



The Case for Play: Get the Facts

Play is serious business. From blocks to architecture, scribbling to fine art, sandbox to boardroom, many of the important skills that prepare young people for a successful future in the workplace originate in the playground. But, unfortunately, free play time is increasingly absent from or in short supply on the activity lists of today's overscheduled kids. This situation is leading to a growing crisis for the future innovation that will help keep America in the forefront of the 21st Century global economy. To help reverse this trend, a prominent group of leading educators, business leaders, authors and researchers formed **Play for Tomorrow** in 2009, a consortium dedicated to shedding light on the crucial role of play in children's development and education. Their international campaign launches with the **Ultimate Block Party**, which aims to bring playful learning back to the forefront. On October 3, 2010, the Bandshell area of New York's Central Park will become the main stage in an international event for families, educators and public figures to explore the real power of play with top architects, scientists, engineers, artists and inventors. And the **Ultimate Block Party** is just the beginning!

The statistics underscore why the **Ultimate Block Party** is such an important step and how the overwhelming lack of playtime has become a real national predicament with alarming, far-reaching implications:

The Play Crisis

- In a recent report, 25% of kindergarten teachers surveyed said they had no time at all for free play in their classrooms. Rather, most class time is devoted to teaching literacy and math, and to test prep (Alliance for Childhood report *Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School*, 2009).
- In the last two decades, children have lost an average of eight hours of free play a week. The American Academy of Pediatrics calls the decline of playtime "a national crisis."
- Schools across the U.S. have eliminated recess. Researcher Anthony Pellegrini has found that kids who miss recess the most are disadvantaged children who, ironically, need to learn the most to catch up to their more advantaged peers (*The New York Times*, 2009).
- 40 million elementary school children will have no arts or music training in their schools this year (NPR, 2009).
- 50% of children have no art training in 8th grade (NEA Report Card, 2008).
- Only 36% of children meet doctors' recommendations for physical activity (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation report *Recess Rules*, 2007).
- Children ages 8-17 now spend an average of eight hours a day in media-based activities, up dramatically from five years ago (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010).

Why Play?

- Play has been shown to help children adjust to the school setting and even to enhance their learning readiness and behaviors as well as problem-solving skills (American Academy of Pediatrics, “The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds,” 2007).
- Researchers found that the complexity of block play predicted kids’ mathematics achievements in high school. In particular, those who had used blocks in more sophisticated ways as preschoolers had better math grades and took more math courses (including honors’ courses) as teenagers. (*Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, “Block play performance among preschoolers as a predictor of later school achievement in mathematics,” 2001).
- Play with puzzles helps kids learn about spatial relationships (Susan Levine and Janellen Huttenlocher, University of Chicago).
- Active kids are more facile intellectually and perform better academically in the long term (Stuart Brown, *The New York Times*, 2009).
- Psychologist Edward Fisher analyzed 46 published studies on the cognitive benefits of play. He found that “sociodramatic play” – what happens when kids pretend together – “results in improved performances in both cognitive-linguistic and social affective domains.” (“The impact of play on development: A meta-analysis.” *Play and Culture*, 1992).
- Encouraging a child to simply play on a daily basis – preferably in an outdoor environment like a yard, playground or park – not only provides great physical benefits, but also has positive effects on learning, social relationships and mood. (Burdette & Whitaker, *Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 2005).
- As children master their world, play helps them 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 (American Academy of Pediatrics, “The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds,” 2007).

*How you play is who you become. To learn more about the **Ultimate Block Party** and **Play for Tomorrow**, visit www.UltimateBlockParty.com and follow **Ultimate Block Party** on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).*

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