



A Playground for Everyone

D R E A M . I N V E S T . B U I L D .



2014

Final Report to the Community

“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.” - Plato

Letter from Chief Playground Officer: Principal Darin Johnson

Our dream has become a reality! After years of planning, fundraising, and sharing our vision for inclusive play with various stakeholders, Turtle Lake Elementary is the proud new home of “A Playground for Everyone.” In this edition of our annual report, I would like to summarize the journey which has brought this project to its completion.

A few years ago, a small group of passionate Turtle Lake parents met with me to pitch an idea that would have a massive impact on our school’s community. Led by Jen Sprain and Heather Meyer, a core leadership team quickly organized and detailed a plan to bring an inclusively designed playground structure to Turtle Lake Elementary and the greater Shoreview community. Over the course of the next few months, strategic plans were developed and communication with key stakeholders began. As momentum around this project increased, parents and community members were introduced to the benefits of inclusive play and started to understand the aspects of our playground which would make it uniquely accessible to children and adults of all abilities. The buzz in our school and local community continued to spread as communications increased about opportunities which were available for those who supported our vision. The ball was officially rolling as various grant opportunities were researched and submitted. Over the course of the next 18 months, additional funding streams were explored, as local businesses and community members showed their support by offering financial contributions in support of the project. It is also important to note that our cause was backed by local municipalities such as the city of Shoreview and the Shoreview Community Foundation. It felt good to know that so many people believed in our vision and worked to support our fundraising efforts!

As blueprints were drafted, communication with various departments within the Mounds View Public Schools system swung into action. Support from numerous district personnel provided an amazing amount of resources in support of our project. Their time, expertise and connections to necessary contractors helped to ensure that our budget would be maximized. I am very grateful for the support of our district.

In the final stages of the project, it was exciting to see our community come together to participate in the actual construction of our playground. Turtle Lake parents, staff, community volunteers, employees from local businesses, grandparents, civic leaders, and employees from contractors providing generous in-kind contributions came together to build the structure you see standing today. What an amazing community we have! The work of our volunteers during the weeks of our construction was an excellent example of what a dedicated group of people can do when they work together. The fact that so many people gave their time, tools and muscles to this work was absolutely awe inspiring. The memories I have of this aspect of the project will be visions I will never forget. Thank you to everyone, who worked to make this playground possible for our students and the members of our local community.

If at any point in this journey you had questions about the vision, the need, or the impact this playground might have on our school, I urge you to stop by sometime during recess and take a look. Personally, I get to see it every day. The beauty of watching all of our students, playing side by side, while laughing and smiling is truly one of the greatest perks I have as an elementary school principal. Every day I consider myself fortunate to be the principal of such a great school...I am so very humbled and extremely thankful!

“Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.” - Theodore Roosevelt



A Playground for Everyone

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OUR MISSION

Turtle Lake Elementary PTA is a 501(c)(3) volunteer-run organization operating in Shoreview, MN since 1990. Our mission includes advocating for the education and well-being of every child at Turtle Lake Elementary. As part of the National PTA and Minnesota PTA, it is also our mission to develop united efforts between educators and the general public to secure for all children and youth the highest advantages in physical, mental, and social education.

Guided by these missions, we decided to take on the opportunity to update the aging playground at Turtle Lake Elementary, which does not meet the needs of all students. “A Playground for Everyone” will maximize accessibility for all children, their families, and members of our community, regardless of their physical and intellectual capacity.

OUR VISION

Inclusive play is the idea that children and caregivers of all abilities are allowed the opportunity to play side-by-side. Inclusive playgrounds address the needs of children with cognitive, visual, sensory, auditory and physical challenges as well as providing challenging and enriching opportunities for able-bodied children.

Our organization aspired to create a place that will expand the inclusion found in classrooms to the playground. This playground will allow children of all abilities to play together and will teach our children the fundamentals of full inclusion, an important example.

Dream

What began as taking a closer look at the aging playground at Turtle Lake Elementary, turned into a chance to better our school and community. Three years in the making, based on inspiration from a Turtle Lake family, a group of dedicated volunteers joined together to enhance the recreational area. We aspired to build an inclusive playground, a place where children and their caregivers can play side-by-side regardless of mobility, social, or cognitive challenges.

A committee was established, policies and procedures put in place, and goals defined. A design panel was assembled, playground vendors researched, and the dream began to take shape. After vetting the vendors, we chose to work with Parkitecture (Little Tikes Commercial) and could not have asked for a better partnership. Brian Flanagan, president, and his team worked tirelessly with us over the years on coming up with a sensational design meeting several criteria including but not limited to: ramping to the highest point, solid surfacing, and innovative equipment. We wanted to incorporate equipment that would provide sensory, social, cognitive, and physical benefits.

Highlights of the actual equipment installed and their associated benefits can be found on the next page.





Equipment	Benefits
Sof Tile Safety Surfacing	<i>Children can run, walk, or roll with ease throughout the area allowing for new physical and social opportunities. More secure footing provides feeling of stability for those with mobility challenges.</i>
Ramping to the highest point and to slide	<i>Height/ "King of the Hill" attainable by all. Design also provides access to a slide without a step – important for those children who utilize a mobility device. Also, allows adult caregivers, with or without mobility challenges, the opportunity to engage in play with children in a way that may not have been accessible in the past.</i>
Multiple access points of varying difficulties	<i>Although two friends may have the same destination in mind, they are able to get there using different paths depending on their abilities. Allows for parallel play.</i>
Multiple social areas: Benches, Rock'n Ship, NRG Hammock	<i>Different opportunities for children to gather and socialize or "hang out."</i>
Rock'n Ship	<i>Not only is this an accessible place for kids to "hang out", it offers sensory stimulation as it provides a gentle swaying motion. Ship theme and treasure map encourages imaginative play.</i>
Independent events: Stand-n-Spin, Solo Spinner, Jack Hammer	<i>For those kids that may be overwhelmed by a crowd, there are independent events surrounding the structure which allow for one or two kids to participate in an activity while obtaining necessary sensory input (e.g. joint compression and vestibular/ spinning).</i>
Various slides: Spiral, Wave, Triple, and Steel	<i>Multiple slides offer different sensory, physical, and social experiences. Triple slide provides opportunities to race down with a friend. A steel slide is offered to include those children with cochlear implants that cannot use a plastic slice because of the static electricity.</i>
Innovative new climbers and events: Infinity Climber, Hoopla bridge, Team Swing, Maypole	<i>Events will interest the kids and challenge them physically and cognitively as they grow helping them build confidence.</i>
Panels: Music, Braille, Telescope	<i>Offers additional sensory and cognitive benefits.</i>

INVEST

The successful completion of the campaign to support "A Playground for Everyone" is a testament to the spirit of philanthropy. From the grassroots fundraising efforts championed by kids at Turtle Lake to the larger investments received, more than \$215,000 was secured to realize our vision of inclusive play - for this we are extremely proud and grateful.

Capital campaigns are ambitious undertakings. Not only do they require substantial financial backing of many, they forever change the landscape of an institution and often a community. In our case, the students and staff at Turtle Lake Elementary will be reminded of what was accomplished on a daily basis when recess calls. The residents of Shoreview and the surrounding community will be witness to the benefits of inclusive play when they see their kids and other families experience play with no boundaries.

The playground leadership is deeply appreciative of those who invested their time, expertise and their resources to help us build "A Playground for Everyone". Notably, the Mounds View School District's partnership was essential in our efforts, as well as the Paul Adelman Children with Disabilities Endowment Fund's gift to our campaign. Also noteworthy is the in-kind support received from McGough Construction, Cemstone and R & S Concrete Pumping. We encourage you to take note of the donor recognition listing to see all those who generously contributed to the project.



"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." - Winston Churchill

Thank you to all of our donors who helped make “A Playground for Everyone” a reality!

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BUILD

Thanks to the wonderful men and women that helped us physically build the playground! Guided by the expertise from **Parkitecture**, approximately 70 volunteers dedicated some of their time to help construct the playground the last week in July. In the weeks prior to the community build, the old equipment was removed by **Bauer Brothers Salvage**. **SafetyFirst Playground Surfacing** helped prep the site for the build by moving woodchips and the old walkways, excavating excess dirt, and setting up safety fencing. By the time the volunteers arrived, we had two semi-trucks worth of equipment and clean slate of good earth upon which to install it.



Clamps were assembled, holes were drilled, concrete poured, and equipment placed and secured.



“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” - Helen Keller

Then there was the challenge of placing two 250 lb roofs. Thanks to **Armstrong Crane** for helping us out!

After the Community Build, the playground was not yet complete. Thanks to **McGough Construction, R&S Pumping Service, and Cemstone** for framing the concrete pad, walks, ramp, and bench pad.



Finally, the tiles were placed, the remaining site work completed, and the garden planted. Everyone that we worked with had a “Can Do” attitude and we couldn’t have done it without the many individuals and entities that believed in our vision to provide a better recreational experience for the community!



Then, on August 26, 2014, the ribbon was cut, and the kids were off!



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