



Eric Cohen

Founder
'nPLAY Foundation

“Back to the Future”

—Meg Kelly

In the good old days, physical activity was as much a part of school as reading, writing and arithmetic. But with budgets stretched thin, many schools are no longer able to provide physical education even once a week. Three years ago, Eric Cohen, Mike Maccia, Scott Hunter-Smith, founded 'nPLAY, a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing the good old days back again.

“Mike, Scott and I grew up playing sports at school. Recess was twice a day,” says Eric. “We were healthy, in large part because we were active. Schools today are overwhelmed with unfunded mandates and often can’t afford to provide exercise. 'nPLAY is working to put money back into our schools and communities.”

Although young, 'nPLAY's record is impressive. Eric credits their success with the people 'nPLAY has been able to attract.

“Childhood obesity can't be solved by government alone. We approach it from many angles, including having athletes adopt a school. They meet the kids at the beginning of the year and stay involved through video presentations and tweets.”

Softball player Jennie Finch and swimmer Summer Sanders are two of the athletes that have volunteered. Olympic champions, Jennie and Summer are excited by what nPLAY is doing. “ 'nPLAY understands that sports teach the value of setting a goal and that confidence comes when you meet it,” says Jennie. Summer agrees, “ 'nPLAY is a great organization. The people are professional and committed.”

One of those people is Dr. Chris Lineberry, head of 'nPLAY's Educational Advisory Board. Chris and Eric agree that while testing and accountability are essential to education, it's not the purpose of it.

“When teachers get the chance to connect with that purpose, great things happen,” says Dr. Lineberry. “ 'nPLAY gives them that chance. They don't go into schools and tell the principal and teachers what to do. They go in, listen and find ways to help them meet their challenges. I feel very lucky to be working with them.”

The feeling is mutual.

For more information go to
www.healthyweightcommit.org



Mike Maccia

Founder
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“Chris and ‘nPLAY have the same goal,” says Eric. “We both want to help schools figure out how to integrate activity and nutritional information into the core. As a principal, Chris has turned two schools around by changing the culture into one of health and wellness.”

The first school, in North Carolina, was one most people had given up on.

“It was ranked borderline low-performing,” Dr. Lineberry remembers. “No money and teachers under huge pressure to get test scores up. Physical Education and recess were being cut. The kids were at their desks for too much of the day.”

Studies show the brain focuses and learns better when the body is active, something ‘nPLAY and Dr. Lineberry strongly believe.

“Our approach is to teach the whole child,” says Dr. Lineberry. “If kids aren’t healthy, nothing works as well as it could. The same goes for the teachers. I worked with the teachers on educating kids about nutrition, so they could make better choices. The staff was excited about this focus and understood the potential gains that come with educating the whole child. We extended recess, and found physical ways to reinforce lessons. The teacher would write a word on the board; the kids stand up if the word should start with an upper-case letter, and sit down if it should start with lower-case. We gave the kids an hour of physical activity a day - 30 minutes of free play, 15 minutes of walking, and 15 minutes of calisthenics. Grades went up and behavior problems went down. ”

In just two years, the students achieved three years of academic growth, and the borderline low-performance school became “A North Carolina School of Excellence.”

Dr. Lineberry credited the success to the teacher’s hard work and the increase in physical activity. When he became principal of another borderline low-performing school in Arizona, he used the same approach. “This school had gone through three principals in one year and had a 40% turnover rate among its teachers. Two years later, it was thriving and ranked as a Performance Plus School.”



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'nPLAY, athletes and Dr. Lineberry all agree that they are able to turn schools around because of people's generosity.

"Philanthropy is an American thing," says Eric, "We're an extremely giving country, and as a country, we need to look at our children, see what's missing in their lives, and help them get it,"

To find out more about how 'nPLAY can help your school, go to www.nplayfoundation.org

'nPLAY is a partner of the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation.

—By Meg Kelly