ensuring that every child in St. Petersburg would have a playground within a half mile walk. By creating a clear policy directive, assigning it to a cabinet-level team member, seeking regular staff updates and relaying those updates to elected city officials, personally introducing the policy to each city council member, and promoting the policy in his stump speech, the mayor gave powerful signals to city officials and potential community partners that he was committed to delivering on this policy.

Mayor Rick Baker celebrates another playground opening.

Population of St. Petersburg:
248,232

Population under 18:
39,631

The Key Driver: Mayor Baker

The initiative was, in part, a response to the park and playground mapping exercise, but it also reflected the mayor's priorities and values. Mayor Baker believes that people feel differently about their neighborhood if they have to get into their cars or take a bus to get to a playground. When making his case for this policy, he argued that access to playgrounds within walking distance is a quality of life and civil rights issue.

The mayor branded the Play 'n' Close to Home initiative and designed the logo, regularly drives around neighborhoods to identify potential new playground space, hand-selects playground equipment, gives input on its placement, and attends every playground launch. City officials report that Mayor Baker, at six feet, seven inches, is widely recognized by the city's children as "St. Petersburg's largest kid." His family regularly takes what they call "playground vacations" to visit and test out playgrounds around the country. In the case of the Play 'n' Close to Home initiative, the mayor created a campaign that he could authentically and powerfully promote through his leadership and example.

Building Political Capital

To publicize the initiative, Mayor Baker made it one of the five principles in "The Baker Plan," which he lays out in his standard speech to constituent groups. (The plan also includes education, safety/security, efficiency, and improving neighborhoods.) According to Susan Ajoc, the mayor's current neighborhood partnership director, citizens are aware of the policy and credit the mayor with playground builds in their community.

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

And to build political support on an ongoing basis, the mayor personally briefs every new city council member on the initiative. He gives the full city council an update during their weekly meetings. According to City Councilman Wengay Newton, the playground policy is often on the agenda, as there are usually a few playgrounds in development.

Assigning High-Level Staff to Implementation

The mayor assigned one of his five cabinet members, Deputy Mayor Mike Dove, responsibility for implementation of the policy. Dove had previously been a neighborhood partnership director in St. Petersburg; as a result, he had the experience, skills, and authority to enlist the support of key partners—both inside city hall and out in the community—to deliver on the mayor's playground policy.

The clarity and specificity of the half mile standard helped to focus city resources and staff attention. Dove and the other responsible city staff were keenly aware of the policy, and they were held accountable on a weekly basis to report on progress. Progress updates were reflected on a wall-size map of the city hanging in the mayor's office. The map indicated existing playgrounds and a half mile radius around them.

The city staff charged with implementing the mayor's playground policy are well-spoken advocates for neighborhood playground development. In particular, they describe the social benefits and educational opportunities of neighborhood parks and playgrounds.

The parks director Cliff Footlick, who worked closely with the deputy mayor on implementing the policy, has noticed that "kids are more entertained when they learn to entertain themselves. This is not just about muscle development—playgrounds allow kids to use their imagination to create a fort or a house." He describes playgrounds as a magnet for social interaction. "People will come together around a play structure and socialize in a way that they would not at an open park," he says. "It draws the children in, but it also draws the adults in, including single mothers and grandparents."

Other staff members touch on the equity aspects of playground access. Ajoc says, "Play is an important part of the education process, and we have a responsibility to stand up for children who cannot stand up for themselves."

And Dove notes that playgrounds and parks have become even more important during difficult economic times. He argues that people affected by the recession tend to stay close to home for recreation, turning primarily to their neighborhood parks and playgrounds. Those spaces deserve city investment, he says, especially since "parks are often the only jewel in tougher neighborhoods."

City staff also describe the cost-effectiveness of investing in play spaces. Footlick makes the case that well-maintained playgrounds have an anticipated life span of 20 years, cost an average of $5,000 or less per year, and serve thousands of children across multiple generations.

Funding and Designing the Playgrounds

With these social and community benefits in mind, the city developed eight new playground spaces on public land from 2001 to 2004. The average cost was $75,000 per playground. To

finance the capital expenses, the mayor relied on revenue from the Penny for Pinellas sales tax. As mentioned, Pinellas County residents chose to add an additional penny on the state sales tax in their county for infrastructure expenses. To finance the Play 'n' Close to Home initiative, the mayor directed $500,000 per year from St. Petersburg's share of the Penny for Pinellas sales tax to new playground builds.

These new playgrounds were designed as intergenerational spaces that would serve as social and community hubs for people of all abilities. Careful thought was put into the placement of benches and other facilities to accommodate caregivers. The parks department used equipment that was ADA approved and accessible to all children, including universally accessible pathways, and elevated sand tables and activity panels. According to Barbara Heck, a member of the Council of Neighborhood Associations, these playgrounds pulled the neighborhoods back together. "The playgrounds get people out of their homes and bring out the child in everyone," she says, "no matter what your age is."

It's important to note that Mayor Baker did not encounter any particular opposition to this early investment in playground development. However, a key early challenge was a technical one: a lack of undeveloped space. Since St. Petersburg is 95% developed, land is at a premium. The mayor and his staff were not going to be able to deliver on Play 'n' Close to Home without building collaborations with community partners.

SCALING UP

In order to fulfill the policy mandate of the Play 'n' Close to Home initiative, it was necessary to identify potential playground space beyond city property. School playgrounds were identified as the best opportunity, since they offered undeveloped or dilapidated playground space in areas that were not covered by the city's playground map. Due to liability concerns, however, school grounds were off limits to the community after school hours. Some spaces were used by sports teams and organizations after hours, but an entity with insurance was always responsible, not the general public. Overcoming these liability concerns was the single greatest challenge the mayor and his staff encountered in implementing Play 'n' Close to Home.

The mayor, city council, and school board engaged in discussions for two years before reaching an agreement. Issues of liability, insurance, maintenance, security, and vandalism significantly slowed the negotiation process. In the end, the city and school board agreed to share liability for the school space, with the school responsible during school hours and the parks department responsible after hours. The city would fully fund the playgrounds' creation and maintenance, including proactive inspection on a regular basis.

Mayor Baker was successful in this negotiation, in part, because of his strong track record of building political good will with the school district. According to school board member Mary Brown, the mayor developed strong relationships with school leadership early in his first term, and maintained constant visibility at the schools. Even though education is not within the mayor's purview, he awards high-performing principals and assistant principals with the "Mayor's Top Apple" and has raised $10 million in corporate funds to support 1,000 four-year college scholarships for economically disadvantaged youth.

Mayor Baker says his negotiations with the school district over joint-use agreements succeeded because "people know that I won't go away." He credits his reputation for tenacity—he once took the case for building a new post office to the White House—as the reason the city and school board were able to overcome significant liability concerns. "There is immense power in deciding," he says. "I decided that our city would have a playground within a half mile of every child. I made this a goal and communicated to staff that they needed to make this happen."

Creating the Joint-Use Template: Mount Vernon Elementary School

Once a general agreement was reached with the school district, the city focused on relationship building with the schools and, in particular, with school principals. According to Deputy Mayor Dove, involving the principals was critical because "principals are kings in our city." In the beginning, Dove and an attorney—hired to negotiate terms of liability and agreements with potential partners—spent a year meeting with "anyone who would listen." They found that the "hardest pressed" schools were the most willing to negotiate and work with the city. Fortunately, those schools were often located in areas the mayor had targeted for playground development.

The city selected Mount Vernon Elementary School as the first school site for development. It was selected for several key reasons. First, there was no playground or park located within or near a half mile. There was also no available land for development within a half mile. The school's current play equipment was outdated and unsafe, and 50% of the students were on free or reduced lunch. Also, the neighborhood had previously been populated with more elderly residents, but younger families with school-age children were moving into the neighborhood. The mayor earmarked $80,000 for the site, including equipment, fencing, and gates.

Mount Vernon Principal Valerie White was initially cautious about the proposal, even after it had been approved. To help build support, the city staff engaged Principal White along with the school's physical education teacher, general education teachers, and maintenance staff in the development process. Working together, they chose the playground structures, determined their placement, and set up a maintenance schedule. Meetings to work out the details included White, city staff, school maintenance staff, school board members, and legal representatives. The collaborative process, along with specific design features—including a fence around the school that was closed during school hours and a fence around the playground that was open after school hours—increased White's comfort level with the management issues.

In March 2004, the first joint-use playground opened at Mt. Vernon Elementary School. According to the deputy mayor, White came to see the playground as a strong asset for the school and one that would attract young children as a "choice" school. In the end, she supported public access after school hours, not only to the playground but also to a large open field, baseball diamond, covered shelter, and basketball courts. Under the agreement, the city maintains the 1.6 acres of playground in exchange for public use of the land outside school hours from sunrise to sunset. Neighbors now have access to significant open space and recreational facilities beyond the playground. Mount Vernon's current principal reports that neighbors care about access to this space and use it heavily. In fact, neighbors call her if the gate is not opened to the community after school hours.

A new playground in St. Petersburg.

Population of St. Petersburg:
248,232

Population under 18:
39,631

Using the successful template of Mount Vernon Elementary, the city has since developed further joint-use facilities around the city. "Through joint use facilities, whether they are playgrounds, ball fields, or libraries, we're improving cost efficiency for both the city and the school system," says Mayor Baker. "Many of these new playgrounds enhance school facilities and help meet the goals of plans created by the neighborhoods."

Developing Broader Community Buy-In: Norwood Baptist Church

With a pressing mandate to develop playgrounds within a half mile of every child, city officials continued to survey land around St. Petersburg to identify possible playground space beyond public space and school grounds. For additional land, the city partnered with a number of other non-city groups that own property in the mayor's targeted areas. Partners include St. Petersburg College, commercial property owners, Little League groups, and homeowners associations.

The city created one such partnership with Norwood Baptist Church. Norwood offered an opportunity to develop land beyond city and school board property and in a neighborhood that was underserved regarding playground access. Norwood owned a dirt lot, which served as an overflow parking lot on Sundays but was otherwise infrequently used. It took a year of negotiation to finalize the partnership, which included the development of a lease agreement with the national organization overseeing the church. In return, Norwood gained a new playground that served the youth at its pre-school as well as the broader community.

Similar to their work with the schools, the city staff listened and responded to concerns from key stakeholders and neighbors in the community. After privacy complaints from one neighbor, for example, the city created a six-foot fence around the playground, rather than the standard four-foot fence. Anticipating and responding to neighborhood questions and concerns has been an important part of the city's design and implementation process.

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

With each playground launch, the city worked with the local community to engage their participation. The ribbon cutting at Norwood Baptist Church was held during a festival at the church. It was well attended by church members, along with the mayor, city council members, and city staff. The city helped generate community buzz by sending press releases to local media outlets, and the ribbon cutting was covered by the city-owned local television station.

SUSTAINABILITY

The success of the St. Petersburg playground program was largely due to Mayor Baker's leadership, says Deputy Mayor Mike Dove. But Dove also credits the "creative and dedicated people in the parks department" who refused to listen to reasons why Play 'n' Close to Home would not work. Instead, the staff focused on solutions and sustainability.

The parks department is responsible for the development and proactive maintenance of these playground spaces, regardless of whether or not the playgrounds are on city property. As part of the joint-use agreements, the parks department agreed to send a staff member to each location monthly, rather then relying on people to report problems or file a maintenance request. The cost for this preventive maintenance program, staffed by two people, is $1.6 million per year. The parks department has also asked the police department for its support in patrolling areas where new playgrounds are installed, especially on non-city owned property. Finally, the city asks schools and neighborhoods to take responsibility for watching over their play spaces on a daily basis. With a proactive maintenance system and collaboration with the community, the parks director reports minimal to no complaints or maintenance issues.

To field citizen inquires and complaints, the city has established a web-based Action Center. Citizens can either call or e-mail concerns to the center. According to Ellen McDowell, the administrative support manager for the Action Center, there are very few complaints related to the parks department, perhaps one or two in the last year. She commented that citizens generally contact their local facility with any concerns and the concerns are promptly addressed.

The safety standards and requirements that the city has for playgrounds are much higher than the school district requirements. As a result, the schools save money on liability insurance with the current cost-share relationships with the city. The schools also report a decrease in injuries on schoolyard playgrounds that have been developed and maintained by the city.

One challenge in the care of joint-use school facilities has been turnover in school administration. Parks department staff report that principals who were there for the build of the playground are often more invested in its ongoing care. Principals who weren't the original administrator during a build may need reminders regarding the joint-use agreement and accessibility of the playground to the community after hours. In these cases, the joint-use agreements—which clearly delineate roles and responsibilities—and regular follow-up have been crucial to successfully maintaining both the partnership and the play space.

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.

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.

Population of St. Petersburg: 248,232

Population under 18: 39,631

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

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?

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.

CONTEXT: MORE PLAY SPACES—A CRITICAL NEED

Tucson prides itself on offering a high quality of life for residents. Tucson's Regional Economic Opportunities, Inc. (TREO) acknowledges that individuals and new businesses consider active living and recreation opportunities as factors when assessing a city's quality of life.

Tucson has a park space deficit. The city averages 6.2 acres of park per 1,000 residents, which is about half the national average. It is the nation's lowest ranking city when it comes to available park land among low-population-density cities. At the same time, Tucson's population is steadily increasing. This is especially true in the youth demographic. From 2000 to 2005, there was an increase of 10,000 residents in Tucson under age 18.

The rapid population growth combined with an existing park deficit has led to "a critical need to add to the existing parks and open space," according to the city's Parks and Recreation Ten-Year Strategic Plan. Focusing on this deficit, Tucson set a goal that every resident live within a half mile of a park or play space. The city also agreed to conduct a play space audit to survey available play spaces and determine areas in need of development. The play space goal and audit process were initiated by Annemarie Medina in the mayor's office.

Residents pressed elected officials to develop solutions to this play deficit. School Board Member Bruce Burke recalls community members advocating for access to their local high school tennis court so they could practice on the weekends. Concerned about liability and maintenance issues, school officials told the group—and many other groups—that they would have to find other places to play.

Despite the school's decision to restrict after-hours access, the school's fields and playgrounds were heavily used at nights, on weekends, and during the summer without explicit permission. Burke and his three daughters practiced soccer on their local school's fields on weekends. Roger Pfeuffer, the recently retired superintendent of the city's largest school district, publicly described helping his grandchildren hop their school's playground fence.

Public Officials Respond to Need

Rodney Glassman ran for Tucson City Council in 2007, pledging to work on water conservation and public safety. During his campaign, constituents asked him to create more community-accessible parks and play spaces. He believed that addressing the citywide deficit of safe and accessible green space was an achievable goal and would make Tucson a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

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

Population of Tucson:
486,669

Population under 18:
129,227

Glassman campaigned on a promise to open up schoolyards after hours and during the summer. "The whole idea of having our neighborhood schoolyards locked was foreign to me until I moved to Tucson," he says. "We're recapturing our neighborhoods for our kids."

Before running for office, Glassman had worked as a legislative aide for Arizona Rep. Raúl Grijalva. He was connected to numerous political stakeholders in Tucson. Glassman ran for city council with the unanimous support of the Tucson Unified School District School Board. The board became a key ally in his efforts to expand playground access in his district and throughout the city.

THE INITIATIVE: PARTNERING TO PROACTIVELY ADDRESS THE DEFICIT

Once elected, Councilman Glassman began working on his campaign commitment to develop new park and play space. "This is something people were talking about for years and years," he says. "We were finally able to move it forward because the city council and school board were both committed and because someone was willing to champion it."

Glassman asked his staff to assess the available parks and play spaces that were fully accessible to his Ward 2 constituents. The assessment surfaced neighborhood schools as an opportunity. Almost all of the schools had fields, multiple playground structures and were in the middle of residential communities. These properties were inaccessible to the public as they were fenced, gated, and locked after school hours. "We have over 100 elementary, middle, and high school campuses with grass fields—but they're surrounded by chain link fences and closed after 3 p.m., on weekends, and all summer long," says Glassman. "My goal was to leverage the community resources that already existed and provide the opportunity for neighbors to enjoy them." He presented the idea of creating joint-use agreements between the city and Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) to open these spaces to the community after school hours.

TUCSON, ARIZONA: SHARING PLAY SPACE AND RESPONSIBILITY

The greater Tucson area is serviced by 14 autonomous school districts. Each has its own school board, superintendent, budget, and priorities. TUSD is the largest district in the region, with more than 100 schools serving over 60,000 students. Councilman Glassman selected TUSD because of its size as well as his strong relationships with its school board members.

In presenting the concept publicly, Glassman made a number of compelling arguments for the joint-use agreements. Children aren't just students, he said, they are members of the neighborhood and should have access to these playgrounds and fields. Secondly, he argued that this approach would create safer neighborhoods by encouraging a visible public presence in these areas at night and on weekends. Lastly, he argued that opening these spaces served a very basic need: increasing Tucson's open park space.

"There was simply no other way of opening numerous safe and accessible neighborhood playgrounds this quickly and at such little cost to the city," says Glassman.

With the encouragement of elected officials, city and school staff worked together to create community green spaces for children and families. Individuals involved in early discussions included TUSD Superintendent Roger Pfeuffer, City Attorney Mike Rankin, and Parks and Recreation Department Director Fred Gray, as well as Jim Conroy, the parks department administrator responsible for Ward 2.

Negotiation of Joint-Use Agreement

The parks department has a long track record of forming joint-use agreements with all 14 school districts. But all previous agreements were for specific construction projects or improvements, according to Director Gray. "Those usually involved joint funding or one party providing the land and the other providing capital funding," he says. Elected officials were promoting a new type of agreement that would open up 12 existing play spaces for after school and summer use.

Under the plan, TUSD would continue to be responsible for maintenance and upgrade costs at all school playgrounds and fields throughout the school year. The city would then take over maintenance and equipment costs during summer months when school was not in session. In exchange, the schools would open gates or take down fences and make these spaces available to the public after school hours and on weekends.

"The additional sites expand the opportunities without significant capital investment," says Gray. "The benefits are increased opportunities for the general public to utilize additional playgrounds and school grounds for leisure and play."

The upfront expenses were minimal. "There were some minor repairs to some of the playgrounds, some additional playground surfacing added," says Gray. "Some of the athletic playing field surfaces needed to be smoothed out and we absorbed the costs of chemical applications for pre-emergent." He estimates that adding the sites to summer maintenance responsibilities cost about $4,000 per schoolyard.

Safety, Liability, and Community Issues

Some parents and school administrators were initially concerned that removing barriers to playgrounds would increase loitering, graffiti, vandalism, underage drinking on school grounds, and people not picking up after their dogs in areas used by children.

Superintendent Pfeuffer tried to allay these concerns by pointing out that people who wanted to get into the fenced areas would find a way to do so. He argued that it is the presence of people that reduces crime and vandalism after hours, not fences.

"TUSD had some concerns about the potential for increased vandalism, which had not been an issue to date," says Gray.

Ultimately, the School Board unanimously supported the agreement. "It was good community relations," says Bruce Burke, TUSD board member. "It was an opportunity to share with the community an asset we have across the city."

City staff and TUSD asked the Tucson Police Department to do special checks on each schoolyard covered by a joint-use agreement. The police agreed, and their role was written into a memorandum of understanding (MOU). Barring any emergency, each school covered by a joint-use agreement would receive a police patrol and drive by on a regularly scheduled basis. This arrangement for additional law enforcement support helped with community buy in.

The other concern was one of liability. With a disparity between TUSD and city safety standards, the city agreed to pay for any equipment upgrades needed to bring schools into compliance with the city's higher safety standards. Liability would rest with whichever entity was in charge of maintenance at the time. TUSD was responsible for liability issues during the school year while the parks department handled liability issues during the summer. "Liability issues could surface," acknowledges Gray, "but both agencies are self-insured and the agreement calls for joint indemnification."

Some neighbors expressed concern about proposed new night lighting in these playgrounds. Neighbors felt that the additional lighting could cause light pollution in their homes and be disruptive. After listening to the community's feedback, city officials and TUSD representatives decided not to install nighttime lights and to rely, instead, on police surveillance.

After working through all the legal questions and other concerns, including those from TUSD, parents, community members, city staff and officials, and the police, the city attorney helped the parties form an intergovernmental agreement in the form of a MOU.

Implementation Success

Once the agreement was in place, the city and TUSD identified schools for inclusion. TUSD is responsible for approximately 75 elementary schools throughout the city. The school board and superintendent aspired to create an agreement to benefit constituents across the city. However, with budget limitations, the joint-use agreements were limited to 12 school sites, two TUSD elementary schools in each of the city's six wards.

"We wanted to select schools that would make a difference for our neighborhoods," says Glassman. The parks department and TUSD selected schools that were furthest from other parks and playgrounds.

Opening of Schoolyards

In June of 2008, 12 neighborhood elementary schoolyards opened for the summer season. According to Glassman, "There was big excitement from the kids that their neighborhood school had become their neighborhood park. It sends the right message."

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According to school officials, these playgrounds are well-used after school hours. Bloom Elementary School Principal Diane Quevedo reports at least 30 people use the playground every evening at Bloom Elementary. Little League teams use the fields, while families with young children use the play equipment. In the mornings, elderly members of the community use the space for walking.

Community members are now taking greater ownership over maintenance and security. "They're looking out for us now, taking care of us," says Principal Quevedo, pointing to one recent incident. "We had 21 windows broken in the back of the school. A woman walking her dog brought it to the attention of police early on a Saturday. If the gates had been locked, she wouldn't have been walking in the area and it wouldn't have been noticed until Monday morning."

Promoting the Newly Opened Parks

Elected officials, parks department staff, and TUSD employees worked together to publicize these agreements and the newly available play space. Mayor Robert E. Walkup provided funding for signs that could be posted at each of the 12 school sites. Tucson's public television channel broadcast announcements that the gates were coming down. Press releases in local newspapers generated earned media, and the city paid for some newspaper advertising.

At each participating school, there was a ribbon cutting ceremony to officially open the playground. At Bloom Elementary, Principal Quevedo reports that the celebration drew about 450 people, including students, community members, city council members, outgoing school superintendent Roger Pfeiffer, and new superintendent Elizabeth Fagan.

Initial results

By all accounts, the school grounds are well-used by the community and there has been a reduction in vandalism. The increase in police surveillance is likely a factor, but school officials and city staff attribute higher usage rates to less vandalism. According to Annemarie Medina, the mayor's constituent advocate, "When the playgrounds were locked up and infrequently used, kids were sneaking in and that's when they would do the damage." Medina says, "Now, knowing anyone can walk in at any time, they must be afraid of getting caught if they are doing something wrong, so they don't do it. That was a nice by-product of the joint-use agreements!"

SUSTAINABILITY

The longevity of this joint-use agreement was built into its design. The agreements themselves have a 75-year-long statute. For the next 75 years the Tucson Unified School District and the City of Tucson will share in maintenance and equipment upgrade costs along with liability coverage.

There is widespread support on both the city council and the school board to open additional playgrounds until every school campus is open. Mayor Walkup calls the arrangement a "worthy investment" and says he would support future expansion. However, Arizona was particularly hard hit by the recession, and the city is looking at 20% budget cuts. As a result, there are no funds available to open additional school playgrounds at this time.

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 schoolyards.

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, 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, 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 school ground 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.

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?

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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.

kaboom.org/bestpractices

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

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.

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.
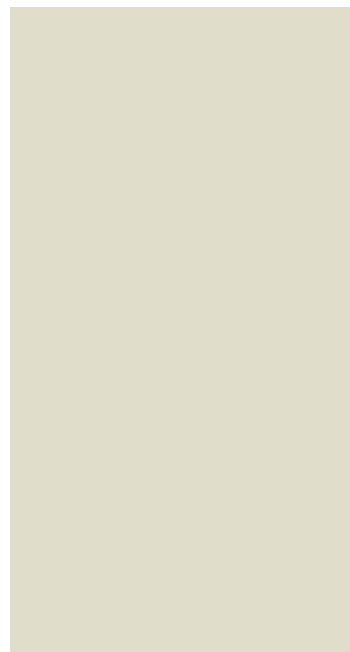
SUBSTANTIATE AND STRENGTHEN YOUR ARGUMENTS WITH DATA

Objective data, identifying a need and/or illustrating positive results of a model, strengthen your arguments, provide a baseline to informs 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:

- 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 promotes the playgrounds, posting signs in the neighborhood.

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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.

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:

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.
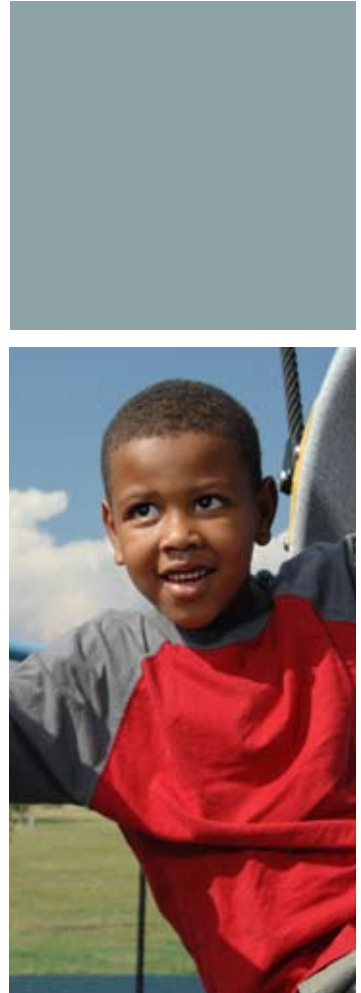
PLAY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
PLAY MATTERS

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	• 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	• 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 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	• 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)

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)

kaboom.org/bestpractices

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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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".

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

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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."

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"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."

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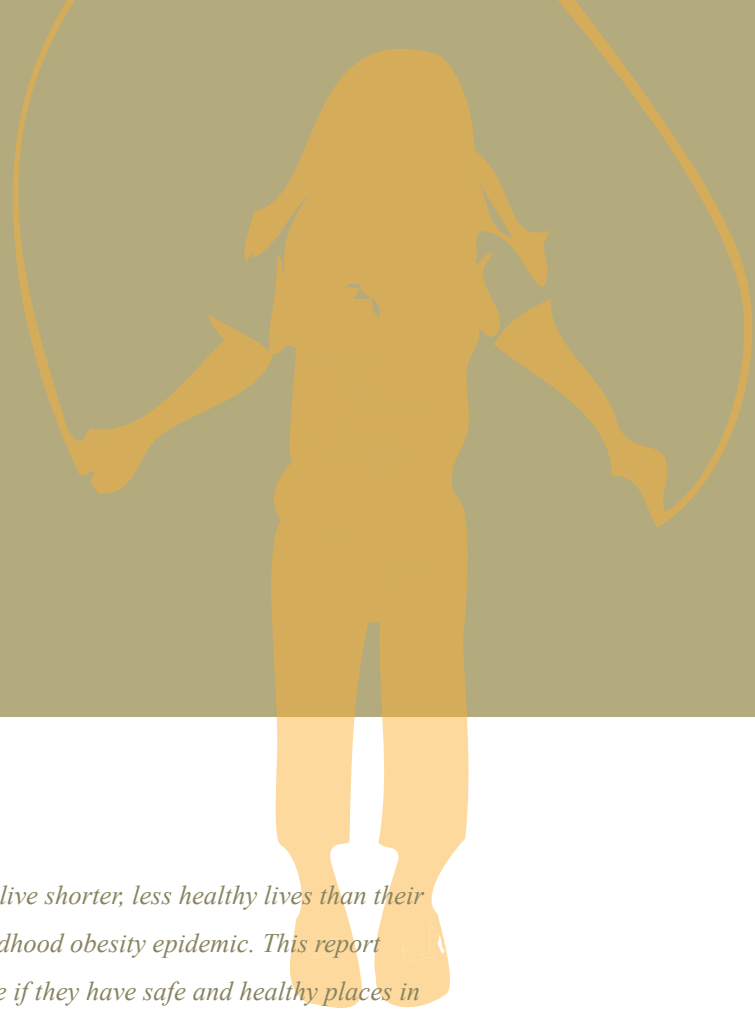
"Today's children could be the first in U.S. history to live shorter, less healthy lives than their parents, unless we take action to turn around the childhood obesity epidemic. This report identifies initiatives that show kids will be more active if they have safe and healthy places in their communities 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."

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"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."

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