

Empower Play

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Recess is credited to improve academic achievement and make students more focused in class. It is essential for students to learn how to interact freely on the playground with each other in an unstructured system. However, this should not be the only option for students, especially those who need extra help with conflict resolution or those who need more framework or purpose to stay engaged in play for their recess.

Our school made this addition of structured recess to make sure all of our students were included, and had the most physically active and engaging recess as possible. However, the number one purpose of Empower Play is to minimize altercations and conflict and promote respectful behavior. After exploring structured recess programs available, we decided to customize our own based on individualized student' needs. We created Empower Play through some of the best practices of other structured recess programs.

Empower Play activities were a hit from the beginning and maintain that status today. Many of the sports are not competitive, yet still maintain the fun aspect of fitness. Equipment is purchased just for these activities, such as frisbees, bean bags, balls, hoppy taws, etc. Students are taught the games beforehand and are given clear expectations of returning equipment, using good sportsmanship, and how reward tickets work for participating. Another benefit of Empower Play is to teach students skills to be self-governing, take responsibility for their actions, and to "empower" themselves. Empower Play also supports our self-efficacy academic goal of students taking ownership of their learning and behavior.

Our school wants students to participate in their recesses despite poor behavior during class or because they have altercations during the free play option. These students become "EmpowerPlayers". They are learning essential social skills while attending the structured recess. However, most students chose to participate, because activities are so captivating. Students flock to be able to play, because the games are so enjoyable. Also, those students struggling with dissonance with their classmates, are learning perseverance and self-discipline.

The great outcomes of Empower Play are important to highlight. First, having structured activities reduce negative incidents and office referrals. Second, students feel more involved and included in outside play. Third, students become more active during recess. Last, Empower Play encourages more social interactions and new-found friendships.

