

## Next Steps for Bringing Play-Based Learning to Your District

This guide is designed to assist administrators in identifying the necessary steps to take prior to implementing play-based learning in their district.

### Define play.

Define play. What are your views on student-initiated play and guided play? What does instruction look like when using play-based learning? How could your district incorporate both student-initiated play and guided play?

### Assess the needs.

Start by conducting a needs assessment: Prior to implementing a play-based learning method of instruction, assess where your district is, and what it needs to successfully implement this method of instruction.

### Create buy-in.

Involve teachers, staff, and administration in the entire process of bringing play-based learning to your district.

### Analyze the standards and requirements.

Standards and play-based learning can go hand-in-hand. Identify how your district's objectives can be met through play-based activities. A further explanation and examples of how play-based learning can be used to meet the standards is found in the Kids Digital resource posted by the Illinois State Board of Education and KIDS.<sup>1</sup>

### Analyze the assessments.

Think about what assessments are currently being used to measure students' growth and mastery. The [KIDS tool](#) is mandated by Illinois state law and requires for observational data of play to be conducted with fidelity.<sup>2</sup> What are your views on formal assessment and informal assessments? How can teachers measure students' growth through these observations of play? Develop a system of record keeping to collect observational data on how students are progressing towards the learning goals. Analyze this data to reassess play implementation to see how they meet learning goals and objectives.

## Consider professional development.

Reflect on what type of professional development is currently available to teachers. Is there training on developmentally appropriate practices that help teachers understand the links between play and academic rigor in the early grades? All teachers, staff, and administrators should participate in professional development that offers best research-based practices for implementing play-based learning.

## Analyze the learning environment and daily schedule.

To implement play-based learning, it is essential to review the dynamics of your district's environments and daily schedules. Identify aspects of these that encourage or discourage play. Identifying your current environment's strengths and barriers makes it easier to develop a plan to incorporate play-based learning in a way that makes sense and addresses your district's needs.

## Create a checklist of materials.

Make a checklist of the materials that are already accessible to your staff. Identify what materials your staff will need to implement play effectively into their classrooms. In order to create equity across classrooms it is important that everyone is provided a “starter kit” of open ended, non-consumable material.<sup>3</sup>

## Create appropriate classroom environments.

Create classroom environments that provide opportunities for inquiry-based learning, during which students can explore answers to their questions through hands-on interaction with materials. This may include manipulatives, relevant picture books, and open-ended materials for construction, experiments, and art extensions. Materials should be culturally appropriate and adaptable for use by students with and without disabilities.

## Engage families.

Share the KIDS Videos for Families with families.<sup>4</sup> Teachers should communicate with families about the standards they are working on, and play families can use at home. Consider outside-of-classroom engagement and extensions including field trips, guest speakers, and home projects that expand the learning.

### ENDNOTES

1 Illinois State Board of Education. Kids Digital Resource. <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/KIDS-Digital-Resources.pdf>

2 Illinois State Board of Education and Center for the Study of Education Policy, Kids Instrument Crosswalk for the 12 State Readiness Measures.

3 Cannady, K and Hillegass, M, [Mastering KIDS: Voice from the field.](#)

4 KIDS video for families-YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkqbGRVSPqiEAm46-PzKacie0wkYS-e7u>