The Recess Program: Increasing Play Participation in School-based Pediatrics

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Play is a child’s primary occupation (AOTA, 2011). In recent years, schools have eliminated around 40% of recess time in the United States to prioritize classroom time (CDCP and SHAPE America, 2017), despite the overwhelming benefits recess has on child development. During play, children develop life skills that translate to the classroom. Social, motor, emotional, and sensory skills are acquired in part due to play, as well as essential executive functioning skills such as problem solving, direction following, and planning.

SIGNIFICANCE

Providence Charter School (PCS) is designed for students with language-based learning differences such as dyslexia. A needs assessment was conducted to identify ways to better support students. PCS faculty and students reported dissatisfaction with participation materials, and space for their outdoor blacktop space. At the request of our stakeholders, this project’s focus was play participation which encompassed recess and guidelines for a traditional playground area that is in the approval process.

OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1
- Construct a comprehensive activity binder to increase participation in play

OBJECTIVE 2
- Develop design guidelines for creating an attainable, accessible, and inclusive playground to ensure every child has the opportunity for engagement

METHODS

BINDER

Created a comprehensive binder that consists of activities for students to play during recess.
- Repeated template with “how to play”, upgrades and gradations, and key
- Focus groups with small groups, motor, executive functioning, self-regulation, sensory, and social skills
- “Open Dyslexic” font

BLACKTOP

Upgraded recess space
- Repainted over faded lines to create a more vibrant recess space
- Created new designs that correspond with activities in the binder
- Fundraised $3,493 through Donor’s Choice to provide new equipment

PLAYGROUND DESIGN

Distributed a guideline document for future playground space
- Defined inclusivity, accessibility, and adaptability
- Divided table of contents by equipment recommendations
- Key used to identify price ranges of equipment, sensory systems, and visual, auditory, and motor impairments

RESULTS: SURVEYS

Students n=65

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Students n=82

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RESULTS: BLACKTOP SPACE

“I haven’t chosen blacktop recess this year because it’s so boring” -5th grader

“Recess would be more fun if there were more games” -2nd grader

“I don’t really like outdoor recess” -3rd grader

“The blacktop is completely cooler and fun to play on!” -5th grader

“This is so 50 amazing!” -4th grader

“It’s so much more colorful and vibrant now!” -4th grader

DISCUSSION

PRE AND POST SURVEYS

- Pre-Surveys: The students and faculty were unsatisfied with the resources available during recess
- Post-Surveys: Based upon the post-survey responses, there was an increase in satisfaction
  - Students enjoyed utilizing the new outdoor equipment and activity binder
  - Faculty expressed there has been an increase in play participation at blacktop recess

LIMITATIONS/BARRIERS

- Inclement weather
- The students' excitement with the new materials may decrease overtime
- General upkeep and cost of supplies

POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS

- Reminders to faculty for binder usage
- Use colorful index cards instead of a binder due to students associating the binder with the classroom rather than recess
- Separate surveys to each grade level for thoughts on outdoor recess to compare results

FUTURE PROJECT

- Alternative storage for activity binder and supplies
- Update activity binder with new games weekly or biweekly
- Additional targeted skills (propriotion, leadership)
- Game of the week to ensure knowledge and practice of games

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IMPLICATIONS FOR USE

OTs can use the Recess Program to facilitate the development of the following life-long occupations outlined in the OTPF, 2020:
- Participation
- Exploration
- Safety/Care for others
- Social and emotional
- Physical wellness

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES

