PARENT COUNCIL PLAYGROUND
PROJECT GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS
Upgrading or installing a new playground is an exciting endeavor often met with enthusiasm from Parent Council Members, teachers, staff, and students alike; however, planning and designing a new playground for your school can be a daunting task if you are not familiar with the process.

This brief guide has been designed by Park N Play Design Co Ltd. to help you understand the roles and responsibilities involved in a school playground project. It is intended to provide you with general information to ensure you have a rewarding experience and a successful outcome.

Our playground project management and design team members are poised to help you every step of the way with courteous service and honest advice.

Please do not hesitate to contact us to assist with your project:

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As parents and adults we tend to gravitate subconsciously to what we are most familiar with and what we have experienced in our own past.

For playgrounds, this means we favour all those good-ole climbers and merry-go-rounds of our childhoods.

The playground industry, however, advances and evolves very quickly.

Like fashion, the styles, colours, designs, and product availability for playgrounds has come a long way. Manufacturers such as GameTime are investing in ongoing research to ensure their products are meeting the needs of today’s generation of users.

Unlike ten and twenty years ago, North American children are spending less time outside and more time involved with technology. Our youth are leading increasingly sedentary lifestyles where access to sport and activity often comes with a cost or expectation of being a registered “player”.

Schools provide a great opportunity for easily accessible active play providing physical benefits as well as social and cooperative skills that develop naturally in these environments.

For these reasons, and many more, we encourage schools to consider fitness-based play.

At Park N Play Design Co. Ltd., we are thrilled to offer an innovative form of fitness-based play for all ages and abilities: the GT Challenge Course!
STEP 1. DEFINING YOUR OBJECTIVE:

So your Parent Council has decided to install a new playground for the students: awesome!

You will soon learn that there are unlimited possibilities, ideas, configurations, and options to make this happen. Once you begin to explore these choices it is easy to become inundated and overwhelmed, and equally challenging to come to a group consensus on what you want.

We recommend you start by defining your playground objectives before looking at any equipment or designs. Involve of a small sample group of staff, parents, and a School Board representative at this stage. Once you have defined your objectives, you can easily go back to them to guide decisions should you reach a crossroad.

Remember, the time spent at this stage is an investment that will pay for itself in the future!

Budget Considerations:

It is important to consider (and be realistic about) both time and money when setting your budget. Consider the following:

- Commercial playground equipment is more expensive than residential play structures – for larger projects you may need to consider designing in stages.

- There are numerous agencies that fund playground projects. Contact Park N Play Design Co. Ltd. for our fundraising guide.

- Understand that playground quotes are good for a limited time. If you are quoting now for a future project (upcoming school year), the prices may need to be re-quoted before the order is placed.

- Playgrounds are an investment. Purchasing the “cheapest equipment” will cost you in repairs and replacements in the future. It is good to be cost conscious, but not worth it to cut costs on quality manufacturing or installation.
• Do not forget to account for these factors when budgeting your playground:
  o Inspection
  o Excavation
  o Removal of existing equipment
  o Soil removal
  o Drainage
  o Site restoration
  o Surfacing

**Time Frame**

A typical playground project can take 3-5 months from conception to completion.

• Invest the time now to make the right decisions.
• Once installed your playground will exist for around 20 years, so make sure you are happy with what you have selected.
• Most playground equipment is made to order due to its custom nature. Be prepared for lead times of 3-10 weeks for manufacturing.

**Style**

Today’s playgrounds come in a wide variety of styles. Research styles and consider them carefully to make sure the playground you design meets your intended goals.
STEP 2. NEEDS ASSESSMENT:

The most obvious outcome of a playground will be “fun” for the students; however, studies prove that school playgrounds offer so much more than “play”. A well-constructed, properly designed playground structure can:

- Improve in-class focus
- Lessen bullying issues
- Lessen tattling experiences
- Improve turn-taking skills
- Decrease incidents of vandalism within the school yard
- Enhance physical education programs

Take the time now to think about the needs of your staff and student body. A playground can be a resourceful tool that serves both audiences. Consider the following:

- Number of children who will use the playground – student body now and in the future
- Age groupings for children using the structure (standards are 2-5 years and 5-12 years)
- The site location and size for the future structure
- Approvals you require from the School Board or school to proceed (permits, sign-offs, restrictions, inspections, etc.)
- Who will have final approval on the concept: the school, the school board, or the parent council?
- Existing Equipment – Who will remove it? What is the current surfacing? Will this be the new location?
- School Neighbours: Are there neighbours who back onto your school yard? Will they oppose the structure or are they in agreement? Will those properties be affected?
- Will the School Board tender the playground project? If so, be aware of the School Board’s tender process and requirements to ensure that what you need/want is communicated through the process.
- Are there special needs within your school that should be addressed to ensure all students can enjoy the playground?

Tip: Investing time now to be well prepared and knowledgeable about the process will guarantee a successful project to come. Having all parties in agreement and “on-board” with the playground from the start will ensure a problem free project!
A NOTE ON ACCESSIBILITY

Inclusive playgrounds must offer more than access on and off the structure. Consider the 5 elements of inclusive play when planning your school’s play environment to ensure your design is meeting the developmental, social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs of all users.

Who are children with disabilities?

Out of 1,000 children between the ages of 3 and 21, approximately 85 will have these special needs:

- 1 physical
- 1.5 sensory
- 18.5 communicative
- 47 cognitive
- 8.5 social/emotional
- 2 multiple disabilities
- 6.5 chronic health impairment

Take the time now to consider current and future needs, as well as the needs of support staff. Consider the following:

- Special needs that your school currently serves, as well as potential for future. (i.e. You may not currently have students with hearing impairment, but may in the future)

- Consider adding sensory play elements to the playground including motion, sound, and tactile stimulation. Remember the importance of colour in providing a sensory-rich play experience.

- Avoid “ramps to nowhere”. Often seen as the keystone to a play structure, ramps offer little play value and access to a limited amount of play. Ground level sensation is a better investment.

- Consult with a professional playground designer who will be versed in CSA, Annex H, and accessibility standards.

- Be sure that care providers, one-on-one assistants, and EA’s have physical room to assist students who require it to explore the activities.
Inclusive playgrounds foster inclusive school communities.
- Park N Play Design Co. Ltd.
STEP 3. SITE SELECTION:

Once you begin the process of deciding on equipment, it can be exciting and overwhelming. There are literally thousands of elements and configurations you will want to add to your playground.

It is important to allocate as much attention to “below ground” requirements as you do to the structure “above ground”. Like building a home, proper structural foundations are critical to stability and durability.

To be sure your site is appropriate AND to make certain you do not run into damages in the future, please consider the following site suggestions:

- Proximity from school to the playground.
- Ease of Access – Are there pathways or ramps into the playground area. Are borders required?
- Sun Exposure - Are roofs needed, or is there natural shade?
- Wind – Is it windy or cold at the site?
- Blockage – Will you need to go through the playground site to access the soccer field, baseball diamond, track, or other property amenities?
- Direction the structure will Face – Are climbing structures or the slide facing into the sun?
- Drainage Requirements – Is the site in a wet or low lying area? Is the area prone to puddles? Is the site in a winter snow plow dumping area?
- Natural Vegetation - Is tree protection required? Are there interfering branches?
- Above Ground/Below Ground Obstructions – Consider fences, trees, hydro cables, public paths, in-ground sprinkler systems, lighting, portables, and storm water drains. Park N Play Design Co. Ltd. can provide locate services.
STEP 4. EQUIPMENT SELECTION:

Now for the fun part: figuring out what equipment the students will enjoy!

The choices and configurations are staggering and prices can skyrocket unless you enter this phase with a plan. Keep your NEEDS ASSESSMENT and GOALS in mind and consider these suggestions to ensure you have the most suitable selection of products at the best price:

• Proximity from school to the playground
• Do you require built-in shade or do you have natural shade?
• Playgrounds are designed to meet the developmental needs of specific age groups. Do you need a structure for 2-5 year olds, 5-12 year olds, or both?
• Consider site lines. Having products that block vision (i.e. solid panels) make it difficult for staff to monitor activities on the playground.
• What percentage of accessible play elements or ground level elements do you require?
• Try to avoid locating feature elements together where children will have to wait to use the equipment and crowd specific areas – spread out the fun equally.
• Create challenging elements (not risky ones) that reflect the developmental stages of your students. If they get bored with the structure it will become a “seat” for students to hang out on.
• When deciding on the colours consider:
  o Natural colour scheme or bold statement?
  o Incorporating school or School Board colours.
  o Fade resistance on plastics with bold colours.
  o The school’s neighbours who back onto the playground and will look at it every day.
  o Highlighting challenging components in stand-out colours.
STEP 5. FUNDRAISING:
We look forward to helping you bring your project to life!

We want your playground planning efforts to become a reality, so please contact us for a directory of funding agencies and resources, and tips to writing and preparing your fundraising efforts.

We look forward to helping you.