

POLICY BRIEF

WHERE WE STAND ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

WE BELIEVE

- **CHILDREN** are the foundation of the world's future.
- **CHILDREN** have always played in all cultures throughout history.
- **PLAY**, along with the basic needs of nutrition, health, shelter, and education, is vital to develop the potential of all children.
- **PLAY** is communication and expression, combining thought and action; it gives satisfaction and a feeling of achievement.
- **PLAY** is instinctive, voluntary, and spontaneous.
- **PLAY** helps children develop physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially.
- **PLAY** is a means of learning to live, not a mere passing of time. (Source adapted from IPAWORLD.org)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Provide information to families on the importance of play and encourage them to lessen screen time
- Incorporate more child-initiated play into infant, toddler, preschool, kindergarten, and primary grades
- Provide learning environments that foster curiosity, discovery, and exploration through long periods, at least 1.5 hours morning and afternoon, in addition to outside play.

THE BENEFITS OF DOING SOMETHING

- ✓ "How children approach learning is central to their chances for success in a school... These characteristics tend to manifest themselves at a relatively early age, and children demonstrate diversity in their approaches and behaviors toward learning". National Center for Education Statistics, 2002
- ✓ The foundation of school readiness is a child's ability to explore and discover the world around them through child-initiated playful experiences.
- ✓ Play provides opportunities to develop 21st Century skills needed for success in the workforce.
- ✓ Through play, children are acquiring the approaches to learning such as curiosity, discovery, problem-solving, critical thinking, initiative, risk-taking, persistence, attention to task, flexibility, and creativity needed for all future learning.
- ✓ Through play, children are motivated to learn, gain confidence, and feel successful, increasing their self-concept.

THE COST OF DOING NOTHING

- ✓ All domains of development, cognitive, physical, language, social, and emotional, are interdependent and inter-related. Only focusing on the cognitive domain harms all development.
- ✓ Approaches to Learning are acquired, supported, or weakened by interactive experiences in an environment with significant adults and peers (Bertram & Pascal 2002). The lack of playful activities reduces the development of these approaches.
- ✓ Unrealistic developmental expectations by teachers, administrators, families, and principals create a mismatch between what is age-appropriate and what is not age-appropriate. And are harmful to development.
- ✓ Too much adult initiated or directed play is harmful to development and limits a child's motivation to learn.
- ✓ A dependence on teaching concepts through screen time versus hands-on, active learning with materials is harmful to overall development.

The American Association for Promoting the Child's Right to Play (IPA USA) is an Affiliate of the International Play Association. Join our advocacy efforts at IPAWORLD.org. Joining IPA World automatically makes you a member of IPA USA. To contact us, go to ipausa.org and click to join our efforts.

Special thanks to Deb Lawrence who authored this Policy Brief

www.IPAusa.org



IPA/USA VISION, MISSION, AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Vision Statement:

A world where all children can play

Purpose/Mission Statement (from Bylaws):

The purpose of IPA/USA is to protect, preserve, and promote the child's right to play.

What is Play?

Play is the work of childhood. Play is a biologically driven. There are many types of play. The highest, purest form of play is spontaneous, freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, pleasurable, purposeless, and free from conflicts. For younger children it also contains symbolism and/or elements of pretend.

Guiding Principles

- Play, along with the basic needs of nutrition, health, shelter, and education, is vital for development for all children, birth to 18 years.
- Play is integral and necessary for social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical development.
- Play facilitates brain growth, especially in the frontal cortex where essential cognitive functions reside, including attention, self-regulation, working memory, and cognitive flexibility, all of which are known as executive functioning.
- Some knowledge can *only* be learned through play and thus justifies the essential need of recess for younger children and breaks for older children.
- Play opportunities are needed both indoors and outdoors for all children, all ages.
- Play needs are different among the age groups: birth to age 2, PreK, early elementary, upper elementary, middle school, and high school.
- Schools, especially PreK and elementary, need help understanding that young children learn best through play. Schools need help and support on how to provide meaningful and appropriate play/learning opportunities, including the project approach for older children.
- Families need help recognizing that play is learning; and that family-play also bonds the family and helps build happy childhoods.
- Community services and regulators; such as parks and recreation, city planning, and housing developments, need help understanding why and how to include play in their plans.
- All types of play are important (e.g., physical play, such as, running, climbing, swinging, etc.; block and construction play; play within art and music; games with rules; rough and tumble; risky; nature; role-playing; etc.), but child-directed, spontaneous play is the most important during the early years of birth through age eight.
- Children have the right to play as guaranteed by the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.