

# SIMON SAYS: BREAK A WORLD RECORD, KIDS!

By Scott Stump • September 26, 2011



*These are just a few of the preschoolers at nearly 400 schools nationwide who participated simultaneously in a giant game of "Simon Says," with the goal of attaining a Guinness record.*

Simon says: "Set a Guinness World Record."

Simon also says to try doing it by getting thousands of 3-year-olds to play an organized game for 10 minutes while keeping it from devolving into giggling chaos.

While it may take a few weeks to make it official, nearly 400 Goddard Schools nationwide may have done just that on Friday when they attempted to break the Guinness World Record for most people simultaneously playing the kids' copycat game.

Children ages 1-5, along with parents and teachers at the schools for early childhood development, all played a game of "Simon Says" starting at 1 p.m. Eastern time Friday. It was all part of a learning initiative — but it may also put the Goddard School in the record books.

The current record for the largest "Simon Says" session is 12,215 people, and Goddard Systems, Inc. CEO Joseph Schumacher told TODAY.com late Friday that "our general sense is that we've beaten the record" as reports came in from Goddard's 375 locations nationwide. Schumacher and the rest of the members in the Goddard School's corporate office even participated in a "Simon Says" game at a location close to their headquarters in King of Prussia, Pa. With roughly 50 to 100 participants (a minimum of 25) at each location, there is a strong chance that the Goddard School zoomed past the old record.

## **Simon says: Follow the guidelines**

To officially be recognized by Guinness, the schools had to follow stringent guidelines, including having to play "Simon Says" for at least 10 minutes and declaring a winner at each site.

Having 3-year-olds try to do anything for 10 straight minutes usually means chaos, but the schools practiced their big moment for weeks. "The kids were probably better than the adults," Schumacher said. "They were really excited. It seemed like they wouldn't contain their energy, but they did a great job. It was great fun, except for the fact that I got eliminated early."

"Ten minutes is a really long time for a 3-year-old, but the schools were really great," said Lisa Fisher, the Goddard School's director of marketing. "Nobody is ever out in a game in preschool, but you have to have a winner at each site for Guinness to consider it as a record, so the students had been practicing sitting down and waiting for their friends to finish. The game has some great learning components, so it was really the effort and not getting the Guinness record. That would be icing on the cake as far as we're concerned."

Making the official record is hardly child's play. A witness not affiliated with the school kept a watchful eye at each location — volunteers for the task included local policemen, firemen and television personalities. The witness for the "Simon Says" game near the Goddard Schools' corporate headquarters was the director of early childhood education for the state of Pennsylvania.

As for the game leaders, the person calling out the instructions could be affiliated with each school, but only he or she could know what "Simon" would say. All of the witness statements and all of the tickets issued to each of the participants have to be presented to Guinness for verification, which could take several weeks, according to Fisher. Parents and teachers counted along with students toward the tally, but babies and children aged 1 and 2 did not count because they technically are too young to be able to realistically play along, Fisher said.

### **Fun with a purpose**

While going after a Guinness World Record was part of the aim, having all the children play "Simon Says" was beneficial for other reasons.

The Goddard Schools

Getting 3-year-olds to participate in 10 long minutes of synchronous play took planning and coordination.

"It's more than a game and more than declaring a winner," Schumacher said. " 'Simon Says' has been demonstrated by academic researchers to assist children with self-regulation, and children who demonstrate self-regulation tend to do significantly better in math, vocabulary and literacy. It helps children listen and demonstrate self-control, and our whole philosophy at Goddard is to help children through contextual learning, or learning through play."

The idea grew out of a Goddard School song in which the children follow directions, such as "walking like a Tyrannosaurus rex," that are reminiscent of the classic game. The company was looking for a way to get all of its schools involved and excited at all of its locations across the country, so it applied to Guinness and received the necessary guidelines to make a run at the record.

"We thought, 'Let's go for something and make it really real,' " Fisher explained.

The "Simon Says" games were held outside at most locations, but on the rainy East Coast, many of them took place in cleared-out classrooms. The game had to be in one location to satisfy the Guinness requirements, so it could not take place in multiple classrooms at one school.

With one possible Guinness World Record in the bag, the question remains: Will the Goddard Schools go for more? Hopscotch? Musical chairs? Pin the tail on the donkey?

"I hope not," Schumacher said before laughing. "This is the only one that I'm aware of at this time."