



Photos Courtesy Christine Mandese

Students at Washington Oak Elementary School play traditional playground games such as basketball knockout, above, or four-square, below. Teachers are using a program called 'Playworks' to teach the games to students so that they can organize their recess time.

TEACHING FUN?

School adopts program to make recess more organized

By **KENDRA LOLIO**
klolio@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — Nearly everyone agrees that recess is an important part of a child's school day, but sometimes that half-hour of play can be absolute chaos for staff and teachers trying to manage hundreds of youngsters in a school yard. Washington Oak Elementary in Coventry is the latest of the district's schools to implement an innovative structured recess program called "Playworks," designed to help students and staff make the most of one of what can be a rather unorganized part of the school day. The school's recess motto? Play safe, play fair, play fun.

The program involves implementing group games and activities for students to participate in during recess, including



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some basics like basketball and soccer but also foursquare and games like bridge ball, everybody's it and "shipwreck," which involves teamwork and commands.

Washington Oak Physical Education Teacher Christopher Lancot introduced principal Christine Mandese to the program last spring and helped the school get grant funding to pay for it.

"It's really about kids having active fun at recess but while creating some organiza-

tion for them," Mandese said in a presentation to the Coventry School Committee Thursday evening. "Recess has changed a lot over the years. They now stress that when there's not a lot to do it can cause trouble for some kids."

"Playworks is about giving students options at recess," Lancot said.

They received a grant last winter and teachers and staff attended a two-day training session to learn how to use the new structure. Playworks representatives were even on-site to help with their implementation.

The Washington Oak PTA

helped to purchase \$1,000 of new resources for the playground to maximize recess, including jump ropes, balls, hula hoops, and even soccer nets. They also found inexpensive ways to make recess more organized by painting lines on the school yard's blacktop for foursquare. Now there are four courts and special storage for their new equipment.

"I was amazed that nobody knew how to play foursquare," said assistant principal Paula Jacquard. "It was fun to teach them."

They also repurpose the squares to play a game called "switch," where four players

stand at the corners and one child stands in the middle. The child in the center yells "switch" and everybody has to run to a different corner.

"The younger grades are playing this all the time," Jacquard said. "We don't even have to set it up for them anymore."

The school always had a tetherball pole, Mandese said, but now there is a ball attached and children are being taught how to play. The activities are designed to be done in groups to get everyone involved.

"Sometimes you see kids running around on the playground, and sometimes

there's a few who aren't included so group games are the perfect opportunity to get them involved," Mandese said. "It is their time to shine and play in a game where they get to be silly and interact with other kids. The next day they come back and they're asking to play again. They are excited to come back and have fun. They want to be there."

"I wish I could go to recess at your school," said Coventry School Committee

Chair Katherine Patenaude. "It looks like it's a very effective program."

Playworks is also being used at Blackrock, Western Coventry and Tiogue Elementary School. Mandese thanked the staff members who have been overseeing the program, including Dawn Malardo, Michelle Malardo, Melissa Sullivan, Becky Lozy and Rose Jacques.

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