

# School Districts Hiring Consultants to Help Kids Play

When I was in elementary school 25 years ago, my classmates and I had no difficulty with finding games to play at recess. Those who monitored recess were either parents or nice ladies from around the neighborhood.

It appears things have changed... for the creepier.

A growing number of school districts are outsourcing recess duty to Oakland-based company Playworks. According to Playworks' website, they have a footprint in 21 states plus Washington, D.C. [Two Minnesota schools](#) in the wealthy Twin Cities suburb of Edina are the latest to employ their services.

Among the services provided by Playworks:

- A coach who “orchestrates play and physical activity.”
- An on-site coordinator “to teach, model, and empower a sustainable recess program.”
- “Professional training and ongoing development to school staff, paraprofessionals, and after-school care providers.”

As you can guess, critics of Playworks believe it takes away from the free play that psychologists have said is so important to children's formation.

But Playworks believes that this unstructured play isn't really enjoyable for children. [On their website](#) they celebrate the value of supervision, rules, safety, and adult participation in recess games. The founder of Playworks describes her motivation for starting the company as follows:

*“Rather than recess being a happy, playful time for the kids, [a principal in Oakland she was observing] lamented that it had become the most chaotic period of the school day, with kids getting hurt, getting into trouble and getting left out.”*

And that quote right there tells you why school districts pay Playworks tens of thousands of dollars to monitor recess. It's not primarily about the kids; it's about the adults. It's about avoiding “chaos.” Most parents don't let their children have hours of screen time each day because of the potential learning opportunities; they do it because it keeps them pacified. Playworks offers school leaders a chance to elude some of the headaches that come with recess: bumps, bruises, and hurt feelings.

Having a highly structured recess is a convenient way for adults to have peace of mind. But is it ultimately damaging

for the kids?