

LOW COST, HIGH ACTIVITY PLAYGROUNDS

Playground Markings Boost Physical Activity



**Peaceful
Playgrounds®**

MELINDA BOSSENMEYER, ED.D.

Low-Cost High Activity Playgrounds

By Melinda Bossenmeyer, Ed. D.

www.peacefulplaygrounds.com

Keep It Simple

Simple playthings such as [balls](#), [jump ropes](#), [hula hoops](#) and riding toys, do more for encouraging physical activity on school playgrounds than swings, jungle gyms and other “stationary” or “fixed” playground equipment, according to a recent report in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

The findings are important because they show that school playgrounds and day-care centers don't need expensive playground equipment to keep kids active. The data was collected by researchers from the University Of North Carolina School Of Public Health.

An important barrier to overcoming the inclination to buy expensive structures may be due to the mindset that the word playground automatically forms a picture of a play structure. However, the North Carolina research reminds us that expensive structures (\$50,000-\$150,000 each) are not necessary expenditures if your intent is to get kids moving on school playgrounds.



Surprisingly, stationary equipment, such as climbing structures, swings and balance beams, were associated with lower-intensity physical activity, researchers said, but are beneficial to other aspects of child development, such as motor and social skills.

Imagining a New Type of Playground

NYC appears to be the first municipality to move forward on the new findings. According to a NY Times article called [Playgrounds Grow Up](#), their newly designed [Imagination Playground](#) will have few “fixed” structures that are common today. Instead, NYC's new playground will have large areas of sand with moveable building blocks, water play, and loose parts.

Portable playthings are also brought out each day for kids to play with so that kids can use their imagination with oversized blocks, balls, sticks, sand, pails, and scoops etc. You might think of it as multiple, low cost activity stations spread throughout the park area instead of the current “composite play structure” that was designed to contain play within a small area.



Playground Design Is Entering A New Era

Beyond portable equipment some schools and parks are utilizing a new concept called Peaceful Playgrounds which takes a resource most parks and playgrounds already have — open space — and transforms blacktops and fields into play areas for different age groups with activities such as tetherball, wall ball, and Frisbee Golf. The game zones consist

of painted games that add a colorful flair to any playground and best of all offer approximately 100 game markings and choices to students.

Playground markings are currently a popular intervention strategy for the [epidemic of childhood obesity](#).

Learning While Playing

The [multicolored boxes and patterns](#) on the playground lend themselves to the innovation of new games as well. The incorporation of letters into the school playground provides games that help build reading skills.

Jumping, skipping and hopping on the blacktop are part of a school wide effort to provide a structured play area that incorporates language arts, geography and mathematics into a play program called Peaceful Playgrounds.



As summer school approaches, elementary school teacher J.R. Ortiz pointed out that, “summer school students are kids that don’t get it all with instruction alone. They need the hands-on experience offered by the alphabet and number grids.”

Some [research findings on Playground markings](#) include:

- Increase in children’s physical activity levels. Use of school playground markings is effective in increasing the amount of physical activity.
- Increase in children’s energy expenditures. Students utilizing playground markings increased their energy expenditure significantly over the control groups.

More than 8,000 schools nationwide use Peaceful Playgrounds. Peaceful Playgrounds was recognized by groups including the [National School Safety Center](#) for increasing physical activity and decreasing bullying and injuries.

Playground Policy

Another low-cost high activity playground intervention gaining attention is a RAND Corporation study entitled [School Playgrounds a Resource in the Obesity Battle](#).

The Rand Study indicates that school playgrounds can be important tools in the fight against childhood obesity. However, many are locked and inaccessible to children on weekends – especially in poor and minority neighborhoods.



“These neighborhoods, where risk of obesity is high and public parks and playgrounds are often lacking, could benefit from convenient and safe places for physical activity. And making schools accessible doesn’t require construction. It’s a policy change with minimal costs.”

So the next time you plan a playground “think small” for when it comes to playground design:

1. Bigger is not better.
2. Portable equipment moves kids.
3. The first step on the road to activity may be as simple as adding some painted games and unlocking the schoolyard gate.

Related Resources and Featured Articles

Playground Stencils: [Hopscotch](#), [Four Square](#), [U.S. Map Stencil](#), [Basketball Key](#), [Peaceful Playgrounds Recess Kit](#).

[Physical Activity: Making the Case for Kids Moving More](#)

Physical Activity at School: Get a Move On