We are pleased to present the first Play Pulse! The Play Pulse surveys the state of PLAY through trends in related indicators. Each Play Pulse will address different indicators on play and will be presented quarterly.

PLAY PULSE POINTS

RECESS IN SCHOOLS

UPBEAT: Some schools such as those in Atlanta and Chicago are reinstating recess.

DOWNSIDE: Many schools across the country still do not require recess as part of the school day.

ACTION: Check with your children to see if they have recess every day in school; speak with the school’s administration about the value of recess and support such efforts to restore recess.

CHILDREN AND SCREENS

UPBEAT: American Academy of Pediatrics is speaking out on the dangers of too much screen time for young children.

DOWNSIDE: Children ages 8-18 are spending nearly 8 hours a day in front of screens.

ACTION: Step away from the screen and take your whole family outside for an hour.

WALK IN THE PARK

UPBEAT: The National Park Service has instituted a Park Prescription program in certain areas to increase access and use of parks for health.

DOWNSIDE: Park access is not universal. There are disparities in park access particularly in communities with low income or minority populations.

ACTION: Invite a friend to join you on a walk around your block, office building, or whatever green space is most convenient to you.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND OLDER ADULTS

UPBEAT: A multitude of recent studies attest to the numerous benefits of physical activity for older adults.

DOWNSIDE: Many older adults lack physical activity in their daily lives believing that it is too late for them to get started or not knowing how to get started.

ACTION: Most communities have local programs for older adults that can be easily accessed.

For further analysis of each of these Pulse Points, you can view the full report.
We measure children on what they have learned and publish the results. We have devices to track vital signs and calories consumed. As Americans we track many aspects of how we live, work, learn, and play. But what about PLAY itself?

We all think about PLAY—those freely chosen options that we pursue during our leisure time. We recall the carefree days of childhood summers. We carefully choose after school programs or summer camps for our children. We even have special places and trips for older adults.

**RECESS IN SCHOOLS**

Scientific research consistently documents that recess plays an important role in the school day and benefits children’s cognitive, social, and physical health (Bohn-Gettler & Pellegrini, in press). These benefits have a positive effect on classroom behavior and achievement. Plus it’s a chance for teachers to catch their breath and for kids to have FUN.

**UPBEAT**

A randomized controlled trial of Playworks, a non-profit organization that delivers a safe, healthy recess in low-income elementary schools in 22 U.S. cities, found that the program reduced bullying, enhanced feelings of safety at school, increased vigorous physical activity during recess, and provided more time for classroom teaching. The research raises the possibility that what happens at recess can affect a school’s learning environment in important ways, and that improving recess and play may enable schools to address a number of pressing issues at the same time. (Robert Woods Johnson, 2013)

On a positive note, some schools are recognizing and acting upon the benefits of recess. For instance, Chicago public schools lengthened the school day to include 20 minutes for recess and some Atlanta area districts have reversed their “no recess” policy to allow for it (US Play Coalition white paper, A Research-Based Case for Recess).

**DOWNSIDE**

Recess is slowly becoming extinct. 40% of public schools either eliminated, or planned to eliminate, at least one daily recess period (Bland, 2005; G. Klein, 2006), and most schools do not actually require daily recess periods (National Association for Sport and Physical Education & American Heart Association, 2010).

**ACTION**

- Review the situation in your community or school district. Find out about the policies and practices used by your local school district and of course, advocate for the benefits of recess for student achievement and overall wellness.
- There is even a national level initiative that helps you to take action. There is currently legislation in Congress calling for mandatory recess among children in kindergarten through fifth grade. This policy requires recess (unstructured play) for the elementary grades. This would be in addition to time for physical education class time and not as a substitute.
- There is other assistance associated with this effort. A Recess Advocacy Toolkit prepared by Mary Lea is available at http://www.ofrc.org/pdfs/Recess%20Advocacyx.pdf. There is a variety of information and suggestions for people interested in seeing this important action for children move forward.
- The US Play Coalition as part of its efforts to advocate and support play published a white paper by Olga S. Jarrett on A Research-Based Case for Recess that can be viewed at http://usplaycoalition.clemson.edu/resources/articles/13.11.5_Recess_final_online.pdf

Remember. Physically active children are healthy children, and healthy children make better learners. The education of our children depends upon the assurance that they have the opportunities to have daily recess periods. This legislation is a means to ensure that recess will be around for our future generations.
CHILDREN AND SCREENS
The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) suggests that children spend time on outdoor play, reading, hobbies, and using their imaginations in free play instead of in front of screens. The AAP specifically recommends that children spend no more than one or two hours a day consuming high quality entertainment media.

UPBEAT
The general public is starting to understand the harm that can come from too much screen time. The old debate about whether media and digital technologies are “good” or “bad” for kids is slowly losing steam. What’s gaining momentum is the understanding that technology is powerful. The good or bad depends upon how we and our kids use them. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued new recommendations to parents on October 28, 2013 regarding the amount of time kids should spend with TV, video games, cell phones, and the computer.

DOWNSIDE
Just how much time do children spend in front of a screen? On average children 8 to 18 years of ages in the United States spend nearly 8 hours a day with entertainment media and 71% of those children have TVs in their bedrooms. It is the equivalent of a full time job. Babies are on board too. Almost one third of children under the age of two have screens in their bedrooms and one quarter of three-year-olds go online daily. (Walsh, Mind Positive Parenting-2013)

ACTION
• Discourage any media use for children under the age of two years.
• No more than two hours of entertainment media a day for children older than two
• Set and enforce a tech curfew and encourage tech-free meals
• Keep screens out of bedrooms
• Co-view media with your children and talk about values and messages
• Model active parenting by creating a “media and technology plan” as a family that includes clear expectations for use
• Encourage other creative, fun outdoor activities for kids and teens

WALK IN THE PARK
We don’t need to be reminded how out of shape and overweight Americans are but it is nice to recall that there are some pleasurable options for overcoming these health issues. According to a recent study in Preventive Medicine, Americans prefer parks as a place for breaking into a sweat and for people who are fortunate enough to live near a park, 50% of them pursue vigorous exercise in those parks (Trust for Public Lands).

UPBEAT
The National Park Service devised a Park Prescription program and doctors have begun prescribing park visits for patients with chronic diseases or obesity issues that could be helped by walking in a pleasant environment.

DOWNSIDE
Park access is difficult in some communities. Although public parks are available throughout the country in urban, suburban, and rural settings, there are disparities in park access particularly in communities with low income populations and minority populations.

ACTION
• Think small. Often we consider getting out for a walk and think that we don’t have the time to do so. There is always another obligation of some kind that makes it easy to forego a daily walk. We need to make time every day for a ten or fifteen minute walk as even short walks are beneficial for health.
• Invite a friend. If you are the type of person who likes company, arrange a daily time to walk and talk with someone you like.
• Spend time WITH nature. It makes a HUGE difference to tune into what is all around you. Paying attention to nature subtly encourages us to spend more time in that healthy environment.
• Contrary to the last recommendation, if a podcast, music, or book on tape helps you make time to walk, then go for it.
• Time and Place. Think of the variety of times and places you can walk. The 10 minutes before work, a portion of your lunch break, or even a short walk after dinner are possibilities. How about a quiet parking lot, mall corridor, or even the stairs at your home or office?
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND OLDER ADULTS

Did you know there is a relatively inexpensive way for adults to extend their lives and the quality of those lives? It’s called physical activity. Older people who lose their mobility have higher rates of disease, disability, and death. A substantial body of research has shown the benefits of regular physical activity for a variety of populations and health conditions. But none has identified a specific intervention to prevent mobility disability until now as revealed with this recent research (National Institutes of Health, May 2014).

UPBEAT

A new study, the first of its kind, demonstrates that physical activity can help older adults maintain their mobility and reduce their chances for physical disability. Exercise aids weight control, healthy cholesterol, blood pressure, mood and sleep. It lowers the risk for cancer, brittle bones and Alzheimer’s disease. One of the most recent studies found that walking farther or faster after age 65 - increasing activity rather than slowing down in older age - helps maintain a good heart rhythm and prevent heart attacks. Even conditions like back pain and arthritis, which many people cite as reasons they don’t exercise, often can be helped by doing that very thing. (Science Daily, May 2014)

DOWNSIDE

Not all adults realize the significant improvements that can be derived by physical activity at any age or feel that they lack the ability to start exercising at this life stage. According to the World Health Organization, sedentary living (physical inactivity) is the greatest health risk for older adults. Whether you are 65, 75 or older, now is the time to get moving. Research has shown that being moderately to vigorously active for as little as 60 minutes a day can bring important health benefits, at any age. Considering that there are 1,440 minutes in a day, making a small 60 minute investment in your own health each day makes good sense! (http://www.healthyalberta.com/634.htm)

ACTION

Just think how exercise could keep an already healthy adult even healthier. The following are just a few options for older adults who want to get started.

- Places and Spaces. Check with your local park and recreation department to see if there are walking trails or indoor walking spaces in your community. Often shopping malls open early for older adults who like to walk indoors.
- Council of Aging or Senior Center. Contact one or both of these organizations to see what they have in the way of physical activity and exercise for older adults.
- SilverSneakers ®. This fitness program designed exclusively for older adults is a unique blend of physical activity and socially oriented programming that enables people to take greater control of their health. Check to see if there is a program in your area and if Medicare supplemental insurance covers the program.
- Find a Friend. If you can find another individual nearby your home - of any age - that wants to get out for a leisurely walk, make a date with them. For some people, having a commitment to physical activity with someone else works well for them.

If accessing physical activity space or mobility issues is a challenge for you then turn to the TV.

- Sit and Be Fit. If accessing physical space or programs or even if mobility issues are challenging then turn on the TV. Sit and Be Fit is an award winning exercise program featured on PBS since 1987 and is viewed in over 86 million households every year. Each chair exercise is carefully researched and tested by a panel of experts in medicine and fitness. This program has been recognized by the National Council on Aging as a ‘best practice’ program for promoting healthy aging.

The US PLAY Coalition network consists of individuals and organizations that recognize play as a valuable and necessary part of a healthy and productive life. We are housed within Clemson University’s College of Health, Education and Human Development and express our gratitude to the university and the college for their continuing support.

The Coalition formed as a result of The Summit on the Value of Play, which took place at Clemson University in summer 2009. The attendees at this important summit made a commitment to create a coalition whose purpose would be to bring together organizations and individuals in support of play and to open up opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities to incorporate play into their lives. Our network is 2,300 strong and is open for anyone to join via our website. We continue to build connections between organizations and people, globally.

For more information please visit www.usplaycoalition.clemson.edu or contact us by email at usplaycoalition@clemson.edu or by phone at 864.656.2525.