



Building A Movement for Safe & Healthy Play

Playworks National Strategic Plan
2016-2020



PLAYWORKS

BUILDING A MOVEMENT FOR PLAY

Playworks has significantly changed the way children are playing and how the adults in their school communities see play as important to their own efforts to give children a real opportunity to grow and learn.

And now Playworks aspires to more.

We want to accelerate impact through multiple tiers of strategies all aimed at changing the education system so that every elementary-age child experiences safe and healthy play every day at school.

Key beliefs and insights are at the core of this plan:

The time for play has come. For 20 years we have been showing what play can do for children. Similarly, for more than 20 years the social/emotional learning movement has been demonstrating the value of these skills. And most recently, the education sector is expanding its understanding of how children learn and what they need to learn. This confluence of movements creates an unprecedented opportunity, and Playworks is ready to leverage that confluence for explosive growth in impact.

Playworks' core competency in play – with both children and adults - is critical to our success. Our competency in play with *children* isn't the only driver of impact. We engage adults in play and in learning how to play with children so that they can model and teach the social/emotional skills children need. School climate changes as a result, but only because the interactions between adults and children have changed. We enable children to be surrounded by an ever-growing circle of adults who are contributing to their social/emotional development. If we are to reach every kid, we must add *new* ways of giving *more* adults this experience and these skills, *faster* and *deeper* into communities that have yet to experience the power of play.

Growing current services – Coach, TeamUp and Pro – is a significant driver of impact. We must demonstrate impact in more and more districts, and we must use stories from these schools as bright spots to inspire others to join the movement. This is the base from which new paths toward impact will emerge.

Making it easy for schools to get on the path will also be a significant driver of impact. We can offer many other entry points for schools: bite-size online training modules, open-enrollment “Playshop” trainings where any individual can learn Playworks' ways, or a stand-alone Junior Coach program toolkit. If we tap the motivation many adults in schools have to make more play happen (that we believe exists based on tracking social media), we can get schools to begin to provide more safe and healthy play for more children. This will build a social movement with momentum unto itself.

Collaborators can exponentially amplify Playworks’ impact. We have already seen how safe and healthy play can be inspired and led by AmeriCorps members at other youth-serving nonprofit organizations. What if every AmeriCorps program that works with elementary-age children incorporated Playworks’ innovation into their services? What if Encore talent provided human capital to spread play to more schools? What if Playworks figured out how to transfer our knowledge and inspiration with fidelity to a wider and wider community of play makers, all the while offering tools, resources, support and connection to each other?

Playworks will continue to be a learning organization, experimenting and improving as we go. Our willingness to see and embrace new opportunities has enabled our strategy to evolve, quickly and repeatedly. TeamUp is an example of how Playworks has quickly increased impact because we were willing to try something new. We will continue to bring discipline to experimentation so that we can rapidly learn and refine new paths to the end goal of “every kid.”



THE PLAN: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Playworks proposes to expand its innovative approach to developing safe, healthy and happy children through play to more than 7,000 elementary schools and 3.5 million children by December 2020.

Playworks has been developing social/emotional skills in elementary-age children for 20 years. We are the leading national organization focused on play during the school day and its potential for bringing out the best in every child. Our innovation has spread across the country with enormous momentum from word-of-mouth among teachers, principals and parents.

Why Play?

Effective teaching and learning are extremely complex activities that rely on a web of factors. Many education improvement efforts focus on teacher skills, such as relaying new information, building student skills in sequence and creating opportunities to demonstrate mastery. These efforts are primarily classroom-based and cognitive in nature, and they are critical to the goal.

Yet a new, promising trend has emerged in education that offers additional levers for change. This trend recognizes our ability to affect other influences that can improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning in a school. They include children's natural curiosity, teachers' rapport, children's capacity to take in new information and their emotional engagement.

This trend has been labeled many things: social/emotional learning, character development, non-cognitive skills, student engagement, school climate and school culture. The common thread is the recognition that how children (and their teachers) feel and interact with each other in school has a direct and measurable impact on the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning, in both the immediate moment and the long-term.

For us at Playworks, the relatively recent spotlight on the value of social/emotional learning is a validation of our innovation and its impact for children.

Academic researchers have, for decades, lauded the extraordinary importance of play in childhood to develop the ability to interact with others and to learn. Play is a natural vehicle for encouraging and developing the competencies the youth development and education fields have now labeled as critical to healthy child development, things like self-awareness, self-control, empathy, social awareness and conflict resolution.

Playworks has demonstrated in thousands of schools that play is a powerful and ubiquitous opportunity to develop social/emotional skills in children. Our success goes beyond simply providing well-trained young adults and a proven curriculum to schools. Playworks has developed new skills in tens of thousands of youth workers, teachers, principals, parents and other school staff so they can develop positive social behaviors in the children they work with each day.

Playworks has been evaluated with a randomized control trial that determined our innovative approach to integrating play throughout the school day has statistically significant impacts on bullying, vigorous physical activity, transitions from play to classroom instruction and sense of safety. Subsequent evaluations have found impact on attendance and student engagement.

So if we have known and been demonstrating how play can contribute to children's social development and the education sector is now valuing this strategy, isn't the trend going the way we want on its own? Why is bold action even necessary?

Old ideas do not give way to new innovations easily. America's long-standing narrative connecting serious hard work and diligent effort to individual success does not easily embrace play as a means, much less an imperative. As the education sector shifts to embrace a broader definition of success – engaged learners across all schools and all children – Playworks has a unique contribution to make to the constellation of effective innovations available to make that vision a reality.

We believe play is critical. Children must learn and develop through play and in school environments that recognize and cultivate positive interactions among students and adults. This need simply cannot be fulfilled with cognitive skill development alone.

And this innovation needs more than a friendly trend for it to take root in a systemic way.

Powered by Playworks

Over the past 20 years Playworks has built a foundation for driving systems change and a significant network of schools to serve as proof points for the impact of its innovation. In that time, more than 3,000 schools have experienced Playworks, either by having a full-time Playworks coach on site for a full school year or more or by receiving professional development training from Playworks for school staff. In the 2015-16 school year Playworks served more than 1,300 schools and 700,000 children.

Specifically, Playworks has been focused on a path to scale that was designed with three overlapping phases: **Flagship**, **Broad Adoption**, and **Movement Building**. The **Flagship** phase was intended to spread our full-time direct-service model (now called Playworks Coach) in elementary schools as an initial proof point that play and recess were important and overlooked tools for developing social/emotional skills and a healthy school climate. Our training services (now called Playworks Pro) drive the **Broad Adoption** strategy, creating an opportunity for a broader reach and larger number of adults in schools to develop their own internal capacity to incorporate Playworks' principles. Playworks trains teachers and other staff in schools and other youth-serving organizations so they can adopt our approaches into their own programs. Training also enables us to bridge the traditional challenge faced by many education improvement efforts based only in low-income schools. Because training is 100% earned income, Playworks makes it available to schools of all income levels, thus broadening the impact to children throughout our communities. With the advent of the **Movement Building** phase of our strategy, we are now beginning the final phase of our scaling work, and with this comes an important shift in emphasis.

While the success in growth of our Coach and Pro services was measured by the numbers of schools directly served by Playworks, measuring success in this new phase requires focusing broadly on the number of schools where safe and healthy play is a lasting part of the school day, whether that transformation comes from Playworks direct services or our inspiration.

The Powered by Playworks Strategy: 2016-20

Expanding our definition of success to lasting impact in schools requires that we shift how we operate as well. Playworks has a foundation of practice, proof and advocates in communities across the country. What we need now are new channels to spread the innovation to more schools faster and new tools that support schools and districts in embracing the innovation with lasting impact.

The Powered by Playworks Strategy relies on three primary efforts:

1. Growing **current** Playworks services to more schools nationwide
2. Developing **new** channels for delivering Playworks' innovation to schools
3. Building a **movement** for safe and healthy play that inspires schools to invest time and resources to make more play happen

Specifically Playworks is working on the following priority areas to grow Pro services and develop new channels:

Demonstrate and Inspire Safe and Healthy Play: Establish a baseline definition of “safe and healthy play” that shows through video and words what it actually looks like in its most basic building blocks, and then communicate this definition to schools.

Establish a Safe and Healthy Play Pledge: Invite schools to join the movement by taking a first step via a pledge that spells out actions they can take to provide safe and healthy play. Use this new relationship with Playworks to share resources, tools and stories of successful schools.

Scale Recent Adaptation called “TeamUp”: This service is based on the successful Coach program. TeamUp assigns one experienced Playworks coach to four schools for one school year to model Playworks innovation on the playground at each school one week per month, inspire and teach each school's Recess Team to lead Playworks on their own and influence school culture to incorporate Playworks' unique approach to engaging children so it will last into the future.

Embed Social/Emotional Learning in Partner Schools: Work with the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence to build into Playworks' staff training a more comprehensive implementation of social/emotional skill development. Collaborate with Transforming Education to capture Playworks impact on SEL with measures that can be replicated across all “safe and healthy play” schools.

Expand Junior Coach Programs Beyond Existing Schools: Significantly expand the Junior Coach program to all TeamUp schools and through a new Pro training that enables schools to implement the program. We will also pilot test a stand-alone Junior Coach program that could be managed in schools. The goal is to inspire hundreds of new schools to partner with Playworks and significantly expand social/emotional skill development to thousands more children.

Develop District Partnerships and Consulting Services: Design consultative services specifically for district-level personnel and school staff who are charged with implementing and maintaining Playworks’ innovation district-wide over time.

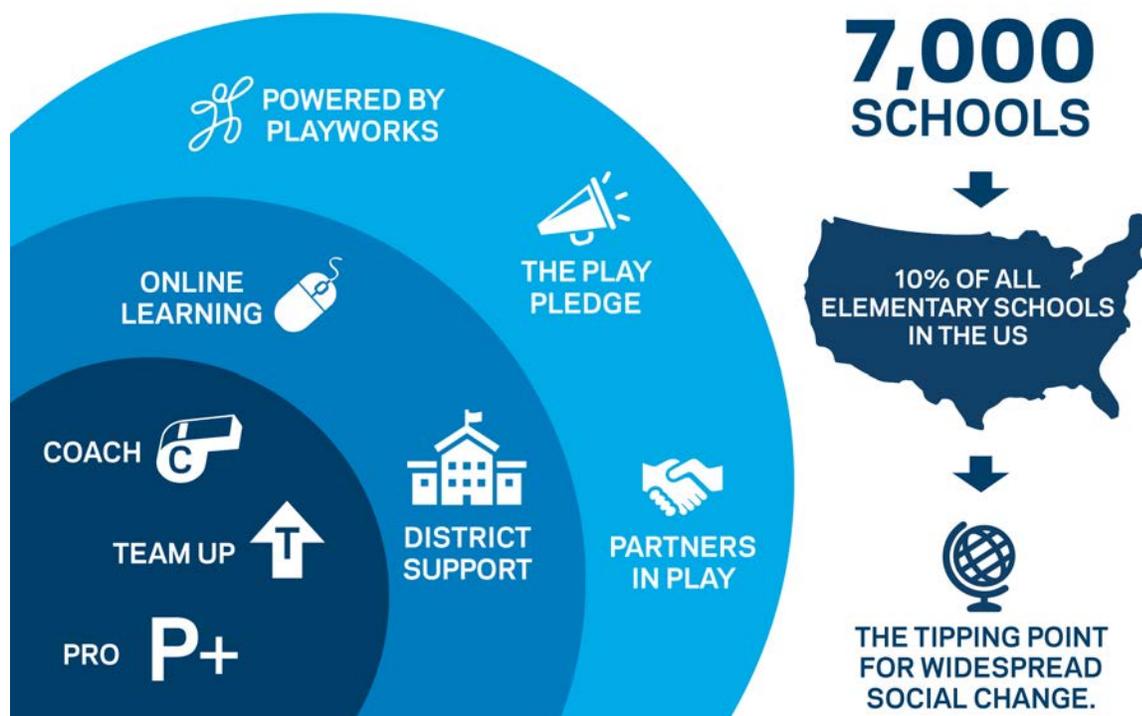
Establish Great Recess Standard: Encourage the adoption of a high standard for how play can directly contribute to children’s development and learning by demonstrating concretely what a great recess looks like. This includes how adults are guiding and how children are interacting when play is being used effectively.

Create “Powered by Playworks Certification:” Using the Great Recess Standard as a baseline, reward schools that meet the standard with public recognition of their efforts to provide safe and healthy play, and encourage schools to promote this certification to current and prospective families and staff.

Develop Digital Resources: Offer all schools access to inspiration and concrete support they need to implement great recess. Strategies include digitally-delivered training and professional development, a community of like-minded educators and families and access to safe and healthy play experts.

Form New Partnerships: Collaborate with other nonprofit organizations, associations and corporations to share Playworks’ innovative approach and resources so these partners can increase safe and healthy play through their own networks.

Deliver a Call to Action: Design a mass communications campaign about the power of play to inspire families, teachers, and principals to join the movement. Develop a web portal that offers resources to those who want to take action, connect users to other partners in the movement, and highlights stories of impact across the country.



We project that through these combined efforts, Playworks will reach its 2020 goal as follows:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Coach	365	339	400	460	500
TeamUp	136	308	420	560	750
Pro	800	1,050	1,300	1,700	2,500
Digital Services	0	50	100	300	1,000
Powered by Playworks Certification	0	50	200	500	1,000
Partners & Movement	0	200	400	800	1,250
TOTAL	1,301	1,997	2,820	4,320	7,000
<i>Children Served</i>	<i>700K</i>	<i>1M</i>	<i>1.4M</i>	<i>2.2M</i>	<i>3.5M</i>

We are extremely excited about the potential for this plan to impact 3.5 million children and the adults who teach them in 7,000 schools across the country. That represents 10% of US elementary schools. We believe this is a critical milestone that will become a tipping point for changing the educational system.

We are confident Playworks has the capacity to successfully execute this plan, and we are eager to get started. The momentum among our regional teams is already growing as we, together, imagine a world where every child gets to play every day.

