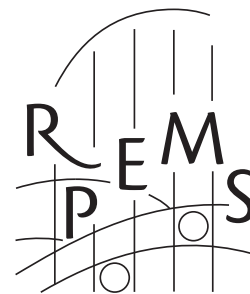




Roland Park Elementary/Middle School PTA Minds in Motion Campaign

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**ROLAND PARK
ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE
SCHOOL**

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Documentary Film on Modern Childhood Asks 'Where Do the Children Play?'

Baltimore — A new Michigan PBS documentary film, *Where Do the Children Play?*, examines an issue of growing concern among pediatricians, mental health experts, educators, and environmentalists: more and more children are growing up today with little or no opportunity for unstructured play, especially outdoors.

The film will be shown at a free public screening at Roland Park Elementary/Middle School (5207 Roland Avenue) on **Monday, March 10, 2008, at 7:00 p.m.** This event is sponsored by Roland Park Elementary/Middle School PTA, with assistance from the U.S. Alliance for Childhood, a non-profit research and advocacy group that works for the restoration of play in children's lives. This screening ties into the PTA's two-year fundraising campaign to increase physical education programming at the school by renovating gym facilities, purchasing equipment, and encouraging the development of a more extensive PE curriculum. "It's no longer debatable that physical education is essential to a child's mental and physical well being. This film overwhelmingly supports our parents' calls for increased access to play both during and after the school day," remarked Claudia Diamond, the President of the PTA.

Where Do the Children Play? grew out of Elizabeth Goodenough's work on "secret spaces of childhood" at the University of Michigan. The film was written and directed by Christopher Cook and produced by Michigan Public Television.

"Children need free time every day to discover their own abilities, desires, and limitations," says Goodenough, who also edited the film's accompanying study guide. "Open-ended exploration and play in woods, fields, vacant lots, or other semi-wild spaces enhances curiosity and confidence throughout life."

A marked decline in children's spontaneous and creative play is a key factor in their increasing mental health problems, according to a recent statement from an international group of educators and children's advocates. They called for "a wide-ranging and informed public dialogue about the intrinsic nature and value of play in children's healthy development."

Their letter echoed a recent warning from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP): children have far too little time for unstructured play, which leads to increased stress in their lives. Causes of the demise of play cited by the group include parental fears of "stranger danger" and the explosion of electronic entertainment—to the point of addiction for some—in the lives of today's children. These and other issues are explored in the film.

The lead author of the AAP report, Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, appears in the documentary, along with Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, British "playworker" Penny Wilson, and other experts in child development, psychology, and urban planning.

Most striking, however, are the scenes of children themselves engaged in the rapt state of self-directed play and then talking about the importance of time and opportunity for free play in their increasingly hectic lives.

For more information about this screening of *Where Do the Children Play?* call **410-662-4734**.

Where Do the Children Play? is part of a larger outreach project developed by Elizabeth Goodenough and based at the University of Michigan that includes a web site (www.michigantelevision.org/childrenplay); a study guide to the film; a Flint, Michigan community conversation called "Special Places/Secret Spaces"; and Professor Jeff Kupperman's work with child videographers. These activities were funded by the Ruth Mott Foundation and other donors.

The Alliance for Childhood is helping to promote *Where Do the Children Play?* as part of its national public awareness campaign, "Restoring Children's Play." The Alliance is helping cities across the country to form local play coalitions to address issues of access to open-ended play and playful environments for all children. It is also introducing "playwork," an established profession in Europe and Japan, to the United States. Trained playworkers encourage and support children's free play without dominating or directing it. For more information see the Alliance's web site, www.allianceforchildhood.org.

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