



# PlayROCs the RCSD: Building a Vision for Playful Learning in the Rochester City School District (RCSD)

## Background

Play is fundamental to whole child health and a child's preferred way of learning. Despite all the benefits, not all children in RCSD have equitable access to play in their education experience. That's why families in the district have partnered with Healthi Kids to say enough is enough!

In Spring 2021 we brought together RCSD youth, families and organizations to develop a collective vision for playful learning for ALL students in the district.

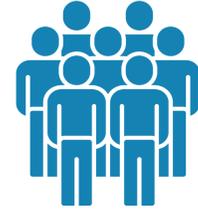
## Who was involved?

The vision for playful learning was developed by students, families and RCSD organizational partners. Healthi Kids and the Planning team worked together over Spring/Summer 2021 to collect feedback and build the vision.



25

Member planning committee



76

Families, students and organizations attend 3 virtual meetings



115

Survey responses from RCSD families & students



30

Students and families participate in Table Talk conversations

94%

of RCSD students and families agree that playful learning is critical to education

*" Play is even more important now because of COVID-19. I want my kids to have the best possible opportunities to learn. Play can help them get through the last 18 months and grow..." - RCSD Parent*

## IMPORTANT POINT!

The vision for playful learning was led by family leaders and advocates, designed by RCSD families and students, and supported by organizational partners



## A definition of playful learning

Playful learning can be both unstructured or structured learning experiences that maximizes the potential of play in education for all students.

Playful learning opportunities include: recess, brain breaks, field trips, hands on experiential learning opportunities, school clubs, school teams, after school, art, music, physical education, and play in curriculum.

## Why is playful learning important in RCSD?



Builds healthy relationships



Builds social emotional skills



Critical now more than ever because of COVID-19



Supports whole child health



Supports equitable opportunities for all students



Best way to learn



Advances student success



Fosters healthy brain development



Fun!

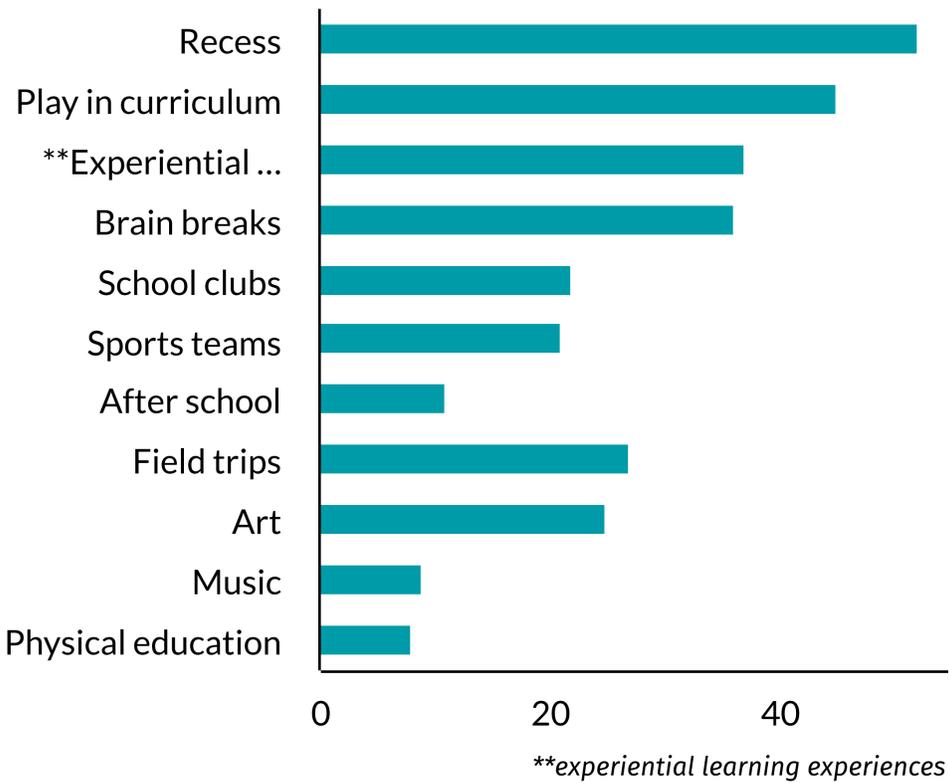
## A vision for playful learning in the Rochester City School District

Play is central to the education and well-being of our children. To support our kids, we must maximize the potential play in a culturally responsive and sustaining way within our education system. All children (PreK-12) in the Rochester City School District (RCSD) must have equitable access to playful learning and unstructured play opportunities throughout the day (in school, out of school, and during the summer).



# What do families want to see in the district?

## Family and Student Priorities for Playful Learning



When asked what families & students prioritize as playful learning experiences they want to see in the district, recess, play imbedded in curriculum/instructional practices and experiential learning arose to the top.

### Most important playful learning experiences for parents:

- Recess
- Play in the curriculum and part of the classroom
- Hands on experiential learning activities
- Brain breaks
- School clubs

### Most important playful learning experiences for students:

- Recess
- Play in curriculum
- Hands on experiential learning activities
- Brain breaks
- Sports teams

## Strengths of Playful Learning

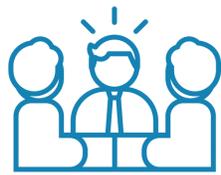
**78%**

of RCSD students and families shared that some playful learning experiences are happening at their school

Families and students shared that some playful learning is happening within RCSD. While it was clear they wanted more of these opportunities, they shared that the district has a lot of great things happening that needs to grow and be built upon. The strengths are listed below:



Successful models exist in school buildings



District champions (administrators, teachers, and staff) are available to share best practices



Policies are in place that support playful learning experiences



Parents and families want more playful learning & are willing to support efforts



Parents and families want more playful learning & are willing to support efforts



Currently there are some resources being directed towards playful learning in the district

## Barriers to Playful Learning

Despite some opportunities for playful learning, all families shared that they did not have access to all of the playful learning experiences they desire in their school. Families and students cited the below barriers to playful learning throughout the project:

**100%**

of RCSD students and families shared that not all of the playful learning experiences they want to see are available to them at their school



Not a priority for administrators



Limited understanding of how play supports academic success



Inequitable division of resources: not all kids are having access to the same learning experiences



Teacher's role to advance playful learning is not clear



Organizations not working together and causing silos



Education is not child centered or working in a way that best supports kids

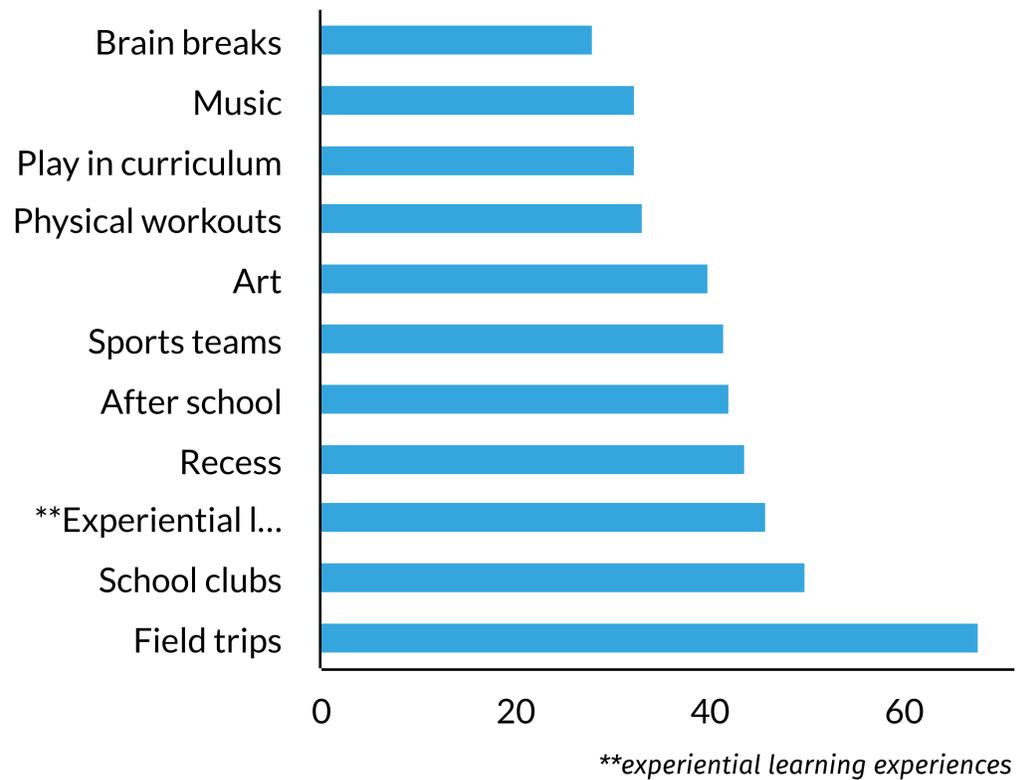
# What families want to see more of in their learning experiences

Families and students across the board want to have more playful learning experiences.

The top 3 playful learning experiences students & families want to see more of are: field trips, school clubs, and experiential learning opportunities.

Over 30% of families & students want to see more music, play in curriculum, physical education, and art. Over 40% of families & students want to see more sports teams after school opportunities, and daily active recess.

It is clear that there's significant barriers to maximizing the power of play in every child's education experience. Families shared that the siloed resources, lack of equity across all school buildings, and others listed above is a huge challenge. Not one parent or student said that they have all their desired playful learning experiences in their school.



## Opportunities for Playful Learning

When asked how we could advance playful learning in the district, families and students shared a number of opportunities that we can collectively take advantage of to move forward our vision.



### Families and Students

- RCSD families and students care about playful learning. We need to amplify, expand, and find opportunities for their voices to be heard by the district.



### Professional Development

- Several organizations are currently offering a number of professional development opportunities on the value of play. This is a great opportunity for district leadership, School Board members, and educators to learn more about the value of play.



### Partnerships

- The district has the opportunity partner with others in the Greater Rochester area to advance playful learning this includes: RCSD families and students, funders, organizations, cultural institutions, neighborhood associations, local faith community and various community tables.



### Expand Best Practices

- Lots of great things are currently happening in the district. We need to amplify best practices and grow what's working to all schools within the district.



### Student and Family-led Projects

- RCSD families & students have a lot of ideas on how playful learning can happen. Invest in projects and ideas created by students and families.



### Increase Funding

- Direct new state or federal funding and explore potential grants that can expand playful learning in the district.

To learn more about this work visit: [www.healthikids.org](http://www.healthikids.org)

A full report on the importance of play in education with recommendations on how to move this work forward is coming soon! Stay tuned for more coming in late 2021