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PLAY has become a 4-letter-word. Yet, the science is clear. Free play and playful learning are related to better physical and mental health. Play fosters the creative innovation that will keep America in the forefront of the 21st Century economy. And playful learning is related to better outcomes in social and academic ability – in reading, spatial learning and mathematics.

The **Ultimate Block Party (UBP)** is a movement founded by leading scientists, non-profit organizations and corporations to put play back into children's homes and schools. Our goals are nothing less than

- To demonstrate value of play in healthy child development and education.
- To expose the science behind the fun
- To activate a change in lifestyle and play/learning patterns

The inaugural event will be held in Central Park in New York City on Sunday, October 3rd, 2010. In an unprecedented collaboration, NYC Parks and Recreation will open its lawns, playgrounds and fields to celebrate the promise of play. To underscore how free play and playful learning build skills central to the workplace of tomorrow, we are also creating rich communications and outreach through the media, web portals, interactive web-sites, brochures and pre-and-post event workshops. Families with children from 0 to 12 years are invited to experience 25 fun activities all inspired from the science of learning and coupled with mini-master classes featuring leading architects, musicians, artists, CEOs and engineers from around the City.

UBP will be an annual NYC event. There is interest in replicating UBP in other U.S. cities like Dallas, Chicago and San Francisco as well internationally. Amsterdam will be hosting a UBP in January of 2011.

Why now? Play is a rapidly diminishing commodity for today's children. In 1981, 40% of children's time was spent in play. By 1997 that number had shrunk to 25% (Chua-Eoan, 1999). Today, 30,000 schools in the United States have eliminated recess to make time for more academic study (Elkind, 2009)-- despite scientific findings that link recess to higher levels of attention and learning. The decline of playtime has been called a crisis by the American Academy of Pediatrics. It has also sparked real concern from child psychologists who worry that a lack of playtime compromises the next generation's academic, physical, and social-emotional health (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009).

This emphasis on the power of play is imperative as we look forward to the future of children today in the 21st Century world. As the world has changed, so too have the skill sets needed to

succeed. The problem of how we raise and educate our children poses a looming crisis that is much like an educational global warming. We know how to engage young children and to create life long, creative learners. But **we need to use what we know in our homes and classrooms now to reap the benefits 20 years from now.** Harnessing play and playful learning is an important step in the right direction.

Why you? Join the scientific community in our grass roots effort to raise visibility for this issue. We need your networking and financial support to foster the best outcomes for all children so that each can reach his or her potential, so that we can give play back to children, change the way we think about how children learn (in ways consistent with the evidence) and can shape social and educational policy.