

October 15, 2019

# Bringing Recess Matters to Combs Elementary School

RALEIGH, N.C. — Late in the afternoon on Saturday, October 12, a young girl rode her bike up to Combs Elementary School in Raleigh, NC. She looked around at the group assembled there — other kids and adults she knew from her town, and some new faces, too.

They were painting the blacktop — creating a sprawling playspace in bright, bold colors. A smile cracked her face.

“What do you think?” asked a nearby adult. “We’re going to surprise your classmates on Monday morning.”

“I think I can’t wait to see their faces,” the girl replied. “If I didn’t know about this, and I saw this on Monday, it would be the *best day ever!*” She leapt off and ran around the space, gleefully trying out all the games painted on the ground.



## Recess Matters

Combs Elementary School is the pilot site for [OPEN Phys Ed's](http://www.openphysed.org) new program, **Recess Matters**. Funded and supported by [US Games](http://www.usgames.org) and the [American Heart Association](http://www.heart.org) (AHA), OPEN has partnered with [Look for the Good Project](http://www.lookfortheoodproject.org) to design and deliver multi-faceted recess programs that promote social and emotional learning and developmentally appropriate physical activity through painted play spaces. The ultimate goal is to give every school an opportunity to create an amazing recess experience for every student.



October 15, 2019

**Recess Matters Playgrounds** — created with blacktop stencils and paint — feature Look for the Good Gratitude Spots, sensory pathways, 4-square and 2-square game courts, and OPEN obstacle course markings that complement a school’s AHA [Kids Heart Challenge Program](#). This work is modeled after the incredibly successful recess intervention program by another OPEN partner, [Eat Move Grow](#), throughout the Louisiana Delta region.



Look for the Good Project's mission is to change mindsets, reduce violence, and transform school environments through programs centered on gratitude. We couldn't be more excited to help them bring their philosophy and results to more schools around the country with these Recess Matters playgrounds.

# Bringing Recess Matters to Combs Elementary

Combs Elementary School was chosen by the American Heart Association as a pilot site for the Recess Matters program, and so on October 12, a team arrived, ready to make it happen. That team was composed of five OPEN National Trainers; Jessica Hook, the physical education teacher at Combs; Anne Kubitsky, founder of Look for the Good Project; and Justine Andrews of the AHA.



US Games and the AHA provided funding for the blacktop stencils and paint, as well as \$300 worth of program-matched recess equipment from the US Games catalog, webinar-based professional development for the school's recess staff, and Look for the Good Project's two-week Gratitude Campaign program.

[www.openphysed.org](http://www.openphysed.org)  
[www.lookforthegoodproject.org](http://www.lookforthegoodproject.org)



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**It was a great day, filled with color, collaboration, and smiles all around.**

“The project was so rewarding, and it had an impact on the students during the event,” said OPEN National Trainer Rich Wiles. “We had students come to help paint in the morning, and more students came in the afternoon after seeing all the different cars and trucks on the school track. We took a blank canvas and transformed the space into an amazing area for play.”

“Everyone — children and adults — jumped in, working together on stencils, areas, and lines. The more bright colors of paint we opened, the more excited everyone was,” said OPEN National Trainer Charla Krahne. “This project lets the students know that they matter. Seeing the final product was amazing.”

“I think adding gratitude and growth mindset messages are *essential* to creating a positive environment for play,” said Anne Kubitsky. “Given Look for the Good Project’s success doing this within four walls of a school, it makes me so happy to see this spilling out into the outdoor spaces, too. It also brings my efforts full circle, since Look for the Good Project originally began as a public art project, and I spent many years engaging the public in gratitude and kindness through outdoor painting projects, interactive displays, and installations.”

“This project will give us a sense of pride in our outdoor space to match the pride students feel for the inside of our school, which is so child-centered and showcases their work,” said physical education teacher Jessica Hook. “I’m extremely excited about the gratefulness aspect added by Look for the Good Project — it aligns so well with our school’s existing leadership model.”

Hopefully, Combs Elementary is just the beginning for Recess Matters. Here at OPEN, we can’t thank Look for the Good Project enough for their excellent partnership, and US Games and AHA for making Recess Matters possible.

Here’s to daily physical activity. Here’s to physical, mental, and emotional development. Here’s to fun, and color, and smiles. Here’s to recess.



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