Memo to: All Families of Young Children  
From: Diane E. Levin  
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Subject: Advocating for Play at School and at Home

Play is essential for children’s optimal development and learning. Through play children use what they already know to help them figure out new things, see how they work, and master skills. As they do this, children add new social, emotional, and intellectual knowledge and skills to what they already know. They experience the satisfaction that comes from working things out and solving problems on their own. They think and sometimes say out loud, “I can do it!” This is the kind of learning through play that prepares children to feel confident in themselves as learners who see new information and ideas as interesting problems to be solved.

However, all play is not the same, and today several forces can endanger quality play. First, many of today’s toys are linked to what children see in movies and on television. These media experiences channel children into imitating what they see on screens instead of creating their own play. Second, the use of electronic media takes young children away from play and can make their child-created play seem boring. Finally, growing pressure to teach academic skills at younger and younger ages takes time and resources away from the quality, teacher-facilitated play that young children need in preschool and kindergarten.

I encourage you to learn about the ways child-created active play supports learning and to advocate for play and encourage it at home. Play will give your children a foundation for positive social and emotional health as well as later academic success in school.

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