

## COVENTRY

# Schools embrace child's play

## Tiogue Elementary school celebrates 'Global Day of Play'

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COVENTRY — All parents and teachers understand the value of a good balance between work and play for young children, but with more homework and shorter time for recess becoming more common a child's social-emotional needs can easily go unaddressed. Coventry's public schools take a holistic approach to education with a strong focus on social-emotional learning and development in all of its schools. This was recently on display at Tiogue Elementary School Wednesday when students participated in the school's third annual Global School Play Day, an grassroots initiative to encourage more unstructured play during the school day.

Principal Louise Seitsinger heard about Global School Play Day three years ago and noticed that the initiative is closely aligned with the district's goals. Each year on Feb. 1 students are given two blocks of time during the school day, about an hour each in the morning and afternoon, where they have the freedom to play and explore. Students in each class are allowed to bring in non-electronic toys, games, activities or crafts to enjoy with their classmates and teachers.

In Bethany Caruso's first grade class students brought in things like beads,



Photo by Kendra Lolio

**First grader Aiden Elliot plays with dinosaurs Wednesday afternoon in Bethany Caruso's class.**

board games, action figures, and legos, while another group of students built a sizable fort in their classroom. Teachers are encouraged to actively engage with students during this time, providing support and guidance but always letting the students lead the way.

"The goal is to be creative, communicate, problem solve and socialize," Seitsinger said. "The kids get to choose what to bring and then share it with their classmates and teachers. They really enjoy that because they can't usually bring toys to school."

She said that activities like board

games promote conflict resolution and taking turns, so the students are still learning when they're playing. They particularly enjoy getting to spend time in a more relaxed way with their teachers, she said.

"It gives them time to explore in an unstructured but supported way," she explained. "When they're with a teacher and doing something together, they never forget those things."

Global School Play Day grew out of a small group of teachers who felt

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First graders Kaileen Andrews, Cora Taschereau and Amelia Bagley string beads.

## Play

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 students severely lacked unstructured time in their day to unwind. In Feb. 2015 over 65,000 children participated in the first Global School Play Day. Over 177,000 participated in 2016 which grew to over 200,000 this year.

Seitsinger as well as principals and educators around the world took pictures of their students and shared them on Twitter using the [#GlobalSchoolPlayDay](#) hashtag.

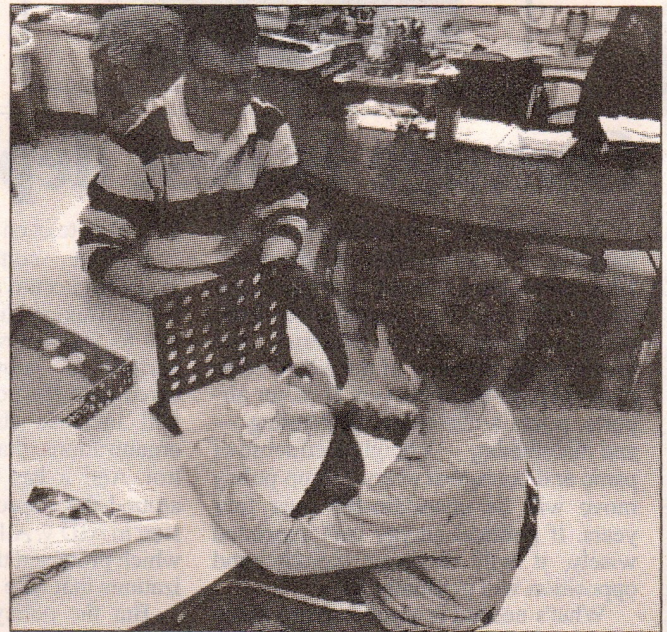
As part of their work to address the “whole” child and all of their needs the school has a number of other initiatives and programs that promote socialization and self-regulation, often led by school psychologist Susan Lyons. Most importantly, all staff strive to make the school a welcoming environment each day.

Each classroom created a

self-awareness scale which students check into in the morning when they get to school. The scale has a red, yellow and green section representing different emotions. The students place a clip on the area that best shows how they are feeling at that moment. The process allows teachers to identify the students who need some extra attention that day, but also guides them in learning to control their emotions. By the end of the day, Seitsinger said, most students have moved their clip back to green and are feeling more positive.

“The self-regulation piece is very important,” she said. “You still use that skill even as an adult and it’s important to learn.”

Lyons is also working with faculty and staff during regular meetings to teach self-awareness strategies they can pass on to students. She also makes regular visits to the classrooms to work directly with the students on



Teacher Greg Tripp and a student play Connect Four.

these skills.

“A child needs their physical needs met first, but without their emotional needs being met they’re not going to be ready to learn,” Seitsinger added. “I truly

believe that there’s nothing more important than recognizing students emotionally and socially. Then the rest will follow.”

Follow Kendra Lolio on Twitter @kendralolio