

Safe Play Spaces Keep Kids Active

The Schoolyard Project was a research project of the Tulane University School of Public Health, with cooperation from the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School for Science and Technology. The King School was formerly located on Claiborne Avenue in the Lower Ninth Ward.

From 2002 to 2005, researchers arranged to have the King schoolyard opened weekday afternoons and weekends. Before the project began, the schoolyard was locked when school was not in session. The researchers wanted to see what affect this change might have on the activity of children.

The project provided balls, hula hoops, jump ropes, and basketball goals, and the yard had an installed play structure (pictured right). Adult supervision was also provided at all times. The schoolyard was open to all students between second and eighth grade. Children could come and go and there were no organized activities.

The study compared the physical activity (exercise) of kids in the King schoolyard and the surrounding neighborhood with the physical activity of kids at another school, where the schoolyard remained fenced and locked outside of class time.

An average of 71 children played in the schoolyard on weekdays. The results showed that that 2/3 of the children observed in the King schoolyard were physically active. The most fequent activities were walking, running, basketball, playing on the play structure, and playing foursquare.



Every three months, researchers also recorded the physical activity of children in the neighborhoods. In seven out of eight quarters, there were more children outdoors and physically active in the area around the King school than in the neighborhood around the comparison school. In addition, children at King watched less television than children at the comparison school. Watching television increases obesity.

Researchers believe that these results show that having a safe play space actually increases play and physical activity in the surrounding neighborhood as well as at the schoolyard. More physical activity contributes to better health and fewer weight problems.



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