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# Play it Forward: Cooperative Learning and Structured Play

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Play it Forward: Cooperative Learning and Play During Recess

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### **Abstract**

Cooperative learning and structured play (CLASP) are two things that have gone unappreciated in the modern educational setting. This is an important issue for many local low-income schools as the dropout rate is so high. CLASP ideals come with a wide array of positive outcomes that look to brighten the futures of affected youth. CLASP provides an incredible number of scholarly benefits: increased school involvement, higher grade point average,, improved interpersonal relationships, increased ability to work as a team, etc. This Capstone identifies these critical benefits and addresses the best way to properly utilize CLASP within the school setting. The three primary stakeholders chosen are the Principal/Vice Principal, teachers, and students. All three of which stand to benefit from CLASP pedagogy. This Capstone implemented a prototype program in a local elementary school. Based on the results from the program, it has been made clear that the best way to utilize CLASP in the school setting is through the incorporation of service learning activity leaders during lunch recess. Furthermore, implementation of CLASP programs is minimal while the outcomes can be monumental.

Recess time at Webster Elementary<sup>1</sup> is notoriously hard to regulate. Cynthia has been a recess monitor since the school opened in 2013. In her time there, she has seen more than her fair share of catastrophes aside from the weekly fights that were happening on the playground. One day, there were four fights over the course of the school day. There was one at break, two at recess, and one after school. Another time, a new fifth grade student had started a fight over another student's girlfriend on his first day of school, resulting in one serious injury and two suspensions. Cynthia and two other yard monitors are expected to monitor a 2050 square yard area, populated with 600 plus students for over an hour every school day. She feels overwhelmed and unable to adequately manage recess in a safe or productive manner.

In response, Webster Elementary recruited a charity organization called Playworks that offers structured alternatives to historically unstructured recess time. The organization has an online database of games that encourage activity and cooperative play among the students. Teachers are given access to this database and then select a few of the games to teach to their students. Students are provided with all of the equipment they need to play the selected games at the start of recess, and those are the only games they are allowed to play during recess unless they have teacher supervision. The Assistant Principal at the school has tracked the downward trend of the number of referrals issued during recess time since they introduced the program. Despite this, Cynthia feels that the program is working it's best when a teacher comes out during his or her lunch break to help lead new games.

Playworks also offers trained recess coaches to lead different games every day. The coaches come equipped to every recess with a variety of games to keep the students engaged

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms such as "Webster Elementary" are used throughout the duration of this paper to protect the identities of the stakeholders in this study.

and regulation strategies to keep the games running smoothly. However, the coaches come at an additional cost that Webster had decided they did not want to expend. Cynthia saw the benefits of having these kinds of coaches one when day that three CSUMB Capstone students came to Webster to measure the effects that cooperative, structured play had on recess. The Capstone students lead a variety of games on the grassy area at the back of the play yard, which Cynthia later mentioned is the area where most of the student fights occur. The games ran the for the entire span of lunch recess, from 11:45am to 1:15 pm, and Webster students were actively engaged the whole time. Plenty of the students mentioned that they had a fun and everybody, especially the Capstone students, was winded when the bell rang.

Cynthia assisted in collecting the cones after the students had gone inside to return to class, and animatedly conveyed how helpful it was to have the games going throughout recess. She said that she usually has to give at least one or two referrals before the end of recess, but did not give out any that day. She excitedly asked the Capstone students when they would be returning.

### **Literature Synthesis and Integration**

According to Janssen, Toussaint, Willem, & Verhagen (2016), it was estimated that one out of five children were overweight in 2015, and only 40% of students participated in moderate levels of physical activity during recess before intervention. Dyson and Casey (2014) recommend that educational agencies should be tasked to promote physical activity during recess by managing recess, providing supervision during physical activity, and actively engaging students. We develop many of our life-long habits as children. Low levels of physical activity during youth compromises the future well-being and health of our population as a whole (Janssen et al., 2011). Additionally, inactivity is directly correlated with increased health risks, such as non-communicable chronic diseases that persist into adulthood. That being said, it is imperative that physical activity is promoted in children as a major public health priority.

#### **What is the opportunity?**

Schools play an important role in promoting physical activity in students as school is an environment in which students spend most of their time, outside of the home. Within this context, physical education (PE) and recess are excellent opportunities for students to be physically active.

Introducing physical activity to elementary age students has correlated with countless positive outcomes documented across a considerable amount of scholarly literature. According to the Physical Fitness Guidelines, which were developed in 2008 by the US Department of Health and Human Services, 60 minutes of physical activity per day is associated with improved academic achievement and concentration, improved mental health and decreased symptoms of depression and anxiety, increased sense of self-esteem, improved conflict resolution and

decision-making skills, as well as motor skill development in elementary aged students. In fact, National guidelines in the United States designate that children should participate in a minimum of 60-minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. Unfortunately, less than half of children and 10% of adolescents meet these guidelines (Leek, D., Carlson, J. A., Cain, K. L., Henrichon, S., Rosenberg, D., Patrick, K., & Sallis, J. F., 2011). Further, the authors assert that students' 60-minute activity time should include moderate to vigorous muscle strengthening, aerobic activity, and bone-strengthening exercises to maximize potential physical, mental, and emotional benefits (*Solving the problem of childhood obesity within a generation: White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity report to the President, 2010*).

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory proposes that utilizing scaffolding techniques, such as cooperative learning, can aid a student in developing new knowledge. Under this theoretical framework, learning is recognized as a social process and social interaction is fundamentally important in regards to cognitive development in children (Vygotsky, 1978). Dyson and Casey (2014) also outline the benefits of using this pedagogical model of cooperative learning, however they focus their research in the context of physical education due to the interdependence of subject matter, teaching, context, learning, and psychomotor development. Researchers implemented a cooperative learning model among 11-12 year-old students and studied how it influenced their behavior. Results from the study showed that teachers took the opportunity to emphasize academic and social learning goals, while students showed improvements in their athletic skills as well as their interpersonal skills (as cited in Casey et al., 2009). Under the Cooperative Learning framework, students and teachers are co-learners. Both work cooperatively to promote the key elements of cooperative play and

learning through physical education: individual accountability, face to face interaction, small group synergy, and group processing (Dyson & Casey, 2014).

Another study regarding the introduction of cooperative learning and structured play programs and their impacts on students' behavior, academic performance, and morale was conducted through America SCORES. SCORES is a program that combines service learning, creative writing, and soccer. A pilot study of SCORES in Northern California showed that students that participated in the program saw considerable lowering of their body mass index, a weight-to-height ratio. Participants also reported increased feelings of self-confidence, as well as increased enjoyment of reading and writing (*Solving the problem of childhood obesity within a generation: White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity report to the President*, 2010). Similarly, Goudas and Magotsiou (2009) assert that when cooperative learning is emphasized in physical education, students report enhanced social skills, improved attitudes toward physical activity, increased preference for group work, and increased empathy for other students compared to a control group. Teachers reported a decrease in disruptive behaviors in the classroom as well.

### **Why is it an opportunity?**

Currently at Webster Elementary School, administration is experimenting with a structured play during recess model through an organization called Playworks. According to their website, Playworks is a nonprofit that offers schools access to an extensive list of organized games that can be played at recess with or without teacher supervision. Their intended result is to push students to be more active, cooperative, and social than they would be at recess without intervention.



Playworks utilizes various cooperative learning techniques to mediate recess for students, including rock-paper-scissors as a form of conflict resolution and appointing older students as Junior Coaches to help regulate the games as well as instill leadership capacities in those students. Playworks conducts an annual survey in order to assess the program's impact on schools and students. The results are outlined in Figure 1. According to the annual survey, 84% of junior coaches report that they have made improvements in regards to their social awareness, relationship skills, and self-management. Additionally, teachers around the country reported in the survey that they get back approximately 20 hours in recovered teaching time after implementation of Playworks during recess.

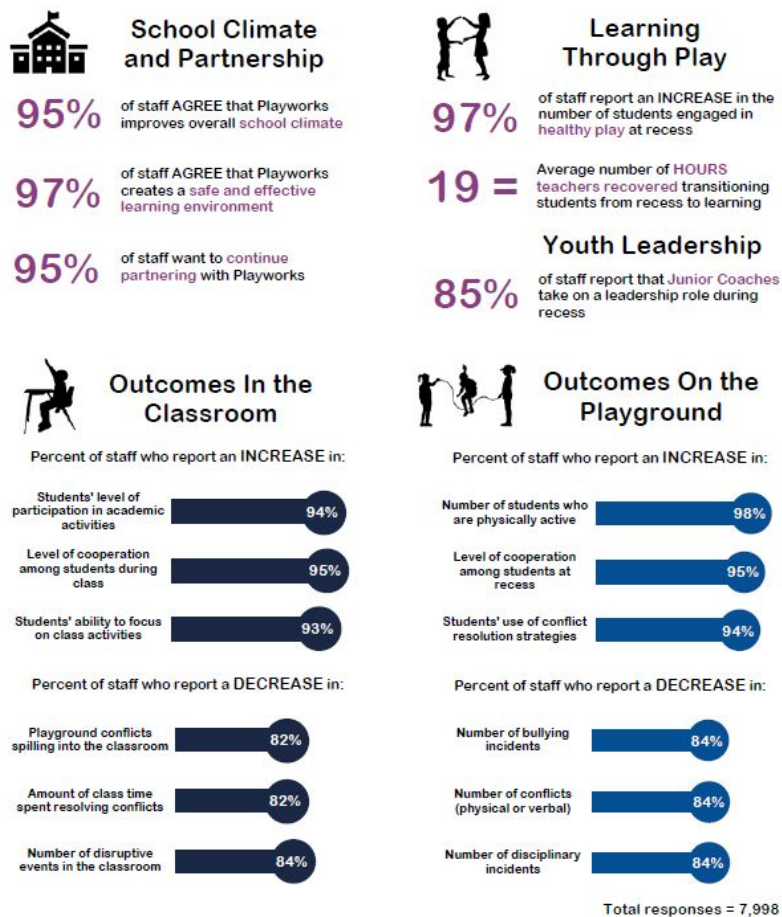


Figure 1. National Annual Survey Results (2017). Retrieved from: <http://www.playworks.org/about/annual-survey/national>

Beyler, Bleeker, James-Burdumy, Fortson, & Benjamin (2014) measured the effects that Playworks had on schools in which the program had been implemented for more than one year and found that teachers at Playworks schools reported their students spent more time participating in intense physical activity during recess compared to teachers from the control schools.

### **What should be done?**

In his Tedtalk, Paul Zientarski (2015) emphasized, “Exercise builds brain cells, not new learning” (at 8:06). *Solving the problem of childhood obesity within a generation: White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity report to the President* (2010) recommends that agencies should provide support to schools that utilize recess as an opportunity to promote physical activity as well as social skill development.

A review of the literature has identified a litany of benefits that stem from providing students with opportunities for physical activity are well documented, and yet students are still not meeting that requirement. The research also indicates that encouraging students to play cooperatively leads to improved social skills and interpersonal relationships. Lastly, there are many tangible opportunities to incorporate physical activity into the school day, where students spend a significant portion of their time.

### **Methods**

Students consistently miss out on sports-related opportunities. Many students do not have the privilege of playing sports outside of school activities. The research of Goudas and Magotsiou (2009) and Dyson and Casey (2014) recognize the importance that physical activity plays in the students’ academics, emotional health, and overall wellness. It is unjust to not

provide students with the opportunity to be physically active during school, where they spend a significant portion of their lives. With that being said, the researchers identified a focus question: what steps can be taken to improve the quality of student lives through the incorporation of a cooperative learning program at lunch recess?

### **Context**

Nunez (2017) explained the following:

*Webster Elementary School is a part of the Oceanside School District in Stumps, California. The surrounding city of Stumps has considerable economic disparity among various city sectors. The more affluent parts of the city see a ratio of one person impoverished to every 25 people not in poverty. The Oceanside district, however, has a ratio of one impoverished person to every five people not in poverty.*

*The school has a population of 724 students, which has grown from 467 students since 2013 when the school first opened. On average, there are roughly 26 students per classroom at Webster.*

*Out of those 6724 students, 84% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch. 448 students at Webster Elementary are English Language Learners and 440 students are of Spanish or Mexican descent.*

*In the 2014/15 school year, Webster pulled considerable averages of fifth-grade students meeting Healthy Fitness Zone on the Physical Fitness Exam. Almost every category received an average of 80% or higher in terms of number of students able to meet that physical goal. However, only 56% of students met the body composition goal and 25% of them were considered "at health-risk" and were flagged for needing improvement. Only 51% of the fifth-graders met the fitness goal for flexibility.*

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

We invited a number of staff and one student from the Webster Elementary School community to participate in this study. This group of prospective participants were invited to participate because they would be directly impacted by the implementation of the program. All of the participants happened to be female, and all had Latin-American cultural backgrounds.

The participants of our interviews were selected based on their role in the school, and the impact of our pilot program on their own job or school experience and at Webster Elementary.

**Cynthia Rico.** Our first interviewee was a recess monitor. She has worked at Webster Elementary for four years, and knows the students personally. Her primary role is the grass field monitor. The field is much bigger than the court and the children play a lot harder in the field. We ran our program in the field, which made her job easier. That is why we selected her. After one recess we walked up to her and asked if we could formally interview her. As our willing interviewee, she was asked to answer our questions and reflect on her experience with our program, as well as the influence she feels our program has on the children that engage with us during lunch recess. Ms. Rico made it clear that she does not enjoy reprimanding the students when they behave badly. When a student acts out or breaks school rules, she must walk them to the front office where they often receive referrals for their permanent record. She conveyed that she feels that more structure at recess would benefit not only the students, but her as well. She also suggested that more play equipment, such as basketballs, could go a long way in reducing negative behavior.

**Julie Brown.** Our second interviewee is the Assistant Principal of Webster Elementary. She is the individual that allowed us permission to participate with Webster Elementary when the researchers initially reached out for this project. It was important for us to interview her because she believed we could make a positive impact on the school during lunch recess, and we wanted to recognize her thoughts as we went through the process of implementing our project. To make this interview happen, we printed out the necessary interview forms to ensure proper consent as well as the ability to quote what she said. We asked questions that provoked

the vice principal to reflect on issues that arose in the past during the lack of a recess program, as well as the results she found came from our program. She is the individual that implemented the ideas from Playworks to Webster Elementary, so she has knowledge and experience with successful implementation of sports programs in the school setting. She provided key insights about our strengths as well as our shortcomings.

**Stephanie Marquez.** Stephanie represents the student perspective in this study. She is a third-grader at Webster Elementary who hates math class and loves recess. When asked why she enjoyed recess, she explained that it is a time for her and her friends to run and play games. Stephanie is a self-described “girl-girl”, meaning she does what she can to follow the rules and avoids activities that would get her in trouble. However, she did confide that the worst parts about recess are: a) the bullies, and b) the possibility of getting a behavior referral herself. Stephanie discussed how she has witnessed physical altercations between students on the playground during this school year. She also described an instance when her friends were overheard using bad language, and her whole friend group had to go to the office and get referrals as a result. This was a perspective previously unconsidered by the research: students may prefer structured play because it minimizes their chances of getting in trouble themselves. When asked about the difference in recess time when it is structured versus unstructured, she replied that when recess is unstructured, she often sits with her friends in a shady spot on the grass. However, when recess was structured with games, Stephanie always participated fully. When asked about how she feels recess could be made even better, she emphasized the need for more equipment, such as basketballs, as well as commenting that she would look forward to recess more if she knew coaches would be leading games everyday.

**Researchers**

- Tyler Elwin

This concern is personally meaningful to me because I feel that the time spent during recess that I was in could have been much more productive. I have experienced, first hand, the time wasting and waiting around that comes with boring recesses. I think it is time we step it up and create programs that are more engaging for students so that they may be able to learn and grow during their free time during recess. Not all students are born leaders, so a little structure goes a long way.

I believe I am fit to carry out this capstone due to my history as an elementary P.E. teacher, my drive for improvement, and my background in sports that allows me to lead. I believe that with the right people in charge, lunch recess sports programs will not simply just waste time until the bell rings, but will provide students with structure and team spirit in hopes of preparation for success.

Race, ethnicity, social class, education, work experience, physical or mental ability, gender identity, sexual orientation will all play a role in this project. It is hard for me to level with every single unique student, but I feel our differences work as an area of growth and learning. These differences will allow for change that I feel is much needed. I think one of the struggles that I might face is lack of proper equipment as a result of low school budget. I do not have personal experience with a lack of equipment, and I do not know how bad it could be as far as supplies go. I do have personal equipment that I can bring in to help the program take flight. Another bias is that I want to keep the programs sports related. I love sports, and I feel like they bring many necessary areas of learning to those who play them. I do know that some stakeholders will not want their children spending their recess time playing sports when it can

be used for study/homework. I am going to have to find a good inbetween.

- Mary Rossi

I feel that this issue is imperative for many reasons. Rates of childhood obesity are jarringly high, and we need to find better ways of addressing this issue than cutting the calories they are allowed to have in their school lunches. Exercise and team sports have many physical benefits, in addition to plenty of emotional and social benefits as well. Studies have shown that students benefit from structured sports programs by reducing student exposure to potentially negative influences outside of the school environment.

My qualifications that qualify me to pursue this project include; experience with coaching elementary physical education, past participation in various sports, my interest in working with elementary students, and my background if liberal studies education.

Not every student is going to want to or feel comfortable participating in the program that we are trying to start. They won't all enjoy sports, or believe themselves to be physically or mentally capable to play. I believe that one of my major biases is that I enjoy playing sports.

I am also unsure as to the amount of extra work this program would put on the staff of the school. If the teachers and faculty are asked to participate as well, some of them may not want to shoulder the extra burden and therefore may be put out. I hope to avoid this by limiting the number of responsibilities the staff would be responsible for.

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

- Vice Principal Questions

1. What do you see as the problem with student free time during recess; or What are you concerned about when it comes to students with "too much" free time during recess?
2. Do you feel like students are given enough outlets for all of the energy that

they have? Why?

3. What would be the best use of time in order to combat this lack of outlet? During the school day (another recess)? Perhaps a new school program that is more sports related during recess?

4. What is currently being done to further engage students during recess - by whom - and do you think this is good, bad, or indifferent? Why?

5. What do you think should be done about lunch recess time?

6. What do you think are the obstacles/drawbacks/disadvantages to changing current lunch recess programs?

7. Is there anything else that you would like to say about children with abundant free time during lunch recess and/or the improvement/development of lunch recess sports programs?

- Student

1. What's your name?

2. Do you like recess?

3. What are some of the best things about recess?

4. What are some things about recess that aren't so good?

5. Have you noticed a difference in recess on days when coaches lead games from days you're left to do what you want?

6. How do you think recess could be made better?

- Recess Monitor

1. Introductions

2. What made you want to apply for this job?

3. What are the benefits of this job?

4. What are some drawbacks?

5. Have you noticed a difference in recess on days when coaches lead games from days you're left to do what you want?

6. How do you think recess could be made better?

## Procedure

The data collection was experience based. The researchers began the project by meeting with the Assistant Principal of Webster Elementary and brainstormed the



opportunities for physical activity at Webster and how we could expand and improve upon them. She helped us to identify that our time would be best spent during lunch recess, and that the need for structure would not go unnoticed. We then began by leading Playworks games during recess that were familiar to the kids, before switching to a structured team based sports focus. The participants of our games were simply asked to play. The researchers found that it was easier to recruit students to play by first playing universal, well known games, such as tag. This scaffolding approach allowed for the development of rapport with individual students as well as build a foundational level of respect and control with the entire group.

### **Results**

For this Capstone project, students and staff at Webster Elementary were interviewed in an effort to gain insights into the current recess experience and how it can be improved upon. This is critical due to the severity of the consequences of inactivity on children's' emotional, physical, and social well being. Students are, on average, not meeting the 60-minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per day standard. Because children spend a considerable amount of their time in school, increasing the amount of physical activity a student receives during the school day could lead to an increase in student's overall well being and ultimately lead to a decrease in the number of cases of disease caused by inactivity. An analysis of the data lead to the emergence of three overarching themes and possible action items, shown in Table 1. The selected action item was chosen through an evidence-based evaluation of each of the proposed action items by the following criteria; cost of implementation, time required to implement, and achievability. Based on this evaluation, Action Item 2 is recommended as the most effective solution to student inactivity.

Table 1: Evaluation of Action Items

Options	Cost	Time	Achievability
Hiring of a lunch recess activities leader	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Partnering with the service learners as lunch recess activities leaders	Low	Moderate	High
Collaborating with CSUMB's KIN 374 class	Low	Moderate	Low

### Evaluation of Action Items

As stated above, the proposed action items were proposed after interviewing one student and two staff members from Webster Elementary. The options are:

1. Appealing to Webster Elementary to hire a full-time recess coach.
2. Collaborating with Webster and CSUMB service learners.
3. Partnering with CSUMB's KIN 374 class

The interview with Webster's Yard Monitor evoked many questions. How can the researchers find a solution that properly addresses the needs of the students? Ms. Rico explained to us that there are not enough adults on the field to keep control. This led the researchers to draw the conclusion that additional adults would help to keep students on their best behavior.

Action Item 1 is to hire a full-time recess activities leader. Beyler et al. (2014) drew clear connections between structured learning, active adult monitoring and participation, and improved student emotional and physical health. We believe this option would help to maintain

student behavior, as well as give students the full benefit of our research. This activity leader would become a member of the school staff, or could be a current teacher that gets compensation for leading games during their lunch hour. This would have a moderate cost due to the opening of a job position. The time to implement this would be moderate because this job position would be needed to be added to the school, and then the position would need to be filled. The lunch recess time slot is very short, so there would be difficulty filling a position in the middle of the day with someone outside of the school who would most likely prefer a full-time job. The achievability of this option is low due to the tight budget that schools have to operate under. We do believe that having a hired professional activities leader could have very positive implications. This individual would be very knowledgeable in CLASP, and could lead games accordingly. This position will most likely get filled quickly and there will be competition for the quality of the activity leader, so this option will certainly be effective.

After our interview with the Assistant Principal of Webster, we were enlightened to the positive influence of college students on the school grounds. Brown stated that she believes when the elementary school students see the college students whom they look up to, they become inspired. This promotes a positive atmosphere in the school because the elementary school students want to try their best to succeed so that they can one day go to college.

Action Item 2 would partner Webster with Cal State Monterey Bay's (CSUMB) service learning institute. Webster would reach out to service learning classes at CSUMB every semester. This option is symbiotic as it would reward college students their service learning time requirement for their time leading lunch recess activities, students have a better chance at meeting their 60 minutes of exercise everyday, and the school benefits from volunteer recess

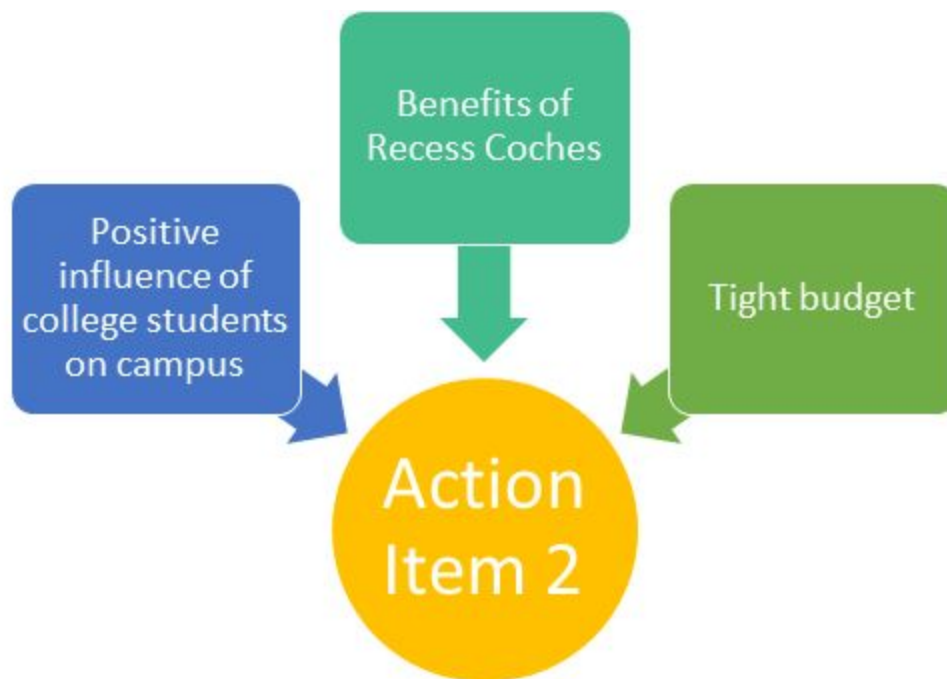
coaches because of the noted decrease in behavioral referrals when an adult is leading games. The cost of option two would be very low because activity leaders would be getting payment via service learning required hours. The time is moderate as it would take time and meetings to setup this program. Schools would have to individually meet with college service learning institutes to properly implement a successful policy. Once the initial plan is set in place, the time will severely lower and the process of filling the position will be streamlined. The achievability is high as the researchers only need to connect Webster with the Service Learning Institute for this action item to be effective. This position will most likely be filled all of the time during the school years, depending on the number of service learners and the strength of the school-college plan.

Action item 3 is to partner with the students of CSUMB's KIN 374; Physical Education for Elementary Students to serve as recess coaches. One of the emergent themes from the data as well as the research suggested that utilizing the recess coaches was beneficial to the overall experience of recess for the students as well as the staff. An evaluation of the local resources indicated another possible method for securing a steady stream of volunteer recess coaches could be to collaborate with the KIN 374 class at CSUMB, which has a lab requirement for students to spend two hours weekly leading physical education classes for elementary students in local skills. The way the class is currently structured, students lead a physical education class twice a week. This action item would include providing the professors of this class an informational flyer outlining the results of this study, and proposing that they consider leading their physical activities during the lunch recess of elementary schools instead of the designated physical education class. This would provide children with twice as many

opportunities for physical exertion during their school day, and also fulfill the needs of all three stakeholders by providing more structure and supervision during recess. The cost of this option is rated low, because the KIN 374 students would be donating their time. The time it would take to implement received a rating of moderate, due to the time it would take to draft an effective flyer and collaborate with the KIN 374/L professors. The achievability is rated as low due to the time constraints placed on the researchers to implement an action item.

### **Recommendation**

The action items were cross-evaluated based on the selected criteria; cost, time, and achievability. The cost of implementation was considered due to the limited amount of funds available for school programs. The amount of time required to implement the action item was also assessed because of the short amount of time available to the researchers to create a lasting impact. The achievability was evaluated to check the researchers' proposed action items in terms of probability of achieving the goal in the allotted amount of time during the semester. We recommend Action Item 2, which would incorporate service learners as lunch recess activity leaders. This option has been chosen above the others due to the fact that it would yield the highest reward at the lowest cost. This option also has the ability to expose elementary students to college students and can work to inspire and promote success in school. Action Item 2 works hand in hand with our research by promoting academic success as well as rewarding academic success. Giving service learning hours for time spent leading activities will work perfectly with low-budget schools, which ensures that all demographics of children will have the opportunity to benefit from the programs.



### **Concessions and Limitations**

There are concessions and limitations to Action Item 2. There is no guarantee that a service learner will be available every day of the week during lunch recess. It is also not guaranteed that Webster will take advantage of this opportunity and work with the service learning institute to set a program into place. A third limitation is that not all majors will be able to receive service learning credit through playing recess games with young students during lunch recess. This means that the number of service learners is going to be limited to only a few majors. Another possible concession is that service learners may meet their time requirements before the end of the semester, so having a steady flow of service learners may be a challenge to overcome.

### **Potential Negative Outcomes**

One potentially negative outcome is that students will begin to lose their sense of self creativity which could potentially come from free-play at recess. Students will count on someone leading games and may forget how to create and lead their own. Having recess game leaders every day would ideally draw a regular crowd of participants who depend on the game leaders for the structure and consistency. This can become negative if students play with the activity leaders so often they become dependent, and cannot think to play games without activity leaders.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the researchers chose Action Item 2, partnering with service learners as lunch recess activity leaders, as the best option for addressing the lack of CLASP in the school environment. Action Item 2 addresses both the needs of the students and school by providing them with a lunch recess activity leaders, but it also addresses the needs of the college students that need to serve in their communities for credit. This option would come at the lowest cost to the school, which is paramount for accessibility to all schools. Even the lowest-income school could receive the full benefits of CLASP programs by simply requesting service learners. This is probably the most important aspect of our evaluation as many schools would rule out our idea on the basis of lack of funding. With service learners, once an agreement and plan is formed and negotiated with the service learners, the expenses are free. Service learners earn their volunteer hours, and students receive exposure to CLASP practices. This also addresses the positive role model theme brought up during our interview with Assistant Principal Brown. Having college students positively engaging with the elementary students can act to inspire the young students to take their education more seriously with the hopes of one day going to

college. Finally, we felt that Action Item 2 would have the highest achievability. As more and more Americans attend college, the amount of service learners will only increase linearly. This provides the biggest possibility that the role of lunch recess activity leaders will always be filled. With all of these things considered, we feel that the positive outcomes associated with Action Item 2 outweigh the possible negative outcomes.

### **Action Documentation and Reflection**

After reviewing the literature, it was determined that the best plan of action to take would be to implement and run a prototype program at Webster Elementary. We did not want to just propose our ideas, we wanted to prove to Webster that CLASP ideas really make a difference in improving the overall quality of life at school. As a group, we took on the role of lunch recess activity leaders. Our program was designed in a way to get students interacting cooperatively. Our main goal was to find students that needed a little bit of structure, and help them to have fun and get moving during recess. We led a variety of games including but not limited to: Shipwreck, Kick Ball, Landmine Tag, Paper Airplane Competition, Variations of Basketball, Capture the Flag, and Shark's and Islands (the favorite game by a mile). These games functioned to intrigue students and develop many motor skills. We taught students that it can be fun to play by the rules, and to play structured games with each other.

One of the biggest changes we made was to the rules of the games. We realized that not all grade levels can play games in the same way. As people learn differently, kids play differently. Some games were instantly favorites, while other games were less favorably received.



Another key lesson we learned was to keep in mind is that preparation is key. The first day we went to the school we had only prepared one single game. We figured we would just play it all recess. This did work for the first day, but having a handful of games to choose from was a crucial part of our success as the semester went on. We also found that mixing up the games keeps students both interested as well as excited to participate.

### **Outcomes**

The researchers could not have anticipated the drastic benefits of implementing structure during recess. Every single day we led activities we were reminded of the importance and influence CLASP programs have on the students. We did not go one single day without students begging us to come more often. Due to schedule restrictions this was not possible, but the need for CLASP in schools is clear.

All feedback was positive. Many students that played games with us regularly showed an increase of instances of positive behavior and teamwork. One student in particular would not play by the rules during the first day of games because he realized that breaking the rules got him more attention. By the last day of games that same student helped the coaches to explain the rules of a game and worked to facilitate the game so that everyone was playing correctly and fairly. An additional outcome noticed was that as the weeks went by, students began asking if they could lead familiar games. The growth in student leadership was exponential week after week. It reached the point where we feel the games will still be played to a certain extent without the coaches being there to lead them. The students that participated all became much more engaged with the coaches and with each other, and began to demonstrate much more sportsmanlike and cooperative behavior.

**Next steps**

The positive impact of the implementation of this program prompted the researchers to devise a way to ensure longevity of the program beyond this Capstone project. An email template was drafted for Webster Elementary to utilize every semester. The email will be sent by the assistant principal of Webster to the Kinesiology and Liberal Studies service learning class professors. It briefly explains the benefits of implementing CLASP programs during recess and requests service learners to serve their required 20 hours of community service at Webster as the Recess Coaches. The template is attached in the Appendix.

**Critical Reflection**

This project surprised and tried me in many ways. It was an awesome opportunity for me to really delve into and research a pressing issue affecting a significant population of children today. My desire to help kids is the reason I have decided to become a teacher. I feel that because I am so invested into the wellbeing of children, it allowed me to truly become engrossed in reading the literature and discovering the common themes across what the researchers in the field were putting forth. I was challenged to think outside of the box and find sources outside of the literature as well, which allowed me to explore resources such as Tedtalks to further my understanding of the subject matter. Broadening my research net did a lot in regards to helping my partner and I grasp what a tangible action item might look like for our project.

The most rewarding part of the experience was getting into the schools, collaborating with administration, and playing with the kids. The amount of positive feedback we received in response was almost overwhelming. The students clearly loved us and wanted to see us more.

The recess monitor was grateful to have the extra help supervising and the administration was more than willing to open their doors to us to conduct our research. Our interviews revealed why every stakeholder was so eager for our project: they had noticed a need for improvement during recess.

As a team, the stakeholders and the researchers participated in solidifying the project as it evolved over the course of the semester. We were very fortunate to have the opportunity to implement our physical activity plan with tangible results within just one semester. Many thanks is due to the administration of the school that we partnered with for this project. With their support, the two of us grew and networked within our field.

My time in the Liberal Studies major has primed me for my future career. It is not hard to miss how the Major Learning Outcomes (MLOs) have shaped the program and therefore its students. MLO 1 challenges us to strive to become critical thinkers, writers, and public speakers. A vast majority of the classes I have taken at this university have helped me to improve upon this MLO, including classes like LS 233 and KIN 374 pushed me out of my comfort zone, to the front of the classroom to give presentations to my instructors and peers. LS 400 is one of the most extreme examples of MLO 1 working within the program. Besides the obvious writing and presenting demands, the class truly challenged me to critically consider the issue I was addressing and find creative ways to work to solve it.

Additionally, I was given the incredible opportunity to participate in a research project with one of our professors at CSUMB. The project challenged me in ways I had never experienced. I learned how to conduct a research study, how to critically analyze and meta

analyze the data that we collected, how to work together with a group of peers to reach a common goal, and how to present to a room full of professionally dressed strangers.

MLO 2 requires that students learn about and carefully consider cultures outside of our own to seek real understanding. HDEV 353, SBS 385, and LING 392 really expanded my knowledge of other cultures, albeit in different ways. HDEV 353 offered a glimpse into daily life in education around the globe. I was humbled by the alternate approaches to early childhood care and also took note of good ideas I may use in my future classrooms when working with students outside of my own cultural background. SBS 385 detailed the rich and complex history of the Native Americans that inhabited California before any other nation had decided to take it. LING 392 was especially enlightening in regards to the similarities of languages spoken all over the world. After taking these classes, I have carefully considered the similarities of people globally and hope to use this idea to network with as many perspectives as possible as I continue to develop into the educator I hope to be.

This semester made it apparent to me that I have reached MLO 3. My Capstone project partner and I had initially had to develop a group synergy together. Working with another person had significant benefits, as well as minor drawbacks. Modern technology and the internet have revolutionized group work and made it possible for people to work on a project together without needing to actually occupy the same space. This made it much easier for us to accomplish our individual as well as our collaborative goals.

I admit I am currently wearing a lovely pair of rose colored glasses as I look back at my time at CSUMB. There are a handful of professors that I am grateful to for giving me individual attention and personally caring about my success during my time here. I hope to make them

proud as I look forward to my future. I am bound for Nicaragua with the Peace Corps this August, where I will be teaching in a rural community school four days a week and working with individual families to build their own gardens. I have big plans that I could not have conceived without CSUMB and its professors.

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## Appendix



### Calling all service learners!

We are "Webster" Elementary, and we have some shoes to fill - athletic shoes to be exact.

We are looking to fill the position of Recess Coach, and would love to have you volunteer with us this semester!

The major responsibilities include: leading groups of elementary students in a physically active games during lunch recess, planning and preparing for the games, and collaborating with administration.

The time commitment would include at least one day per week, 11:30am-1:30pm.

Please email \*\*\*\*\* for more information.  
Thank you!

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