



Children at Play: An Evaluation of EW/NSCC's Socialized Recess Program

**Prepared by
Research for Action**

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RESEARCH for *ACTION*

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based, non-profit organization engaged in education research and evaluation. Founded in 1992, RFA works with public school districts, educational institutions, and community organizations to improve the educational opportunities for those traditionally disadvantaged by race/ethnicity, class, gender, language/cultural difference, and ability/disability.

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Mission Statement

Through research and action, Research for Action seeks to improve the education opportunities and outcomes of urban youth by strengthening public schools and enriching the civic and community dialogue about public education. We share our research with educators, parent and community leaders, students, and policy makers with the goals of building a shared critique of educational inequality and strategizing about school reform that is socially just.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Focus of Research	1
Methodology	1
Overview of Findings	3
Purpose and Structure of Socialized Recess	4
Findings	6
Socialized Recess Goals	6
Accomplishments and Benefits	6
<i>Decrease of Injury and Conflict</i>	7
<i>Socialization of Youth</i>	8
<i>Enjoyment During Recess Time</i>	10
Challenges	11
<i>Inadequate Staffing</i>	11
<i>Indoor Recess</i>	12
<i>Supplies and Materials</i>	12
<i>Playground Conditions</i>	13
<i>Transitions</i>	14
<i>For Team Leaders—Motivating Corpsmembers</i>	14
Relationships with School Staff	15
<i>Staff Roles in Relation to Socialized Recess</i>	15
<i>Teacher-Corpsmember Expectations and Tensions</i>	16
<i>Relationships with NTAs and Aides</i>	17
Training	17
Overall Assessments of Recess and its Effectiveness	19
Recommendations & Implications	23
Staffing	23
Training	24
Programming	24
Relationships with School Staff	25
Physical Conditions/Supplies	25
Acknowledgements	26
Authors	26

Executive Summary

Introduction & Methodology

EducationWorks (EW) contracted with Research for Action (RFA) to research and evaluate its socialized recess (SR) program conducted by EducationWorks/National School and Community Corps (NSCC) teams which are based full-time in individual public schools. The purpose of this research was to give EW/NSCC deeper insights into the accomplishments and challenges of the program and to suggest ideas for program improvement.

This research consisted of both in-depth qualitative data collection and surveys of corpsmembers and school staff. For the qualitative research, RFA observed multiple socialized recess periods at four school sites and interviewed thirty-five representatives of both EducationWorks and school staff. For the survey component, RFA conducted the NSCC Recess Survey about recess programming among both corpsmembers (N=27) and school staff (N=35), with the help of NSCC team leaders. The overall response rate was lower than expected, with surveys returned from seven out of 17 schools. Despite the relatively low number of schools and individuals that completed and returned surveys, the survey findings provide useful triangulation for the qualitative data; thus, we have included survey data in the report as appropriate. Finally, this report draws on data from a separate survey of seventy-five corps-members conducted by RFA for EW/NSCC; it provides data about corpsmember training needs relevant to SR work.

Overview of Findings

This research indicates that the vast majority of school staff interviewed and surveyed thought that NSCC's socialized recess program provided significant benefit to their school.

NSCC teams were, overall, rated very positively by school staff and team members for meeting their goals for socialized recess, despite facing many barriers. Nearly two-thirds of the interviewees, predominantly school staff, made very positive comments, such as, "I'm totally dependent on them," "they do a good job," or "we're doing an excellent job."

Survey data indicates that:

- Both corpsmembers and school staff agreed that recess programs are effective, with 68% of corpsmembers and 69% of school staff reporting that their school's NSCC recess program was effective or highly effective.
- Eighty-four percent of corpsmembers indicated that they were satisfied with the way recess is run at their school, while 71% of school staff were satisfied.
- Overall, 80% of survey respondents indicated that the recess program has improved the school's climate.
- Finally, 78% of corpsmembers and 77% of school staff members responded that recess would be worse if NSCC were to stop running the program at the school.

Socialized Recess Goals

When asked to state the 'goals' of recess time school staff stressed that recess is an important time for students to release energy and to play.

NSCC members and school staff identified three key benefits that socialized recess offers that go beyond regular recess. These were: (1) SR adds structure and contributes to a safer environment for children; (2) through more structured activities children learn important social skills such as how to resolve conflict, play on a team, demonstrate good sportsmanship, and make new friends; (3) children receive emotional support from NSCC team members.

Accomplishments and Benefits

Across all four schools, the three most commonly mentioned successes of the program were: (1) decreased injury and conflict at recess; (2) improved student social and conflict resolution skills; and (3) more productive and enjoyable recess time for students.

Both the qualitative and quantitative data indicate that many believe that socialized recess has resulted in a decrease in injury, fighting, and conflict during

recess time. Data from the NSCC Recess Survey revealed that over 70% of both NSCC and school staff groups agree that fighting and aggression among students are chronic problems at the sites, which underscores the importance of NSCC team success in reducing incidents during recess time.

Both data sets also reveal that many individuals feel that the NSCC recess program aids in the important socialization of youth. Seventeen of the 35 interviewees shared the belief that this "socialization" teaches students an important set of skills, such as cooperation, fair play, turn-taking, and conflict resolution.

Qualitative and quantitative data alike also showed that the recess program provided basic enjoyment, fun, and a structured way to release energy. This finding is not surprising given schools' increased focus on academic work with fewer breaks for even very young children. The finding also reflects participants' belief that NSCC's recess programming provides a much needed outlet for children and facilitates positive recess experiences despite poor playground conditions.

Challenges

Across all four schools, the two most frequently mentioned challenges were: inadequate staffing; and indoor recess. These two challenges, as well as four others, are highlighted below.

Staffing was named as a challenge at every school. Thirteen interviewees from a range of positions including administrators, teachers, non-teaching assistants, corpsmembers, and team leaders said that more adults were needed on the playground.

At every school and across roles, eleven interviewees described indoor recess as very challenging. NSCC team members expressed their frustration with indoor recess, where large numbers of children are confined in relatively small indoor spaces that can easily become noisy and chaotic.

At every school, corpsmembers and/or their Team Leader noted that recess equipment is used "hard" by the large groups of children and teams run out

of equipment as materials wear out, break, or are stolen.

At all schools, corpsmembers and/or TLs articulated the challenge of conducting recess with inadequate facilities; they wished for better playground conditions. In addition, transitions, i.e., children moving between the school building (classrooms or lunchroom) and the yard, are often difficult.

Three of the four team leaders noted that a key challenge in their role involves keeping corpsmembers motivated for their socialized recess work.

Relationships With School Staff

Most teachers report and expect minimal involvement with recess.

Although, in general, teachers did not highlight increased teacher participation in recess as a need, interviewees across all other groups suggested that teachers be more involved during lunch and recess.

Both teachers and corpsmembers reported some tensions with each other related to socialized recess. These tensions focused around two areas, discipline issues during recess and transitions to and from recess.

At all of the schools we visited, corpsmembers and non-teaching staff reported positive and productive working relationships. NTAs and aides alike voiced appreciation for corpsmembers and their work in the school.

Training

Most corpsmembers feel well-trained for their socialized recess work and the majority of school staff agrees with this assessment.

Most corpsmembers and school staff indicated that corpsmembers are well-trained for their work in socialized recess; however, corpsmembers requested more training in helping children eliminate fighting, managing difficult behaviors, and understanding conflict resolution.

Recommendations & Implications

Staffing

Larger teams: Emphasize the importance of increasing staffing in order to have larger teams. This will allow fuller implementation with more attention to conflict resolution, more activities, and the ability to staff a quiet area for reading and games.

Improve transitions: Encourage the involvement of student leaders, parent volunteers, teacher volunteers, and other adults during the transitions from classroom to recess and back to help children especially reenter the classroom ready to learn.

Customize teams: Consider the needs of each site when forming teams with special attention to the need for a greater male presence at some sites.

Seek principals' support: Share best practices with principals to encourage their support of extra staffing and the use of volunteers.

Identify substitutes: Create a substitute or floater bank that can cover absenteeism across schools.

Training

More training re: behavior: Increase training for dealing with difficult student behaviors.

More training re: older children: Increase training for working with older students as schools transition to K-8 grades.

Share strategies: Create ways for corpsmembers and staff to share strategies as a way of gaining support and skills.

Programming

Stakeholder education: Educate all stakeholders about socialized recess to help strengthen support and ease implementation.

Advocate for daily recess: Be a voice for students' developmental needs.

Programming for older students: Prepare new strategies and activities for older students as schools transition to K-8 grades.

Quiet areas: Create a recess quiet area for reading and games at each school.

Indoor recess strategies: Strive to find ways to improve indoor recess.

Relationships with School Staff

Involvement strategies: Discuss with teachers and administrators the importance of their involvement. Across schools, share creative ways of involving staff.

Collaborate with staff: Improve pick-up and drop-off and other transitions.

Keep sharing the mission of SR: Communicate the importance of socialized recess as a way of building teacher support.

Physical Conditions/Supplies

Improve conditions: Become an advocate for improved playground conditions by garnering district and community support.

Community support: Consider developing ways for community members to assist with the ongoing need for supplies.

Start small: Make small improvements to playgrounds as a catalyst for greater improvement or community service projects.

Introduction

Focus of Research

EducationWorks (EW) contracted with Research for Action (RFA) to research and evaluate its socialized recess (SR) program. Socialized recess is conducted by EducationWorks/National School and Community Corps (NSCC) teams who are based full-time in individual public schools. The purpose of this research was to give EW/NSCC deeper insight into the accomplishments and challenges of the program and ideas for program improvement. EW/NSCC can share the data, analysis and recommendations about SR found in this report with schools and funders to educate them about SR and to engage them in a rich dialogue about this program.

The following questions guided the study:

What are the accomplishments and benefits of socialized recess?

***What factors contribute to smooth implementation of socialized recess?
What are the major challenges in implementing socialized recess?***

***What are the major strengths of EW/NSCC training and support for implementation of socialized recess?
What are the key areas of need for further training and support?***

Methodology

To understand the history and current context of socialized recess and to guide the development of a broad school-based NSCC Recess Survey, across all sites with NSCC recess programs, RFA conducted interviews with four EW/NSCC central office staff with extensive experience with the program. All four staff members provide support and training to school teams implementing socialized recess and some also had extensive experience as team leaders running SR programs in the past.

This research consisted of in-depth qualitative data collection at four school sites. At these sites, researchers observed multiple socialized recess periods and interviewed both EducationWorks and school staff. Interviewees at most sites included an administrator, one or more teachers, the school nurse, non-teaching staff, a group of NSCC corpsmembers and the NSCC team leader (TL). Thirty-five people were interviewed across the school sites; most interviews were conducted with individuals, with the exception of corpsmembers, who were usually interviewed as a small group. (See Table 1 & 2 below for an overview of the site details and interviewees.)

Table 1**Site Details of Socialized Recess Programs Observed**

	Student Population	Number of Lunch Periods (recesses)	Number of Grades	Number of Corpsmembers	Separated by gender	Other
School A	420	Two	K-8	Ten	Girls on one side of playground & boys on other	
School B	589	Three	K-4	Five	Boys outside while girls eat lunch & vice versa	Have playground equipment donated by community
School C	890 Two buildings	Two	K-4	Nine	Boys outside while girls eat lunch & vice versa	
School D	1165 Two buildings	Four	K-4	Six	Boys outside while girls eat lunch & vice versa	Children go outside every other day

Table 2**Interviews Conducted as Part of Socialized Recess Research**

	Principals/ Assistant Principals	Teachers	Non-teaching Staff*	Nurse	Team Leader	Corpsmembers
School A	X	X	X	X	X	Five
School B	X	X(2)	X(3)		X	Two
School C	X	X	X	X	X	Two
School D	X	X	X(2)	X	X	Three

*Includes NTAs, Noon-time Aides, Food Service Workers, and one non-staff person, a Home & School Association president.

In addition, with the help of NSCC team leaders, RFA conducted the NSCC Recess Survey about NSCC recess programming among both corpsmembers and school staff. The overall response rate was lower than expected and the NSCC Recess Surveys were only returned from seven out of 17 schools. Despite the relatively low number of schools and individuals that completed and returned surveys, the survey findings provide useful triangulation for the qualitative data; thus, we have included survey data in the report as appropriate.¹ Twenty-seven corpsmembers across seven schools and 38 school staff across five schools completed the survey. Three of the four schools participating in the qualitative study also contributed survey data. School staff members completing the survey identified themselves as teachers (69%), noon-time aides (10%), food service workers (5%) and other (5%). And finally, this report draws on data about corpsmember training needs relevant to SR work from a separate survey of seventy-five corpsmembers conducted by RFA for EW/NSCC.²

¹ In addition, RFA and EW/NSCC need to continue to work together to make administration of surveys as fruitful as possible.

² This more extensive End-of-Service survey of 75 corpsmembers was conducted as part RFA's larger evaluation study for EW/NSCC.

Overview of Findings

This research indicates that the vast majority of school staff thought that NSCC's socialized recess program provided significant benefit to their school. Approximately three-quarters of both staff and of corpsmembers agreed that the NSCC recess program helps to improve school climate. Corpsmembers and non-teaching staff (NTAs, noon-time aides), who work together to implement SR, reported productive working relationships. While teachers appreciated the presence of SR, most had little direct involvement.

School staff and NSCC corpsmembers named the following benefits of the program: decreased fighting and injury at recess; students learn social skills and conflict resolution; and recess time becomes more productive and enjoyable for students. The major challenges to strong implementation of SR included the need for more adults on the playground, inadequate supplies and materials, and, frequently, deplorable playground conditions. In addition, staff and corpsmembers agreed that implementing recess indoors during inclement weather is often difficult. Most corpsmembers and school staff indicated that corpsmembers are well-trained for their work in socialized recess; however, corpsmembers requested more training in areas such as helping children with fighting, difficult behaviors, and conflict resolution.

Purpose and Structure of Socialized Recess

One of EducationWorks' goals for the work of NSCC corpsmembers is to "concentrate on improving the school climate and student behavior." Socialized recess programs play an important role in this effort by "promoting peaceful playgrounds with organized activities; fights and injuries are reduced and students return to class prepared for their afternoon instruction."³ In addition to socialized recess, teams have multiple responsibilities that may include providing in-class assistance, service learning or after-school programming, and running an accommodation room.

It is important to understand the challenging context in which EducationWorks' recess programs operate. In many urban, public schools, facilities for recess often consist of a concrete schoolyard with little or no play equipment; this is particularly true in the low-income, under-resourced neighborhoods EW most often serves. Funding for staff (e.g. noon-time aides, non-teaching assistants) who used to monitor recess has also been cut over recent years. In addition, approximately three-quarters of school and NSCC staff surveyed indicated that "fighting and aggression among students at (my) school is a chronic problem." The fighting and aggression described by these staff underline the importance of a recess program that teaches conflict resolution and other social skills, while simultaneously increasing the challenges of smooth implementation of SR. And, given an increased focus on academics, even for very young children, and a high-stakes testing environment, children may need recess and physical activity even more than in the past.

³ Quoted goal statements came from EW's website: www.educationworks-online.org/Program (Retrieved, 12/01/05)

While NSCC corpsmembers (corpsmembers) at many schools are involved in recess, the organization of recess varies by school context. This report identifies four different types of recess:

- **Monitored recess**, which occurs when adult to student ratios are too large to enable corpsmembers to occupy stations and lead games as envisioned within the SR program guidelines. Instead, they simply monitor the children.
- **Socialized recess, occurs when there are enough corpsmembers to conduct multiple activities that involve most of the children.** Corpsmembers led or monitored the following kinds of activities at the schools we visited: team games (e.g., dodgeball, kickball, wall ball, football, basketball), jumprope, races, drill team, circle games, and a quiet area for reading and board games.
- **Hybrid recess**, which falls somewhere along a continuum between monitored and socialized recess. In this type of recess, corpsmembers may offer some activities or stations, though not enough to involve all of the children.
- **Indoor recess**, which occurs (in schools with all three of the above types of recess) when there is inclement weather. Corpsmembers conduct recess indoors, usually either in the auditorium or in the lunchroom or both. Indoor activities may include movies, spelling bees, or board games.

The four school sites which RFA visited all had socialized recess, while the survey schools may have had socialized or monitored recess or a hybrid.

NSCC teams work at schools of varying sizes and grade configurations. Student populations at the four schools we visited ranged from about 450 to about 1100, while team sizes ranged from four to ten corpsmembers. At most schools, at least a few non-corpsmember adults were involved during recess, though they did not always participate actively on the playground. These adults included parent volunteers, welfare-to-work recipients, noon-time aides and/or NTAs. Schools may have two, three or four lunch periods depending on the size of the school, which means that at schools with more lunch periods, corpsmembers may spend as many as three consecutive hours on their feet running stations over multiple recess times.

At the schools visited, recess was organized by grade with anywhere from one to four grades represented in a single recess period. A number of district schools are adding grades to become K-8 schools and this means an increasing number of NSCC's recess programs must also meet the needs of older, middle school students. Generally, schools prefer to minimize the range of ages on the playground at any given time and have used a variety of strategies for reducing the number of students on the playground during recess. At three of the four schools, only half of the children were on the playground at any part of the lunch period, i.e., half ate inside while the other half played and then they switched. This was an attempt to minimize overcrowding and chaos and to create better conditions for playing. All of the schools separated children by gender, either giving girls and boys separate areas of

the playground or having the boys eat while the girls were outside (and vice versa). At one school, children only had recess every other day and were also split by gender for lunch and recess, which meant that only 25-35 students were on the playground at a time. Students ate in their classrooms on non-recess days.

In general, given the current push for children even in the youngest grades to devote more and more time to academic work and paper/pencil tasks, recess time becomes ever more important. While one school reduced the number of children on the playground by offering recess on alternate days, this unfortunately does not meet children's developmental need for play and physical activity. Although an extreme case, it demonstrates the need for schools and NSCC teams to strike a balance between making recess manageable while still ensuring that recess is treated as an important component of children's development. One administrator said,

Parents don't let their kids go out. I mean they go home, they put on a movie, they play video games, they play in their room, and don't go outside. I think for many of them this is the only opportunity they get in the day to go outside and play with their friends. That's important to them. Secondly, now that the district has gone into the 120 minute literacy block and the 90 minute math block, there's a lot of sit down time for kids. So...the only time they get as a down time would be a preparation period, which is not always a down time, and this time now during recess.

Findings

Socialized Recess Goals

In order to better understand the ways in which different individuals at the schools assessed the socialized recess program at their site, we felt it necessary to first understand their perceptions of recess time in general and how they saw the SR program contributing to that time. **When asked to state the ‘goals’ of recess time, in general, school staff stressed that recess was an important time for students to release energy and to play.** The following quotes illustrate some of those attitudes:

Can adults sit there for hours on end in a seat all day and not have any release? No. They start talking... start playing games... we can't do it! We start talking to the next neighbor or we write notes. How do you expect for children to sit there all day long and not have some form of release? They must have it. [principal]

It allows them to blow off some steam and enjoy themselves. We're up here trying to teach them to work consistently and they have a long day ... we're working them, working them, working them, and at 12:35 they need to let off that steam... I need it as well. [teacher]

Interviewees from all four sites, and across all positions, also stressed the importance of that release time for both the physical and emotional well being of students. Such comments included the importance of students getting physical exercise, a break from classroom and testing pressures, and emotional support from the corpsmembers.

NSCC members and school staff identified three key benefits that socialized recess offers that go beyond regular recess. These were: (1) SR adds structure and contributes to a safer environment for children; (2) As children participate in the structured activities, they learn social skills such as how to resolve conflict, play on a team, demonstrate good sportsmanship, and make new friends; (3) Children receive emotional support from NSCC team members during the recess. Students find increased outlets during recess times to deal with problems or concerns with the help of caring adults whom they interact with throughout the school day, as indicated in the following quote:

We're hoping that ... if they [kids] don't feel good about things, that they know that they can come and communicate with one of the staff, such as NSCC, and they feel close. They call NSCC members by first name, on first name basis, Mr. [name omitted] or Mr. [name omitted] or Ms. [name omitted]. And they feel close, the kids really feel close to the members of the team. There's a bond that has helped. [principal]

Accomplishments and Benefits

These findings are based on data taken from both the NSCC Recess Survey and interview questions designed to elicit responses about different individuals' perceptions of the successes and impacts of NSCC's recess programming. Across all four schools, the three most commonly mentioned successes of the recess programming were: (1) decrease of injury and conflict; (2) socialization of youth; and (3) enjoyment during recess time.

In addition to the above, several interviewees also noted that the structure, flexibility, and organization of socialized recess contribute to the program's success. Smaller numbers of interviewees across all positions, but predominantly from two of the sites, spoke of the successes that the NSCC teams have had in maintaining the structure of programming over time and establishing themselves as part of the school's culture.

These three primary successes are discussed below and are in line with the programmatic goals set by EducationWorks for the NSCC SR Program.

Decrease of Injury and Conflict

Both the qualitative and quantitative data indicate that many believe that NSCC teams' implementation of socialized recess has resulted in a decrease in injury, fighting and conflict during recess time. Data from the NSCC Recess Survey (as shown in Table 3 below) revealed that over 70% of both NSCC and school staff groups agree that fighting and aggression among students are chronic problems at the sites (with an average of 78% agreeing or strongly agreeing across the groups), which underlines the importance of NSCC team success in reducing incidents during recess time.

In addition, seventeen out of 35 interviewees, representing all four schools and each position, directly correlated NSCC's recess programming with a decrease in injury, fighting, and conflict during recess time. These decreases were described as the result of the added structure and organization that an SR program provides that keeps children engaged in activities. The presence of NSCC

teams means that there are more adults on the playground during recess. In addition, the corpsmembers' ability to form respectful relationships with students and to teach conflict resolution contribute to a positive atmosphere on the playground. The following two quotes elaborate on this area of success:

They [corpsmembers] do a lot of mentoring with the kids when the kids have problems or during lunches if there's fights... [corpsmembers are] doing mentoring and doing peer mediations and things with kids and things of that nature. It's not like if something happens they just grab the kid and push him off to somebody. [Home & School Association President]

It [socialized recess] cuts down [on] all that fighting that they [students] carry into the classroom that can last for a day to a week and that can continue. It helps stop that before it gets bad or keeps it from happening at all. [literacy coach]

Three other interviewees specifically noted that classroom outbursts had also decreased as NSCC corpsmembers were preventing conflicts from starting or escalating during the recess time.

These findings are also consistent with the NSCC Recess Survey results showing that over 80% of school and NSCC staff agree (with an average of 86% agreeing or strongly agreeing) that the NSCC recess programming helps to reduce the number of injuries during recess.

Table 3

Statement	% School Staff who Agree or Strongly Agree	% NSCC staff who Agree or Strongly Agree	% Combined who Agree or Strongly Agree
The recess program helps to reduce the number of injuries that occur during recess time.	83	88	86
Fighting and aggression among students at this school is a chronic problem.	81	73	78
There are clear rules and guidelines at my school for how to deal with aggressive or violent interactions between students.	57	81	67
The recess program helps to reduce aggressive behavior among students during the remainder of the school day.	49	80	61

Although over 60% of respondents reported that the recess programming helps to reduce aggressive behavior among students during the remainder of the school day and that there are clear rules and guidelines at the sites for how to deal with aggressive or violent interactions between students, NSCC staff agreed much more than school staff with these statements. We hypothesize that there was less agreement about the 3rd and 4th statements above because these statements asked teachers to make judgements about the overall school culture and support systems (e.g. presence of guidelines), which may function differently for teachers than for NSCC members. In addition, making a direct link between what happens during recess and the behavior of children during the afternoon may not be possible from their vantage point. Teachers also may be making judgements based on the chaos that tends to ensue during transition periods. It is during these periods of transition when order is difficult to maintain that new arguments and disputes arise that are then carried back into the classroom. These challenges are explored in greater detail in the next sections of the report.

Socialization of Youth

Both data sets also reveal that many individuals feel that the NSCC recess programming aids in the important socialization of youth. Seventeen of the 35 interviewees shared the belief that “socialization” teaches students an important set of skills, such as cooperation, fair play, turn-taking, and conflict resolution. Individuals also expressed that socialization needed to take place at school because children do not appear to be getting enough socialization outside of school or while at home. Instead of playing outside with neighbors or friends, interviewees are under the impression that children tend to watch television or play video games.

I think that a lot of kids need to learn social skills. And playing with other children in a game setting helps that to some extent, because I think they just, when they go home they're either in front of the TV or in front of the Xbox or something and they don't have a chance to develop social skills with other children except at school. [team leader]

Parents don't let their kids go out. I mean they go home, they put on a movie, they play video games, they play in their room, and don't go outside. I think for many of them this is the only opportunity they get in the day to go outside and play with their friends. That's important to them. [principal]

When interviewees stressed the importance of learning social skills, they also expressed concern about how students would navigate through their future worlds and engage with different individuals as they got older and entered the job market. When asked about the successes and impacts of NSCC's SR programming, 11 out of 35 interviewees across all school sites and positions, except for NTAs and corpsmembers, specifically mentioned the successful formal and informal teaching of socialization skills to children. Individuals across all sites indicated that these socialization practices positively impacted the ways in which students were interacting with each other, behaving in class, and treating adults. A sample of these views is highlighted below:

The main goal [of SRs] is to teach children how to play without it becoming a serious issue. You not understanding the rules, or losing, should not cause a fight ... you should be able to express when you are unhappy without it being in a violent way. The little people really don't know how to play. [team leader]

Sometimes, you can see kids that are really down. At that time, we talk to them about problems, see how their day is going ... The girls, they just want to talk. They just want to be there. There really aren't many socialized games going on at that point. It's more just about socialization in itself and that's what they want. [team leader, different site from above]

Sometimes there are conflicts, but sometimes, you know, because of recess, sometimes they [the students] are able to hash things out on their own, talk things, talk through problems and come up with their own solutions. So I think that's a good aspect of it. [teacher]

Other changes interviewees observed in children included speaking more respectfully to adults, speaking respectfully to one another, and increased sharing.

Although these findings are also consistent with the NSCC Recess Survey (see Table 4 below), school staff responses on the survey were not as positive as corpsmembers in agreeing that NSCC's recess helps students learn conflict resolution, group play, and facilitates positive behavior. Regardless, nearly three-quarters of all respondents (corpsmembers plus staff) felt that NSCC recess programming was helpful in these areas.

Table 4

Statement	% School Staff who Agree or Strongly Agree	% NSCC staff who Agree or Strongly Agree	% Combined who Agree or Strongly Agree
The recess program helps students to learn conflict resolution skills and group play.	65	88	74
The recess program helps facilitate positive behavior among students.	67	85	75

Enjoyment During Recess Time

Qualitative and quantitative data alike also showed that a success of the recess programming was providing basic enjoyment, fun, and a structured way to release energy. This finding is not surprising given schools' rising focus on increased academic seat work with fewer breaks for even very young children, as discussed above. The finding also reflects participants' beliefs that NSCC's recess programming provides a much needed outlet for children and facilitates positive recess experiences despite the poor playground conditions. Ten individuals, representing three schools and different positions, specifically mentioned that the improved recess time has improved student attitudes about recess, school atmosphere, and provides a pleasurable experience that students can look forward to during their school day. Many interviewees described recess prior to the

implementation of NSCC socialized recess as a time for chaos and injury to occur; however, it was now seen by school staff and corpsmembers as an added incentive for students to stay out of trouble.

Interviewer: Have you noticed any changes in how children feel about recess or how they talk about it?

Literacy Coach: Oh, they love recess. They love to go to recess.

Interviewer: Did they before NSCC's socialized recess program came here?

Literacy Coach: Yeah, I think so, but it's more positive now since they have been here. Yeah, definitely.

The NSCC Recess Survey corroborates this finding as indicated in Table 5 below, with 80% and 86% of survey respondents indicating that they use recess as an incentive and that students enjoy the NSCC recess program, respectively:

Table 5

Statement	% School Staff who Agree or Strongly Agree	% NSCC staff who Agree or Strongly Agree	% Combined who Agree or Strongly Agree
I use recess as an incentive to get students to behave.	78	84	80
Students enjoy the NSCC recess program.	84	88	86

Challenges

Across all four schools, the two most frequently mentioned challenges were: (1) inadequate staffing for socialized recess; and (2) conducting indoor recess. Smaller numbers of interviewees mentioned: (3) maintaining/inadequate supplies and materials; (4) restrictive/poor playground conditions; and (5) transitions to and from recess. And as a sixth (6) point, three of the four team leaders indicated that keeping corpsmembers motivated for their socialized recess work was an ongoing challenge. These six challenges are discussed below.

Inadequate Staffing

Staffing was named as a challenge at every school. Thirteen interviewees from a range of positions including administrators, teachers, non-teaching assistants, corpsmembers and team leaders said that more adults were needed on the playground. A few people had specific requests, e.g., they felt their schools needed male corpsmembers or younger corpsmembers who could play more active games, but most simply felt that the program would work better with a higher ratio of corpsmembers to children. Inadequate staffing also limited the number and types of activities team leaders could offer during recess. Some were unable to offer a quiet area for games or reading. A few also noted the challenges that corpsmember or NTA absenteeism poses, given that many teams are already short-staffed. The following quotes illustrate a range of interviewee sentiments about staffing:

I think the greatest challenge is not having enough of them [corpsmembers] because when one man is down or one of the team members is absent, it does make it a little more difficult for the rest of the team to manage at the same level that they're used to. Even when they're all here, I know that it would improve things even more if there were 5 members instead of the 4 that we have. [assistant principal]

We get more and more students. Our enrollment is always getting larger but our NSCC staff is not getting larger so I think that's one of the main things. [NTA]

(We need) more tools for kids who don't want to run around. I should be able to have kids reading together, I don't have the space or the staff to do that. I need as many people as I can get out in the lunchroom. A whole lot of factors (don't) allow socialized recess to be socialized recess. [team leader]

I think we need a guy on the team or a guy...(who will) come out for recess and play with the boys. Because most of the time it's OK but when it comes to the older boys they want to play football and things like that...and I do it, like I'll go play basketball with the boys sometimes, but I have my own section to be at and I can't always go over there and rap with the boys, because it's a lot easier. [corpsmember]

Indoor Recess

At every school and across roles, eleven interviewees described indoor recess as very challenging. NSCC team members expressed their frustration with indoor recess, where large numbers of children are confined in relatively small indoor spaces that can easily become noisy and chaotic. Some strategies that have worked for outdoor recess (e.g. switching student groups half-way through recess) don't function as well during indoor recess. At one school the lunch period is shortened on such days.

When we got inclement weather, it's a mess....They don't like to be confined in this building. [noon-time aide]

Indoor recess is a little iffy. We don't like them running around the lunch-room. They don't want to sit there. They stand up, yell from table to table. [corpsmember]

Indoor recess is very challenging because we have so many children in such a small place. Our library should probably be for a max of 35 people and yet we constantly have to fit around 75, sometimes 80, people in there. [team leader]

For the first group of children, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban was put on in the auditorium. The children were not interested in watching the movie. Most of the time the children were being so loud that you could not hear the movie, even if you wanted to watch it....Many of the children were running around and were out of their seats. [fieldnotes]

Only two interviewees liked indoor recess. A nurse noted that, “the kids are more miserable, but there are a lot fewer injuries.” One team leader described indoor recess as, “a calmer atmosphere than being out in the yard. She appreciates having more opportunities to talk with children indoors; “it develops our relationship with the children.”

During indoor recess, corpsmembers often find it hard to come up with activities that truly engage the children. During our observation, one example of a successful indoor activity stood out. At the same school where the boys watched the movie (described above), girls participated in a spelling bee, which was much more successful.

During the girls' half of the second recess, the TL led them in a spelling bee....Classes cheered for their team. Sometimes there was a collective “ooh” if a word was considered hard. The kids were having conversations among themselves and doing some things like braiding hair, but the general level of noise was much quieter than the earlier recess and most of the girls... were much more engaged in the spelling bee than the earlier recess group was in the movie. [fieldnotes]

Supplies and Materials

At every school, corpsmembers and/or their Team Leader noted that recess equipment is used “hard” by the large groups of children and teams face running out of equipment as materials wear out, break, or are stolen. Nine interviewees (a school staff person at three of the schools in addition to the NSCC workers) named this challenge. A few corpsmembers spoke of buying additional balls and jump ropes themselves. At one school, a bully prevention committee provided additional materials. Though lack of mate-

rials was a constant problem, one principal highlighted that fact that NSCC provides additional equipment that the school otherwise would not have. The timing of the research may have served to highlight this finding; towards the end of the school year, supplies are likely to be at their lowest.

Of course NSCC has equipment that they use for socialized recess that I'm not sure we would have available to us because we are short-staffed. If they were not here, it would simply be students who brought their own ropes and that sort of thing, boys who brought their own footballs for football. We have the playground area, but that needs supervision too.
[principal]

At this time of year most of my equipment has been stolen or destroyed.[TL]

Corpsmember 1: It is funny because you have so many different ways that your materials get worn out. Somebody could have stolen it, there are kids from (middle school) that walk past the school...

Corpsmember 2: I think that has been the biggest issue, having enough, not having enough, right now we have practically nothing, it is basically a football and a basketball now.

Corpsmember 1: Everything we have is there [pointing to a cardboard box]. I've purchased a lot of it, it seems like it is a difficulty keeping it. Things go over the gate and in someone's yard and we never see it again.

Playground Conditions

At all schools, corpsmembers and/or TLs articulated the challenge of conducting recess with inadequate facilities; they wished for better playground conditions. At three of the four schools, play-

ground conditions are poor with concrete underfoot and little or no play equipment. At one school in particular, the space is very small. The fourth school has new state-of-the-art playground equipment with rubber ground coating underneath, provided by an outside group, however maintenance and upkeep are difficult. At one school, corpsmembers noted the need for fairly minor changes, such as repainting the lines for kickball or creating a hopscotch grid on the playground surface.

I think if they had more space, it could be structured just a little better, but right now, with the space, the limited space that we have... it's hard for them to actually implement the games and things that we (learned)...I've always been in a school where they had large yards. This is the first school that I've been in that actually is using the school parking lot. And that's really a challenge for us. [team leader]

The school yard is large and made of concrete except for the playground area. There are also two funnel ball stations but one is damaged and unusable. [fieldnotes, this is the school with the new playground equipment]

There is a fence around the school yard and (the Team Leader told me) there is at least one active drug house right across the street. One day the Team Leader had to cut recess short and rush all the kids inside the building because of police activity at the drug house. Another time, a man came out of the drug house and stole one of the NSCC program balls that had rolled out of the school yard and across the street! On one end of the yard (bordered by the school's brick wall) there are two plastic milk crates that are used as make-shift basket ball hoops. [fieldnotes]

Transitions

Transitions, i.e., children moving between the school building (classrooms or lunchroom) and the yard, are often difficult.

Five interviewees named transitions as a challenge and observations supported this finding. At the end of recess children want to keep playing and it's not easy for corpsmembers to calm them down. Transitions are more difficult when teachers are late to pick up students and corpsmembers have to try to keep children lined up and quiet.

The biggest challenge is the transition when the girls are going in the lunchroom, boys are coming out. You gotta get them in line, make sure the girls are all going ... they don't want to stop playing. Then the boys are coming out, they want to start playing, so, getting that transition settled is, that's for me the biggest challenge.

[corpsmember]

Everything that we do while we're out here and the fun that we have, when the kids line up, we always have a whole set of issues that differs from when they're just outside playing. That's where a lot of the kids will start picking on each other. [team leader]

In addition, some teachers feel negatively about recess time because of the chaos that they encounter when picking up their students. Some teachers' only involvement with recess may be during this transition, and this can leave teachers with a false impression of recess overall:

And then when I'm coming down to get them [my students], the girls are coming out to get back in line with the boys and it's like when I come out there's a lot of commotion. There needs to be a different way to handle that. Like, I don't know, I see kids with jump ropes

so I'm sure there's something going on. Like I hear kids talk about the football or this or that but I'm not out there to see what's all going on. The end of recess for me is a problem because when I go out there I feel like then not only if another teacher's not out there, so her kids are acting up, my kids are wired, so now I've got to get her kids and my kids all in line, so you got twenty kids lined on the fence because they're angry about something, I've got twenty tattletales waiting for me when I get upstairs ...but I'm sure there are things they are doing out there but because I'm not there I can't see that so I can't say for sure whether they're all doing something, I don't know what that's all about. [teacher]

For team leaders—motivating corpsmembers

Three of the four team leaders noted that a key challenge in their role involves motivating corpsmembers for their socialized recess work. Corpsmembers often need to be outside supervising children in all kinds of weather for several hours per day. Team leaders know this task is difficult and seek creative ways to support their teams.

(My biggest challenge as a team leader is) keeping the energy of the team up – all eight recesses⁴ and making sure they're focused and making sure they're monitoring the areas. So I buy a lot of hot chocolate in the winter and sunscreen in the spring. [team leader]

(My biggest challenge as a team leader is) keeping my corpsmembers motivated in the spirit of wanting to play with the kids, as adults we don't always feel like turning rope. I have a lot of older corpsmembers. [TL]

⁴This school has eight recesses because each of the four recesses is broken in half in order to limit the number of children on the playground at one time.

Relationships with School Staff

Positive relationships between corpsmembers and school staff facilitate teams' ability to succeed, both in the classroom and on the schoolyard. This section examines these relationships in more detail. It draws on data from subgroups of respondents, i.e. from teachers to report on teacher perspectives on SR or from teachers and corpsmembers about relationships between the two groups.

Staff roles in relation to socialized recess

Administrators, NTAs and noon-time aides are the school staff most involved with recess. Administrators and other educators who are not classroom teachers, e.g., a literacy coach at one school, are sometimes present on the playground and in the lunchroom; they may serve as disciplinarians or help supervise the lunchroom. NTAs and noon-time aides often work in the cafeteria; their duties are usually clearly delineated and involve tasks such as clean-up that do not overlap with NSCC. Some aides do accompany corpsmembers to the playground.

Teachers

Most teachers report and expect minimal involvement with recess. In the survey of school staff, 81% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that "recess is a time for me to take a break from student activity and interaction." Eighty-one percent of teachers also indicated that they were "rarely" (31%) or "never" (50%) involved with recess.

Despite the fact that most teachers have little direct experience with the structures and process of socialized recess, almost all teachers surveyed (92%) agreed with the statement "*I'm aware of what happens at recess time.*" Corpsmembers do not necessarily share this perspective.

Corpsmember A: "They [teachers] don't know what's going on; they don't know what socialized (recess) is."

Corpsmember B: "Yeah, (teachers) just come, drop (children) off and pick them up."

Both teachers and principals noted that the teachers' contract limits teachers' role during recess. As one teacher said, "*I just know that by contract, we're not really supposed to be involved in recess so I don't know how we really could be involved.*" Yet, despite those limits, some teachers do get involved with recess:

Once in awhile, I'll go out and play football with the kids; of course they enjoy that. Unfortunately if I go out there and play I have every fourth grade boy out there wanting to play with me because I'm out there, but we do have input (into SR)...if we want but we're pretty much content with the way it is. [teacher]

An example of teacher investment in socialized recess

At one school, teachers did become more deeply involved in recess. At that school, teachers volunteered to come out at recess and during transitions in order to improve safety and climate through participation in a bully prevention committee composed of teachers, the NSCC team leader and others.

The teachers wanted to know, what we can do to help out with your recess...in the first two recesses, the...teachers go out in the yard with the corpsmembers and it actually helps. Because now you've got more eyes out there; you got more bodies out there.... (Corpsmembers also help the teachers at the transition times by monitoring the stairwells). So it's actually been a plus, as far

as...helping the teachers out and the teachers helping us out....When we were discussing it in the bully prevention meeting, I said will this be a problem with the teachers and their contract...but these are teachers who volunteered to go outside....These are teachers that are on the bully prevention committee and see the issues and the problems that we've been having in the yard [team leader]

Teachers' work on the bully prevention committee seemed to create shared ownership of and commitment to improving conditions at recess; it created the possibility for collaboration between teachers and NSCC staff as they worked toward shared goals.

Although, in general, teachers did not highlight increased teacher participation in recess as a need, interviewees across all other groups suggested that teachers be more involved during lunch and recess.

I'd love to have staff members involved in the recess period, to really participate in the different programs with their kids; there's just a contractual issue there. So we leave it up to them and most choose not to. [principal]

We support our teachers a lot. When they have problems in the classroom, we go up and assist. I'd really like the teachers to come out (to recess) sometimes. You see a different side of the kids, develop stronger relationships. [TL]

Teacher-Corpsmember Expectations and Tensions

Both teachers and corpsmembers reported some tensions with each other related to socialized recess. These tensions focused around two areas: discipline issues during recess and transitions to and from recess. Teachers' expectations about what corpsmembers can do to manage student

behavior and prevent injuries, as well as duties and roles during recess, do not always match corpsmembers' expectations and experience. In particular, negotiating some students' challenging behavior can cause tensions between teachers and corpsmembers. During interviews some teachers articulated their expectation that recess issues will be handled during recess and contained there. Though corpsmembers try to do so, sometimes recess conflicts spill over into class time. Some corpsmembers wished they had more opportunity to talk with teachers about individual children's needs and behavior.

Once in awhile, kids are still going to get hurt and you hear stuff [from teachers] like, 'Where's the NSCC?...' (corpsmembers) are not going to be able to prevent everything; they'll do their best. [teacher]

With the teachers, I think the biggest thing is when fighting...occurs and they're (the two students who fight are) in the same class. They'll take it upstairs and right away it's a recess issue again. [team leader]

They don't come outside and understand how it is....They'll see one of us try to sit down for a second or lean on the wall and they're quick to complain. They don't understand what it's like to be out there with the kids for three hours. [corpsmember]

I don't want to have someone come to me and say, here's a list of your kids, this one did that, this (at recess,) and you need to handle that... I'm not going to handle that because I wasn't there.... But if you want to tell me that something really ugly is happening, then we need to call the parent. I can help you. I'll give you a phone number.... I want to be involved that way but I don't want to be giving the pun-

ishments for something that happened when I wasn't there. [teacher]

Well for the most part we don't get to hear a lot of their comments. In reality, it's like we don't even have time to speak to the teachers unless you work with that teacher in classroom assistance. Otherwise, it's just "hi" and "bye" and that's it. [corpsmember]

Corpsmembers at several schools were frustrated that some teachers don't pick up their classes in a timely manner at the end of recess; this then has an impact on corpsmembers' ability to begin their duties for the next recess.

The only problem we have (with school staff) is that at the end of recess teachers come late. [NTA]

I feel there should be better communication as far as when they're supposed to come pick up their class, because a lot of time that causes problems....the 2nd graders are coming out. But the first graders are still out there; we're trying to get them in line....If they came out and got them at the right time, it would cut down a lot of confusion and make our job a little easier. [corpsmember]

The only thing we ever have a problem with is pick-ups...Recess ends at 12:45 and sometimes we won't have some of the teachers out here until 12:50, which then creates a problem, because if there's a recess right after them, it's cutting into that....It can just be challenging for us when there is no cooperation in that respect. [TL]

Relationships with NTAs and Aides

NSCC members play an active role during recess that may be quite different from the roles NTAs or noon-time aides had played

before the institution of socialized recess. Yet, **at all of the schools we visited, corpsmembers and school staff reported positive and productive working relationships. NTAs and aides alike voiced appreciation for corpsmembers and their work in the school.**

Interviewer: Overall what kind of working relationship does NSCC have with the school?

Oh a great one. A great one....I just think NSCC is doing a great job and I know they're making my job easier. [NTA]

(Before NSCC came) I was out there by myself. I did not like it. They're doing all the work, NSCC. I just stand there and make sure nobody gets into a fight. I hope they never go...because that would put me back on the spot. They're major help....If they (school staff) call me in the building, they'd (NSCC) still be outside. [noon-time aide]

(NSCC is in its first year at this school.) We have more help (at recess) this year. It's a lot more organized. Each individual (adult outside) takes a different activity. Last year we had 2 people dealing with 2-300 children....There were lots of issues with fights....Now, everything is more organized. The children are having fun. [NTA]

Training

Most corpsmembers feel well-trained for their socialized recess work and the majority of school staff agrees with this assessment. In the NSCC Recess Survey, 100% of corpsmembers agreed or strongly agreed that NSCC staff members are trained sufficiently to run recess at this school. Seventy-four percent of school staff strongly agreed or agreed that NSCC staff members are trained sufficiently to run recess at this school. See Table 6 below for full results.

Table 6

Statement	% NSCC staff who Agree or Strongly Agree	% School Staff who Agree or Strongly Agree	% School staff who Don't Know	% School Staff who Disagree
NSCC staff members are trained sufficiently to run recess at this school.	100	74	18	8

In the interviews there were few requests for additional training. Three of the four team leaders noted the limitations of “classroom” training for socialized recess and suggested ways to make training more hands on. Each school site is different and “nothing can prepare you like experience.” One TL suggested at least having some of the summer training in a school yard at a school site so that corpsmembers can see the set-up at a real site and role play some of the challenging issues.

We did receive some training but you can't put that much into effect until you try it, see what they enjoy, what they will play. [corpsmember]

I think socialized recess should be something that's done on a school site. That's not something that you can teach in a classroom....I like to do a re-training when my corpsmembers come on the site. [team leader]

As noted above, interviewees said that NSCC teams successfully helped decrease conflict and fighting at recess and helped children gain skill in negotiating social relations. But both the qualitative and quantitative data indicate that helping students with difficult behaviors is also an area where more training and support are needed. The one area for further training named by multiple interviewees (five) involved training in methods of working with children, organizing them and deal-

ing with difficult children. This included dealing with bullies, communication challenges, fighting and difficult behaviors, group management/monitoring and how to organize kids and explain rules. This focus on difficult behaviors and fighting is echoed in the broader survey of corpsmembers. In the End-of-Service surveys given to all NSCC corpsmembers, corpsmembers were asked to check topics on a list to indicate areas where they would have liked more training. In this survey, only 9% of corpsmembers said they wanted additional training in socialized recess. The three most requested areas for additional training were Dealing with angry children (55%), Conflict resolution (35%), and Anger management (35%).

Overall Assessments of Recess and its Effectiveness

NSCC teams were, overall, rated very positively by school staff and team members for being able to meet their goals for socialized recess, despite facing many barriers. Nearly two-thirds of the interviewees, predominantly school staff, said very positive things such as, “I’m totally dependent on them,” “they do a good job,” or “we’re doing an excellent job.” Others were not quite as willing to say the program goals had been met and instead said things such as, “it’s hit or miss depending on who’s there,” “it has been pretty good,” or members mentioned specific goals that they had met along with goals that they were still working towards.

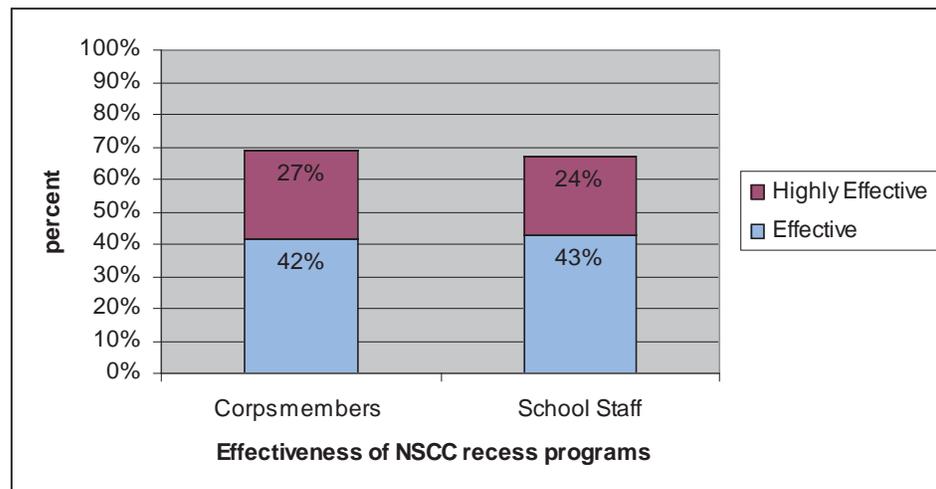
Before NSCC came it [recess] was just a mess. There was no organization on the playground, recess was being run by student volunteers, and there were lots of fights, and consequently injuries, that children often brought back with them into the classroom after recess was over ... [now,] it's much more organized, much more structured, yet the kids are still getting to do what they want to do. [teacher]

As far as my principal is concerned, she's working her budget now and she doesn't even want to consider another year without the support of the National School and Community Corps workers. If that's any indication as to what kind of an impact they have on our students' recess time, I think that says volumes! [assistant principal]

These positive qualitative findings are strengthened by the findings from the NSCC Recess Survey, as discussed in the following. **Both the NSCC corpsmembers and school staff rated “what they have heard from students” about recess quite positively on the NSCC Recess Survey**, with 73% of respondents reporting they had spoken with students about recess during the year. Eighty-six percent of all respondents indicated that they have heard “very positive,” “positive,” or “somewhat positive” things from students about recess.

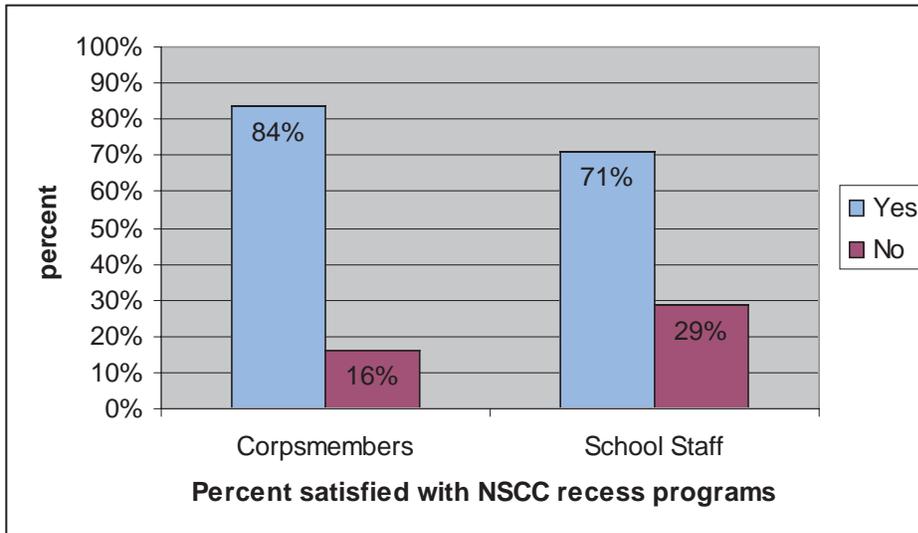
In addition, both corpsmembers and school staff agreed that recess programs are effective, with 68% of corpsmembers and 69% of school staff reporting that their school's NSCC recess program was effective or highly effective (see Chart 1 below).

Chart 1



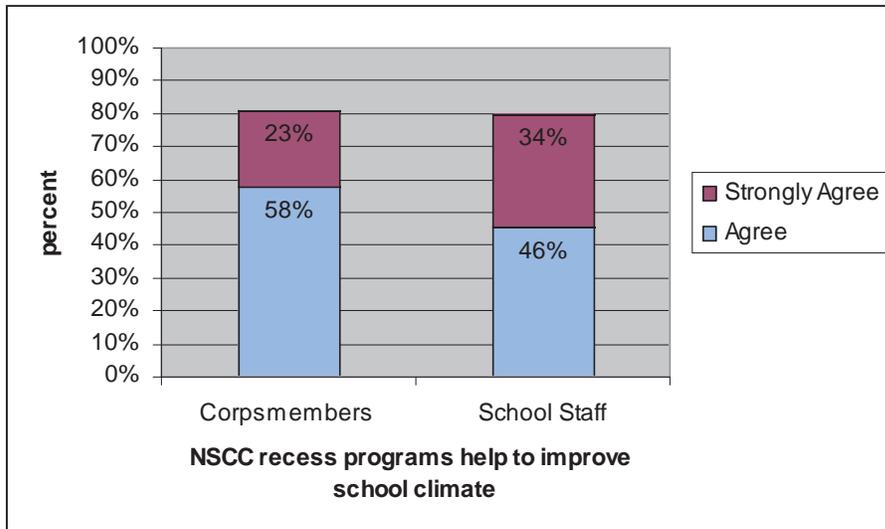
Eighty-four percent of corpsmembers indicated that they were satisfied with the way recess is run at their school, while 71% of school staff were satisfied (see Chart 2 below).

Chart 2



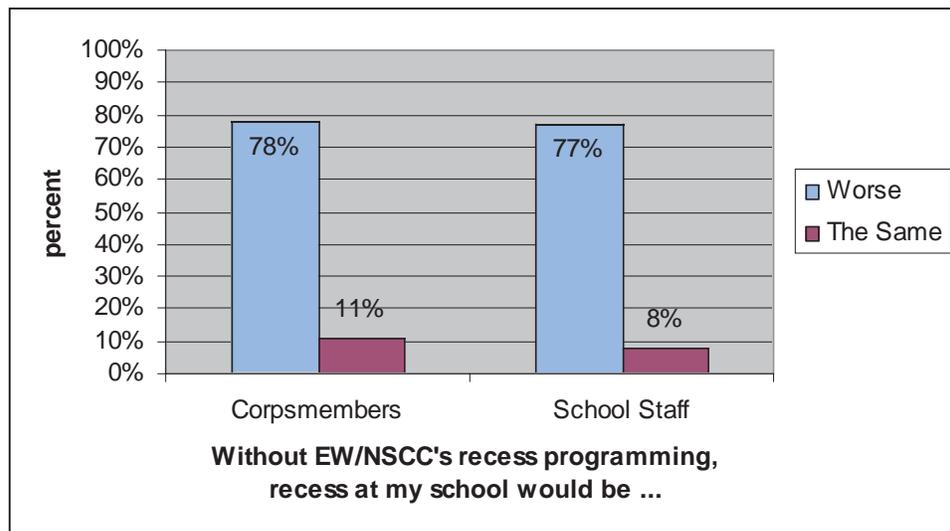
Overall, 80% of survey respondents indicated that the recess program has improved the school's climate (see Chart 3 below).

Chart 3



And finally, 78% of corpsmembers and 77% of school staff members answered that recess would be worse if NSCC were to stop running the program at the school (see Chart 4 below).

Chart 4



Although teams were rated very positively overall, by both interviewees and survey respondents, almost all of the interviewees we spoke with discussed barriers that are inhibiting teams' abilities to reach all of their program goals or made comments about the inconsistency of program successes:

I think it's improving. I see it as when we were [all, NTAs and NSCC corpsmembers,] here. We had enough people to watch all the children, but now as time goes on, we have less people so it's kind of hard to really reach all the children.
[NTA]

When recess goes well, kids are happier and days go more smoothly, but when recess doesn't go well, the days aren't smooth ... overall, I've seen gradual improvements, but there's wide variation.
[teacher]

Almost 40% of respondents agreed that the recess program helps to improve students' readiness for learning after recess. A majority of respondents did not see improvement in this area. As this is one of the stated goals of the recess program, this deserves further investigation.

Recommendations & Implications

Based on the above findings, taken from site visits, interviews, and survey data, it is clear that schools appreciate and depend on the NSCC recess programming at their sites. Many of the challenges that teams face are beyond the control of EducationWorks or NSCC teams, such as weak teacher involvement and poor playground conditions, however there are areas that EW/NSCC can address to improve programming.

Staffing

- Emphasize the importance of large NSCC teams as EW negotiates with school and district leaders. EW can use the findings from this report to bolster this emphasis and encourage schools to make the financial commitment toward larger teams. Administrators, teachers, other school staff, and NSCC corpsmembers all called for increased staffing to make an already good program better and ensure program successes. Larger teams at school sites will enable fuller implementation of recess with more attention to conflict resolution and more activities, including the capacity to provide a quiet area for reading or games, which most schools could not offer due to lack of staff.
- Team Leaders and Operations Managers can and should encourage the involvement of student leaders, parent volunteers, teacher volunteers, and other available adults to help teams during times of transition. More effective transitions would help children to reenter their classrooms ready to learn and also help to build positive images of NSCC recess programs among teachers.
- Consider the socialized recess needs of different sites when forming NSCC teams. For example, at sites with many recesses or large yards, NSCC could try to include at least some members who are able to remain physically active for long periods as well as males on the teams. This recommendation is based on the need at these sites for members who have a lot of energy and greater stamina for enduring multiple, consecutive periods of recess. In addition, presence of male team members on the playground can specifically provide male students with important moments of interaction with male role models through the mentoring and teaching that goes on during recess time.
- Help principals to provide extra staffing by sharing ‘best practices’ with them as EW negotiates programming, such as the inclusion of parent volunteers, Arbor program workers, and the formation of bully-prevention committees that involve volunteer teachers going onto the playground, etc.
- Explore the possibility of deploying one or more corpsmembers as substitutes or floaters who can cover absenteeism across schools. This person or group could fill in on a short- or long-term basis with a focus on alleviating staff shortages for socialized recess. In addition, they could be available to help in other areas that EW identifies, such as assisting with after-school programming. Individuals might have ongoing projects they devote time to in the NSCC office when they are not needed at school sites.

Training

- Increase training for dealing with difficult student behavior and fighting, building leadership among youth, and anger management.⁵
- As more NSCC sites grow into K-8 schools, increased training for those teams about engaging older children during recess would be helpful.
- Continue to create opportunities for corpsmembers, team leaders, and other NSCC staff to share strategies and to problem solve together around the issues named in this report, as well as other areas teams identify. Many teams face similar challenges and teams and individuals have developed many creative ways to meet them that might be replicable across sites. The more NSCC teams and staff can share and build on the rich experience and knowledge corpsmembers and team leaders possess, the stronger the program can become.

⁵ It was unclear from the survey whether or not individuals were indicating a desire for increased training on personal anger management or on helping children learn anger management strategies. Due to the high stress contexts that NSCC team members can find themselves in when working with aggressive and angry youth, we recommend presenting anger management training in a way that address both aspects.

Programming

- There is ambiguity about what socialized recess is and people did not always mean the same thing when they used the term. EW/NSCC could make the most of opportunities to communicate what socialized recess is so that all stakeholders are talking about the same thing and in order to further strengthen support for and implementation of socialized recess. Communication about socialized recess could take place at trainings with corpsmembers, in negotiations with schools about programming and in the initial days of the school year with school staff. NSCC could develop a one page hand-out that clearly communicates key information about SR, including the purpose, benefits and what it looks like in action. EW/NSCC can draw on the discussion in this report in developing this document.
- Help find ways that all students can participate in recess on a daily basis. The importance of recess is clear. NSCC teams should be advocates for the developmental need to play and get physical exercise.
- As more district schools become K-8 schools, consider how the addition of middle school age children creates new issues for socialized recess. How does SR need to change in order to engage older children?
- Seek to develop a ‘quiet area’ at each recess site for students who do not wish to engage in athletic activities. These areas could provide opportunities to engage grandparents or other community volunteers to read or do art projects with children.
- Continue to explore and problem solve about ways to improve indoor recess, for example, include activities such as dancing, guest speakers, enrichment activities, talent shows, stationary exercises, and ice-breaker type activities.

Relationships with School Staff

- Articulate to school staff the importance of administrator and teacher involvement with socialized recess. Many administrators already realize this. Affirm their efforts and explain how this is helpful. Share strategies across schools, highlighting schools that have found creative ways to involve teachers in recess.
- Work on improving pick-up, drop off, and other transitions. This could help to improve teacher impressions of the recess programming and possibly help to better transition students back into class and get them ready for learning. This could be an area for teachers and corpsmembers to collaborate on and plan together.
- Build stronger bridges to teachers, with improved communication about what SR is and clearer processes for communicating about specific students in relation to SR. Twenty-nine percent of school staff surveyed were not satisfied with socialized recess; this leaves a lot of room for both better communication about what is happening at recess and for exploring staff's concerns. Explore creative ways to involve teachers during recess, even if only occasionally and only a small group

Physical Conditions/Supplies

- Because of the physical condition of most school district playgrounds, many Philadelphia school children lack appropriate conditions for play and most NSCC teams do not have what they need to do their job, i.e., implement high quality socialized recess. NSCC could lead the way to develop a movement to push for improved playground conditions. NSCC would need to enlist key district people as well as community and school-based stakeholders. NSCC and the district could enlist corporate sponsors to address this inequitable distribution of resources. Develop guidelines or minimum requirements for school playgrounds. Do assessments of individual school playgrounds where NSCC works and develop a strategy for getting individual playgrounds to at least the minimum standard. This effort would build on and support NSCC's school-based efforts; it would also need to involve the highest levels of NSCC and the district.
- The ongoing need for SR supplies and materials could be a promising avenue for community involvement. Examples include drives for equipment, "grandparents come to read" day, pastors/church members who volunteer to help out at recess for a week, etc.
- Enact small improvements to playgrounds that could make a large difference for children. While improving the overall physical condition of the playgrounds is a much project, NSCC teams could serve as a catalyst to organize the school and its community to paint hopscotch, foursquare, hip-hop dance grids, and other games on the playground. Such projects would also lend themselves to community service days.

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