



MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent
FROM: Playground Standards Ad Hoc Advisory Committee
DATE: December 10, 2021
SUBJECT: Recommended Playground Standards

Introduction

Between 2021 and 2022, Bellingham Public Schools is scheduled to open three new elementary schools, Alderwood, Parkview and Sunnyland. As part of the new facilities, each school will have a new playground design and equipment. The Playground Standards Ad Hoc Advisory Committee was formed in spring of 2021 with the goal of developing standards for playground design and equipment choices for our three newest elementary schools and to guide decision-making for new playgrounds in the future.

Committee Work

Playground Standards Ad Hoc Advisory Committee members, spring 2021:

- Curtis Lawyer, director of capital projects, co-chair
- Jessica Sankey, executive director of operations, co-chair
- Kristi Dominguez, assistant superintendent of teaching and learning
- Mylo Allen, principal at Parkview Elementary
- Amy Berreth, principal Sunnyland Elementary
- Micah Smith, principal at Alderwood Elementary
- Margaret Gude, communications specialist
- Alisson Bonner, counselor, Columbia
- Nic Castona, physical education, Parkview
- Rodolfo Riviere, physical education, Birchwood
- Meredith Gant, Life Skills teacher, Cordata
- Sarah Catudio, Life Skills teacher, Wade King
- Jenny Brice, occupational therapist
- Cindy Pearson, physical therapist
- Corbin Anderson, physical therapist
- Jen Mallett, developmental preschool, Happy Valley
- Debbie Haney, early learning specialist
- Trevor Aeschliman, BPS playground specialist
- Corey Ayers, capital projects manager
- Brian Smart, capital projects manager
- Kristine Wilson, Opportunity Council
- Patty Yunge, parent, Wade King
- Kristi Wyandt-Varela, parent, Carl Cozier



- Gina Austin, project engineer, City of Bellingham
- Jonathan Schilk, landscape architect, City of Bellingham
- Joshua Cloud, OAC Services

Key resources:

- [The Bellingham Promise](#)
- [Policy & Procedure 3440](#)
- [Let Kids Play!](#) Best practices in inclusive playgrounds
- Playworld [“Inclusive Play Design Guide”](#)
- [“Imagining Playgrounds”](#) video developed by BPS staff & families

The Playground Standards Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee met five times in April and May of 2021. The basis for establishment was to provide a playground standards guideline to inform the design, procurement, and installation of new and existing playground equipment and play surfaces at our schools. This includes new school projects, remodel/improvement projects, and entire/partial playground equipment replacement projects. A standards guideline allows for decisions to be made efficiently without compromising safety, functionality, durability, equity and inclusion goals.

The key charge was to develop playground surface and equipment standards for new elementary school playgrounds. Using The Bellingham Promise and the Playworks Guide to Inclusive Playgrounds, the ad hoc advisory committee developed **“Playgrounds in Bellingham Public Schools: a Plan for Universal Design”** to represent our work and illustrate the key values to drive building and equipment choices for all new playgrounds.

Over the course of two months, the advisory committee shared materials and information about surfacing and height recommendations, welcomed guest speakers with expertise in universal design, and held discussions on **inclusion, movement vocabulary and physical literacy**.

The committee recommends that **all new playgrounds begin with universal design**: an environment that is usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

The values statement developed by the district’s Playground Standards Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee articulates that to achieve the collective commitment of The Bellingham Promise, we design and build playgrounds that are:

- Fun, engaging, inspiring, imaginative and challenging
- Inclusive and accessible, with something for everyone, that exceed minimum accessibility requirements
- Developmentally appropriate, with access points for all stages of physical development.



- Built to encourage social connections through play
- Supportive of diverse sensory need, providing experiences to stimulate sight, sound, tactile, vestibular and proprioceptive sense, and also strategic with sensory pathways.
- Safe play spaces and surfaces that include perimeter containment
- Locally-relevant, with cultural, geographic and artistic connections to Bellingham, and
- Community-centered, connected to nature, and most of all, welcoming.

The committee welcomed guest speaker and national inclusive playgrounds expert Mara Kaplan of Let Kids Play! to share the seven keys to an inclusive playground and **recommends that future Bellingham Public Schools playgrounds meet each of the seven keys to an inclusive playground** as published in the Playworld [Inclusive Play Design Guide](#):

1. Surfacing: even surfacing with limited curbs allows for the greatest mobility.
2. Perimeter containment is necessary for the safety and security of students and staff.
3. The coolest thing is accessible to all: a concept that encourages inclusion, belonging, and healthy relationships.
4. Fun and challenging for all.
5. Includes zones, to allow for the developmental and interest needs of a diverse population.
6. Sensory play, to invite fun and health development at the same time.
7. Social/cooperative play opportunities, to support social-emotional learning.

Recommendation:

The committee recommends that district groups consult the “Playgrounds in Bellingham Public Schools” document when making decisions about new playgrounds, familiarizing themselves with the key resources and aligning playground design with the stated values for universal design.

Schools planning new elementary play spaces should:

- Convene multi-disciplinary teams including but not limited to building leaders, physical educators, recess teachers, special education staff members, school community members (families and students) and district-wide employees (e.g, Capital Projects staff, Facilities and Sustainability staff, playground maintenance specialists, OT/PT staff).
- Use the values in the “Playgrounds in Bellingham Public Schools” design as a baseline for developing values specific to school sites.
- Design playgrounds that meet each of the 7 keys to an inclusive playground.