Leveraging Unstructured Play & Experiential Learning for Social-Emotional Learning

Helping Kids Be Kids
Hello, From Action for Healthy Kids!

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Tell Us in the Chat!

Let’s start with a mindful minute. Tell us in the chat your glow and grow from this week.

Glow: Something to highlight; something you are proud of/ you’re celebrating

Grow: Something you are working on/ looking forward to doing more of/growing into
Learning Objectives

After today’s session, participants will understand...

» The **impact of unstructured play and experiential learning** on the various components of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model framework.

» How **increased access to physical activity and play supports the development of social emotional competencies** and nurturing relationships.

» How **increased access to optimal nutrition and health education supports the development of social emotional competencies** and nurturing relationships.

» The **resources and support** available through Action for Healthy Kids.
Action for Healthy Kids Overview
Who We Are, What We Do, and How We Work
Who We Are

Action for Healthy Kids is a national nonprofit organization committed to the belief that healthy kids create a better world. We pursue this vision by mobilizing family-school partnerships to address the child health crisis and prepare kids to be healthy in body and mind.
What We Do

We collaborate with families, schools and school districts to support three key areas of child health.
How We Work

Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model (WSCC)

Family-School Partnerships

Collective Impact

The Story
The Evolution of Be Time

Physical Activity
Nutrition
Unstructured Play

Family-School Partnerships

As a parent and health coach, I am very aware of the limited opportunities available in urban communities to young children today for physical activity and unstructured free time. I really appreciate that this grant has helped us bring more awareness to the entire school community that allowing kids the space and time to just "be" is critical to their health, growth, and development.

Amybeth Whissell-Pignataro, Parent
PS. 17 Henry David Thoreau School
Long Island City, NY
Experiential Learning & Unstructured Play

**Play-based Learning**
- Mix and mingle carts
- Play curriculum
- BE Time bins

**Built Environment Enhancements**
- Play space refurbish
- SEL room
- Sensory hallways and spaces
- Walking path

**Mindful Awareness Practices**
- Yoga
- Mindfulness
- Mindful movement
- BE Time bins

**Outdoor Learning**
- School garden
- Forest school

*Kids at West Noble Primary School in Ligonier, Indiana love having unstructured outdoor time to explore nature and socialize with their classmates.*
The Impact
Data Collection and Methods

» Year end school final reports *(both years)*
» AFHK-Modified CDC School Health Index
» Student surveys
» School staff interviews *(both years)*
  • Primary grant contact
  • Principal or AP
» Parent/Caregiver focus groups
Snapshot: School Year 2018-2019

“When I have free time at school, I like to…”

- 46% play on the playground or play sports outside
- 34% play indoor games
- 32% do arts and crafts

3 urban schools
All three schools made garden improvements and all of their SHA scores related to farm to school programming (which includes school gardens) increased correspondingly.

23 minutes
Average increase in minutes of free time per day at all three schools

98% students eligible for free/reduced-price meals

1,586 students impacted
Impact Highlights

Schools Increased Nutrition and Physical Activity Opportunities in School
Number of students who said “Always” to the following questions:
- My school offers fruit or vegetables at school fundraisers: Pre 11% vs. Post 27%
- I have a chance to be active in classes like math, reading or science: Pre 20% vs. Post 31%
- There is PE and recess equipment for me to use at my school. For example, balls or jump ropes: Pre 56% vs. Post 77%
- My heart beats fast and I breathe hard during recess: Pre 37% vs. Post 49%
- 145% increase

Improvements in Social-Emotional Learning Outcomes
Incremental changes demonstrate shifts in a positive direction.

- I stay calm even when someone is bothering me:
  - Always: Pre 17% vs. Post 17%
  - Almost Always: Pre 17% vs. Post 21%
  - Sometimes: Pre 26% vs. Post 27%
  - Almost Never: Pre 12% vs. Post 13%
  - Never: Pre 26% vs. Post 22%
  - 36% increase

- If I get mad at someone at school, we can talk it out:
  - Always: Pre 30% vs. Post 33%
  - Almost Always: Pre 17% vs. Post 15%
  - Sometimes: Pre 26% vs. Post 24%
  - Almost Never: Pre 11% vs. Post 11%
  - Never: Pre 17% vs. Post 16%
  - 22% increase

- It’s easy to pay attention in class:
  - Always: Pre 24% vs. Post 25%
  - Almost Always: Pre 23% vs. Post 24%
  - Sometimes: Pre 30% vs. Post 35%
  - Almost Never: Pre 7% vs. Post 7%
  - Never: Pre 15% vs. Post 9%
  - 22% increase
Impact Highlights: Connecting the Dots

### Positive Changes to Beliefs About Physical Activity and Nutrition
Percentage of students indicating they agree with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am helping my body by participating in physical activity.</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am helping my body by eating more fruits and vegetables.</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will grow strong if I eat fruits and vegetables.</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will grow strong if I am active.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impact Highlights:
Key Themes

We saw a lot of enthusiasm and interest in grant-related activities among children, parents, and school staff.

- Children are more focused in the classroom.
- Children are more relaxed at school.
- Children are less stressed and more relaxed at school.
- Children are more conscious of the need to practice environmental conservation.
- Children are more aware of what is healthy vs. unhealthy.
- Children are more likely to participate in activities such as BE Time.
- Parents feel proud that children and school staff express appreciation for their volunteer time.
- Teachers learn more about their students' learning styles.
- School staff members expressed support for BE Time.
- Overall, there is more excitement to be at school.
- There are fewer conflicts among children at school.
- More staff members expressed support for BE Time.
Snapshot: School Year 2019-2020

8 states

14 schools

3 rural
6 suburban
5 urban

Connectedness and Nurturing Relationships
Schools and families worked together to build students’ social-emotional competencies and model strong relations for children.

Safe and Supportive Learning Environments
Schools and families worked together to develop a foundation for social-emotional learning and create spaces where children are encouraged to make mistakes, learn and grow, and explore emotions through connection and unstructured OE Time.

Promotion of Social-Emotional Learning
Schools and families worked together to develop and implement projects that facilitated social-emotional learning and skill development.

7,095 students impacted

79% students eligible for free/reduced-price meals
On average, schools offered **60 minutes** BE Time per day

As a result of BE Time programming, schools reported an...

- **85%**
  Increase in students' demonstration of empathy and showing concern for others.

- **85%**
  Increase in students' initiation of play or conversation with others.

- **85%**
  Increase in students' contribution to group efforts through cooperation and teamwork.

- **85%**
  Increase in students' willingness to ask for help when necessary.

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As a result of BE Time programming, schools reported an...

- **92%**
  Increase in students' ability to identify own feelings and where they came from.

- **77%**
  Increase in students' ability to identify positive outlets of expression and emotion management when experiencing difficult emotions to calm down and reset.

- **69%**
  Increase in students' clear communication around basic emotions to peers and adults.

- **62%**
  Increase in students' ability to remain calm in difficult or disappointing situations (e.g. can think before he/she acts).
Impact Highlights: Key Themes

The following are themes from all four interviewees:

**BE Time Impacted Students**
Staff observed students using cooldown and self-reflection strategies and heard students verbally identifying their emotions and expressing their needs.

**BE Time Continued During COVID-19**
School counselors led self-regulation practices and synchronous lessons with teachers doing controlled breathing exercises.

**School Health Teams Are Proud of Their BE Time Efforts**
Improved communication with parents has led to increased participation and staff willingness to participate in their own personal SEL practice online as a result of COVID-19.

The following are themes found from both schools interviewed:

**BE Time Filled a Gap in Existing SEL Initiatives**
Direct instruction about SEL skills had not been taught previously. BE Time compliments other SEL programming.

**Administrative Support was Critical to Success**
Administrators value and prioritize SEL and participated in BE Time initiatives.

**Family Knowledge and Support for SEL Increased**
Students brought home information about SEL to their families and parents are now asking for more information about SEL.

**Students Believe BE Time is Helpful**
Staff overheard students sharing SEL techniques with each other and noticed changes in student attitudes about SEL.

**Teachers and Staff Took Initiative to Go Above and Beyond to Implement BE Time**
Teachers believe designated SEL time is the most important thing for their school and they have instituted school-wide morning meetings with a focus on SEL.
Looking Ahead

• Support schools in connecting practice back to policy for increased depth and sustainability.

• Expand interventions to support adult social-emotional learning through increased opportunities for virtual and in-person learning sessions, resources and support.

• Develop future programming within a framework that is more inclusive and responsive to intersectionality.

Equity

[We are] helping staff to truly understand the intersectionality between three concepts: cultural competency, SEL, and mindful movement. They’re not mutually exclusive from one another. Students’ ability to move themselves through dysregulation, having appropriate and measured social-emotional responses while being a child of color in an environment that is often times out of their control is something that is so important for us to be able to help establish the healthy amount of overlap for folks. In a world where staff are continually asked to do more and more, by showing them that these things actually go together can make you practice stronger in the service of kids I think has been really powerful.

Culture

Staff [prioritize] personal well-being and self-care. And it’s the same message we are giving to our students. It becomes more cultural rather than “you need to drink more water because it’s good for you.” It becomes a cultural thing to take care of our mental health.

Practice

They [the students] would connect with me afterwards and say “hey, you know what, I was able to do that when I felt sad or when I felt mad” and “I didn’t need anybody to do it for me. I could just do it by myself.” I’ve also heard that same thing from our school nurses.
The Role it Plays
## What Social-Emotional Learning Looks Like

### Social-Emotional Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Dual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use clear communication to identify and describe basic emotions, thoughts, and needs to peers and adults.</td>
<td>Manage emotions, thoughts and behaviors to navigate stress and accomplish personal and collective goals.</td>
<td>Demonstrate empathy, compassion and support towards others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use physical activity and active play as a tool to support emotion regulation and healthy responses to emotions.</td>
<td>Demonstrate empathy, compassion and support towards others when engaging in group physical activity and play.</td>
<td>Demonstrate teamwork, collaboration and positive encouragement of peers through group physical activity and play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate respect for differences that exist among peers in terms of physical abilities, skills and passions.</td>
<td>Demonstrate teamwork, collaboration and positive encouragement of peers through group physical activity and play.</td>
<td>Demonstrate and model constructive, safe and responsible behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use clear communication to identify and respond to personal physical abilities, skills and passions.</td>
<td>Evaluate the benefits and consequences of actions for personal, social and collective well-being.</td>
<td>Evaluate the benefits and consequences of actions and model constructive, safe and responsible behaviors when engaging in group physical activity and play.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Through Physical Activity & Active Play

- Use clear communication to identify and respond to personal physical abilities, skills and passions.
- Use physical activity and active play as a tool to support emotion regulation and healthy responses to emotions.
- Demonstrate empathy, compassion and support towards others when engaging in group physical activity and play.
- Demonstrate teamwork, collaboration and positive encouragement of peers through group physical activity and play.
- Evaluate the benefits and consequences of actions and model constructive, safe and responsible behaviors when engaging in group physical activity and play.

### Through Nutrition Education & Promotion

- Use clear communication to identify, describe and respond to internal hunger cues.
- Utilize internal hunger cues to regulate emotions, thoughts and behaviors to support the development of healthy eating habits.
- Demonstrate respect for cultural diversity in culinary practices/preferences.
- Demonstrate effective communication with peers during snack and mealtimes and respect for differences in body shape/culinary preferences.
- Make sustainable and responsible decisions in food choices, reflecting an understanding of the impact of food waste and the role they play in food waste and/or food systems.
- Make healthy and constructive decisions about nutrition and eating habits.
Helping Kids Just Be

This project was made possible through a partnership with Materne GoGo SqueeZ
Tell Us in the Chat!

What’s one takeaway from today’s presentation that inspired you to take action?

What can you do in the next 30 days?
Resources and Support

• Digital Tools and Resources
• Healthy Kids Blog
• Events and Learning Opportunities

... and more!

Visit actionforhealthykids.org or email us at contactus@actionforhealthykids.org!
Connect with Us!

Join in conversation discover fun activities and healthy recipes, learn of ways to get involved and take action!

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We are here to support you!
Connect with us for questions and support!
contactus@actionforhealthykids.org
Questions?

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