

OUR VSB



Playground Guide

**For School Administrators and
Parent Advisory Councils**

Acknowledgements

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The Vancouver School District is honoured to be working, learning, and playing together on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the s̓k̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh (Squamish), sel̓íl̓witulh (Tsleil-Waututh), and x̓ʷm̓əθk̓ʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) nations.

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PLAYGROUND GUIDE

FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND PARENT ADVISORY COUNCILS

September 2022

Guiding Principles

This guide is for school administrators, PAC members, and school community members who wish to undertake the installation of a new playground on their school ground. The intent of this guide is to outline the expected standards and processes required for schools to plan a successful playground project.

Standards

The Vancouver School District (“the District”) supports, in principle, the establishment of creative play areas or the upgrading of existing areas on school grounds. The District has adopted the **CSA “Children’s Playscape and Equipment” Z614:20** guidelines as the standard for new playground installations and maintenance. These standards cover all aspects of playground construction and safety. In addition to the CSA standards, the District also requires that all new playground structures be certified by the International Play Equipment Manufacturers Association (IPEMA). This is to ensure that the structures are both strong and durable, thereby reducing the risk of failure due to improper construction.

Accessibility

In 2001, Statistics Canada estimated that 4% of children aged 5 to 14 have disabilities. Of these children, the breakdown of the types of disabilities (i.e. “limitation to activity”) are as follows:

Chronic 65%	Dexterity 20%
Learning 65%	Mobility 14%
Speech 43%	Hearing 13%
Psychological 32%	Visual 9%
Developmental 30%	Unknown 3%

Consider that there are students in your school who experience one (or more) of these types of disabilities, whether they are visible to you or not, and how they might experience the opportunity to use the school grounds for play.

*The District strives to **exceed** all guidelines where possible to provide increased play and learning opportunities for all abilities. The Grounds Department **will only approve** playground proposals that **include accessible components**.*

Playground spaces *must* meet the needs and range of abilities of the whole school and community. Physical access does not guarantee social inclusion or the opportunity to participate. Designing inclusive spaces creates an opportunity to provide for meaningful and diverse experiences. The thoughtful layout

of the play and learning components of the playground fosters interaction, socialization, and integrated play among *all* users (students, educators, parents/caregivers, community members).

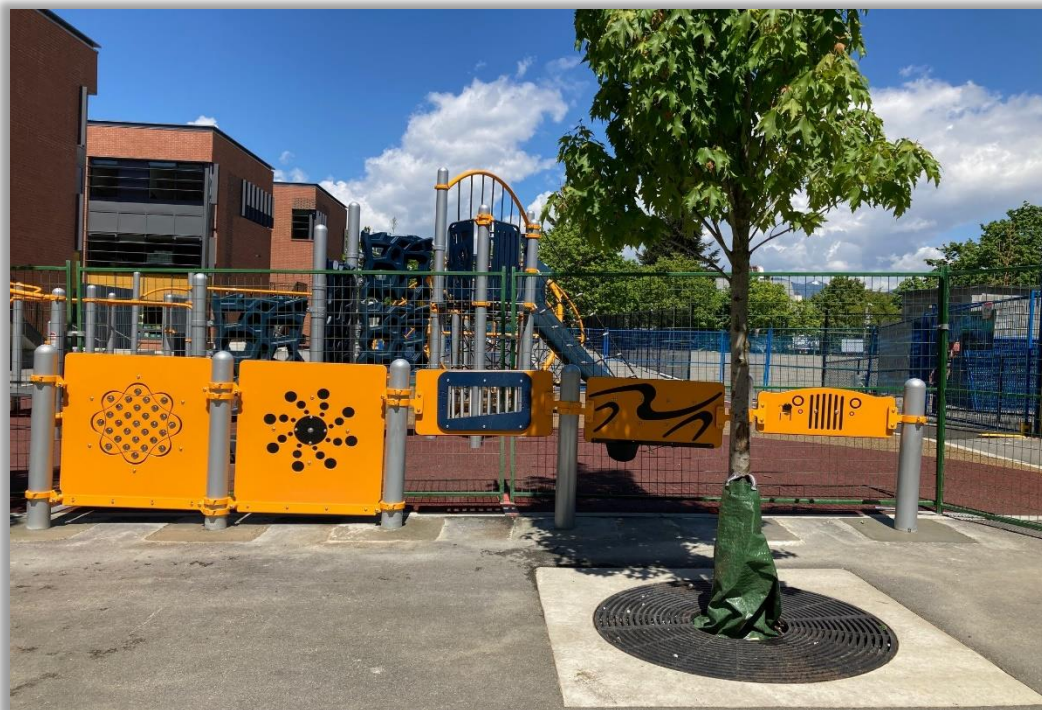
Consider elements for a range of abilities and a rewarding combination of experience, including:

- Physical (e.g. ramps and transfer points for access with mobility equipment)
- Sensory (e.g. colours, textures, and noise making components for those with visual or hearing impairment)
- Developmental (e.g. activity panels, motion-based activities, or cozy spaces for a child with autism)

Consider elements for a range of play experiences, including:

- Creative/cognitive play (thinking, manipulating, or problem solving)
- Physical play (climbing, sliding, crawling, swinging, rocking, running, jumping, throwing, and building)
- Quiet retreat play (perching, hiding, and playing alone or with a friend)
- Social play (interacting with other children)

The accessibility of different components can be play an opportunities in themselves. For example – pathways, ramps, safety panels, and joining elements are also part of the play experience and can provide for the developmental needs of students with all abilities.



Activity panels marking the edge of the playground area at Tennyson Elementary

The key considerations for accessible design are to:

- Ensure users can get to each element (e.g. provide a stable surface, provide visual cues)
- Ensure elements can be used by school and community members with varying physical, sensory, and developmental abilities.
- Remove barriers (e.g. curb edging, walls)
- Provide supports (e.g. transfer stations, railings)
- Aim for inclusive opportunities for play (e.g. do not isolate accessible components to only one section of the playground)

For more information about creating accessible play spaces, see the [Resources](#) section.



Ramp Access to the Sway Fun element at Roberts Elementary

District Procedures

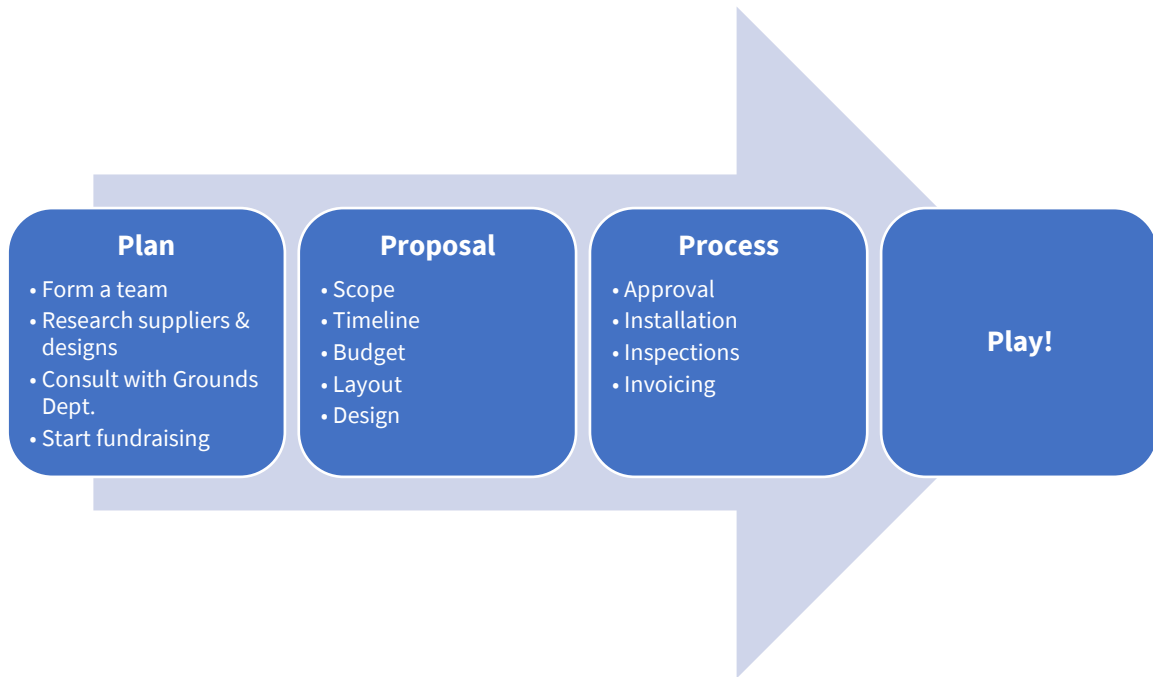
The guidelines for all new play areas are outlined in the District's [Administrative Procedure 551 – Appendix B](#), and include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. To upgrade existing equipment or develop new creative play areas, the **Principal or Vice Principal** initiates discussions with the **Grounds Supervisor** to review guidelines for play equipment.
2. Communication with the Grounds Department and any equipment suppliers is conducted **by the school administrators only**. Any communications from families, PAC members and teachers must be channeled through the school administrators.
3. The school administrators are responsible for determining that the project is as respectful as possible to the adjacent neighbours, with input from Grounds staff.
4. After consulting District staff and developing plans for the school site, a formal proposal is submitted to the Grounds Supervisor.
5. Upon approval, the Grounds Department will work with the supplier to purchase equipment and schedule installation.
6. Following completion of the project, the Grounds Department will inspect and approve the equipment.
7. After the project is approved by the Grounds Department, the District is responsible for the maintenance of the playground.



Birdseye view of new playground at McBride Elementary. Note the mix of both poured-in-place rubber and engineered wood fiber surfacing

Overview



1. PAC and school form a team to plan, identify design elements, and start fundraising.
2. Administrator contacts the Grounds Department for a site visit to get more info about what might work on the school ground.
3. Administrator contacts suppliers to research potential designs, including accessibility components.
4. Create proposal with District-approved suppliers to submit to the Grounds Supervisor. Grounds Department will contact suppliers to facilitate purchase and installation of equipment and surfacing.

The proposal should include:

- scope of project – detailed plan of all work required
 - Proposed project timeline
 - Budget and fundraising plans – estimates of all material, equipment, and labour costs, and details about funding sources
 - Site map with layout of proposed equipment (plans, sketches, pictures, or models) (consider presence of existing utility lines, and future needs of the site (e.g. seismic projects, portable classrooms, etc.)
 - design elements/equipment from one of the approved suppliers
 - plan for surfacing material (rubber or wood chips) from one of the approved suppliers
5. Submit proposal to Grounds Supervisor.
 6. Grounds Department will contact supplier and school administrator with any feedback prior to approval.
 7. Installation and final inspection.
 8. Supplier invoices Grounds Department directly.

Team Roles and Responsibilities

1. **School District:** The District assumes the ownership and liability of the playground once it is installed. Playgrounds are governed by current CSA (Canadian Safety Association) standards which must be strictly adhered to as a minimum standard. The District reserves the right of final approval for the manufacturer selected to provide equipment and the supplier of the base materials, to ensure that all safety, accessibility, and design requirements are met.
 - a. **Grounds Department:** The Grounds Department represents the District and manages the purchasing and installation of the playground equipment and surfacing. The Grounds Department will also consult on the design and location of the playground and will assume responsibility for the maintenance of the playground in perpetuity.
2. **School Administration:** An administrator's role is to facilitate and mediate the planning and installation of the playground equipment between the Grounds Department and the school PAC. Administrators are responsible for attending meetings, providing input on equipment selection, assisting in identifying a location for the playground, and other items pertinent to the installation of equipment.
3. **Parent Advisory Council:** The PAC is responsible for fundraising for the playground and providing input on design and equipment.



Friendship Swing at Fraser Elementary

Develop a Proposal

Scope

Brief description of the proposed playground project, including the extent of work required (i.e. is it a brand-new playground, or is it an upgrade to an existing area?)

Timeline

Proposed timeline for completion of the project if it is to be spread over multiple years.

Important: *Playground projects typically take about one year from proposal to completion once the funding has been fully secured.*

Budget & Fundraising

The District does not fund new playgrounds. The playground team will need to identify potential funding sources to cover the cost of the playground equipment and surface. The PAC should **NOT** pay the supplier directly. The funds will be transferred to the school and dedicated for the playground. The Grounds and Purchasing Departments will complete the contracts with the supplier.

Important: *Costs of equipment fluctuate per market forces. Estimates from suppliers are typically valid for 30 days to account for rapid changes in costs.*

Site Selection

A Grounds Department representative will meet onsite with school admin to provide input to the potential locations for the playground. The proposal should include a preliminary dimensioned drawing showing the location on the school grounds, extent of the creative play area and the location of structures/equipment. Consider existing utility lines, and consult with Grounds regarding future needs of the space.

Design – equipment and surface material

Outline the equipment that is to be installed. Consider getting input from students in the design process. Suppliers may be able to assist with the design process and can offer insight into playground elements that are accessible, engaging, and beloved by students.

Approval decisions of plans for the development of such playground areas will be based on the following criteria:

- a. The relative safety and accessibility factors, which include the height, material used, function of the equipment, play value, ratio of students to number and size of structures.
- b. Appropriateness for age levels of users in terms of physical challenges as well as imaginative and creative play potential
- c. Location of the playground in relation to the school and homes adjacent to the school property.
- d. Possible area development requirements such as drainage, landscaping, and future potential needs of the site (i.e. portables, renovations), access from the asphalt area around the school building, etc.
- e. Conformance with the most current CSA standard and District best practices and standards.

Submit the Proposal

Proposals can be submitted to Grounds Supervisor Geoff Pearmain. Proposals are accepted on an ongoing basis.

Approval, Installation, and Inspection

Arranged by the Grounds Department and the supplier.

Payment

Arranged via District Purchasing department with supplier. The full amount required to fund the playground must be in the school account prior to installation.



Playground in progress at McBride Elementary with We-Go-Round element

FAQ

Who can install playground equipment once purchased? In most cases playground equipment will be fully installed by the supplier. In certain circumstances some types of equipment can be installed by community volunteers. Any volunteer work must take place after hours (evenings and weekends) and must be arranged directly with the supplier, who is responsible for supervising volunteers. This can lead to a cost savings. PACs should connect with the supplier directly to determine if this type of installation is possible.

Can we have a tube slide? No. Tube slides can conceal a person inside and they are often a target of vandalism. Fires have been lit inside tube slides damaging them beyond repair.

Can our play structure have a roof? No. Covered structures can attract people seeking overnight shelter and are susceptible to vandalism. Although roofs are not considered a designated play surface, and thus not part of the play structure, they are an enticement for children to climb onto which could lead to injury.

What kind of ground surfacing is considered accessible? Both poured-in-place rubber surfacing and engineered wood fiber (wood chips) surfacing meet CSA accessibility guidelines.

Can we include “natural” elements in our playground design? (i.e. rocks, boulders, dry creek beds, waterplay, sand play, mud kitchen, berms and hills, logs and stumps) Loose parts, logs, and stumps are never permitted due to the risk of injury to students and damage to school buildings. Other natural elements will be considered on a case-by-case basis and need to be included in the proposal to the Grounds Department.

How much does a new playground cost? Costs vary depending on equipment, surfacing, and labour requirements, and can climb into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Start fundraising early, you don't have to wait until after you have submitted a proposal.

How can we get money to fund our playground? There are many grants and funding opportunities available from national, provincial, and local sources. The list below is not exhaustive:

1. [Canada Post Community Foundation](#)
2. [Rotary Club](#) (search for your local club office).
3. [Royal Bank of Canada](#)
4. [Safeway Canada Community Involvement](#)
5. [Canadian Tire Jumpstart](#)
6. Kal-tire [Kal's Replay Fund](#)
7. Tire Stewardship BC [Community Grant Program](#)

Approved Suppliers List

Playground Equipment and Installation:

- Habitat Systems - Dave Warner 604-294-4224 (Landscape Structures)
- Swing Time Distribution - Tammy Rule 604-990-8187 (Blue Imp)
- ParkWorks – Kathleen Trites or Danielle Clarkson 604-940-0067 (formerly RecTec)
- Suttle – Mark Suttle info@suttle-recreation.com
- GreenRoots Play Equipment - Samantha Erskine – 250-655-3373 (Henderson)

Playground Surfacing:

- Marathon Surfaces – Diana Mather 604-878-0625 ext. 4
- Habitat – Engineered Wood Fiber (EWF) - Dave Warner 604-294-4224

Resources

Rick Hanson Foundation: [A Guide to Creating Accessible Play Spaces](#)

Blue Imp – [Inclusive by Design Guide](#)

Canadian Public Health Association – [Accessibility and Useability of Play Spaces](#)

CSA Standards and Annex H - [How to Make Playgrounds Fun for All Children: Annex H](#)

International Play Association - [Position Statement on the Play Rights of Disabled Children](#)