



Developing Great Schoolyards

A Handbook for Elementary Schools

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1st Edition

PRINCE CHARITABLE TRUSTS

**21st CENTURY
SCHOOL FUND** | IMPROVING URBAN PUBLIC
SCHOOL FACILITIES

All Children Need Quality Schoolyards

Quality schoolyards are important places for elementary schools because outdoor activities are critical for growth, health, education and enjoyment. All children should experience pleasant and well-equipped outdoor environments on a daily basis.



Small Athletic Field
Bancroft Elementary School



Vegetable Garden
Peabody Elementary School



Playground Seating
Hearst Elementary School

A Good Education Includes Outdoor Activities



Students in High Quality Schoolyard
Hearst Elementary School

Quality schoolyards provide opportunities for the physical challenges, exercise, sensory play, fantasy play, organized sports and unsupervised free play that allow for healthy, well-rounded development.

Schoolyards should be safe places where children practice social skills and develop an appreciation for the feelings of others and the complexities of the natural environment.

Some Children Have Uninviting Schoolyards

Many schools do not have inviting playgrounds. Poor quality schoolyards, like these examples, may have new play structures but still not be welcoming to children or adults. There is little to no shade, water, seating, social areas or any natural environment for children or adults to learn from or enjoy.



Poor Quality Hardscape with New Equipment
Harriet Tubman Elementary School



Poor Quality Hardscape with Old Equipment
Martin Luther King Elementary School

Great Schoolyards Support:



Basketball Court
Key Elementary School



Children's Garden Classroom
DC Bilingual Elementary School



Early Childhood Area
Bancroft Elementary School (former play area)

Healthy Child
Development

Quality
Education

Community
Vitality

Sustainable
Environment



Small Athletic Field
Eaton Elementary School

Healthy Child Development



Sandbox Area
Guy Mason Recreation Center

Interesting and inviting outdoor areas support healthy growth by providing a variety of ways to encourage children to engage in:

- Sensory Play
- Social Play
- Fantasy Play
- Active Exercise
- Exploring the Natural Environment

Sensory Play

Children enjoy actively using touch, sight, smell, taste and hearing as they play. A variety of different play equipment, surface textures, trees, shrubs and plants invites children to explore their environment and stretch their abilities.

An essential part of early childhood development is awareness of weather and the rhythm of the seasons. Time outside every day makes this possible.



Toddlers Bouncing
Bancroft Tot Lot (former play area)



Students with a Water Sprinkler
Bancroft Elementary School (former play area)



Sandbox
Courtland Place Playground



Free Play Time

Bancroft Elementary School (former play area)

Social Play

Informal social play is critical to healthy development. Creative games with child-negotiated rules and cooperative projects are as important as organized team sports.



Sandbox Area

Guy Mason Recreation Center



Boulder Climbing Circle

Guy Mason Recreation Center

Fantasy Play

Places for children to engage in fantasy play enhance skills such as creativity, communication and problem solving. Schoolyards can invite imaginary play with features that stimulate the imagination but are not overly designed, leaving lots of space and materials for improvisation.



Environmental Habitat Area

Bancroft Elementary School



Climbing/Seating Stumps

Peabody Elementary School



Play Area for Exploration

Mann Elementary School

Active Exercise

With childhood obesity reaching epidemic levels, active playtime becomes crucial. Teachers are more likely to take children outside when school yards are inviting.

Besides hard surfaces for jump rope and basketball, it is important to have grassy areas for organized field sports or just for informal play.



Swinging

Garrison Elementary School



Improvised Jump Rope

Kimball Elementary School



Awnings Shade Play Area

Key Elementary

Exploring the Natural Environment



Wildflower Garden and Vegetable Beds (former)

Bancroft Elementary School

All children need a chance to explore the great variety of grasses, shrubs, plants, insects, trees and natural materials that can be found on thoughtfully planted schoolyards.



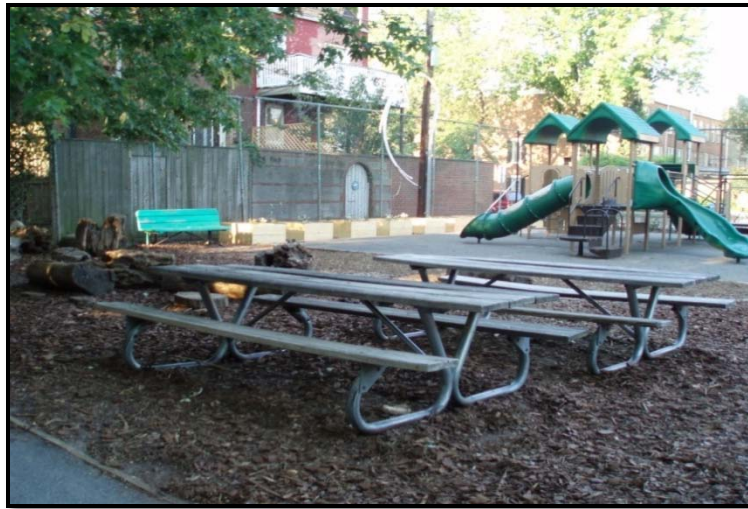
Sand and Water Table
Bancroft Elementary School

Quality Education

Outdoor activities expand learning experiences and encourage unstructured play and social interaction. The out-of-doors should be used regularly for:

- Outdoor classroom projects
- Hands-on environmental science
- School gardens and nutritional studies
- Physical education

Outdoor activities also contribute to learning by improving the focus and attention of children upon their return to the indoors.



Outdoor Classroom
Peabody Elementary School



Outdoor Performance Space
DC Prep Academy, Benning Elementary Campus

Outdoor Learning

Outdoor classrooms allow for a range of teacher-led projects that require more space, are too messy or too loud for inside. These can include science experiments, art projects or hands-on environmental education.

Outdoor classrooms need flexible space and moveable furniture that can accommodate a wide variety of uses. Tables with good work-surfaces and space for materials are important; a covered area for shade and access to a water source is optimal.

Students also enjoy having a quiet place for independent reading, writing or drawing.

Outdoor performance space can accommodate scripted classroom projects or impromptu student dramatics.

Environmental Science



Bee-keeping Lesson
Walker-Jones PS-8th Grade



Learning About Soil
Bancroft Elementary



Stream Flow Table
Bancroft Elementary



Cicada Cage Project
Stoddert Elementary

Effective environmental science instruction often includes complex outdoor experiences.

Just a few examples are studying plant development or insect observation or learning about erosion.

Physical Education

Well-equipped athletic space is an essential schoolyard component. Every day, children need at least an hour of active play with moderate to vigorous activity.

Participating in organized sports can be rewarding for children; it can build the foundation for a lifetime of enjoyment. Team play embodies a wealth of values that transfer to the adult workplace.



Small Track and Volleyball Court

Mann Elementary School



Versatile Small Artificial Turf Field

Oyster/Adams PK- 8 Upper School



Basketball Court

Eaton Elementary School

School Vegetable Gardens

School gardens are an enjoyable way for children and families to appreciate how food grows. When children have the opportunity to plant and harvest fruits and vegetables they get firsthand lessons about nutrition and come to understand the importance of agriculture.



Squash and Marigolds in a Planter

HD Cooke Elementary School



Raised Garden Beds with Wide Walkways

Mann Elementary School

Playgrounds Designed for All Abilities

A broad range of schoolyard activities is critical for all children including children with physical disabilities.

Outdoor play areas and classrooms designed with wide pathways, specialized swings and low transfer platforms can accommodate all children.



Accessible Play Area

Sharpe Health Special Education School



Swings for All Ability Levels

Sharpe Health Special Education School

Community Vitality

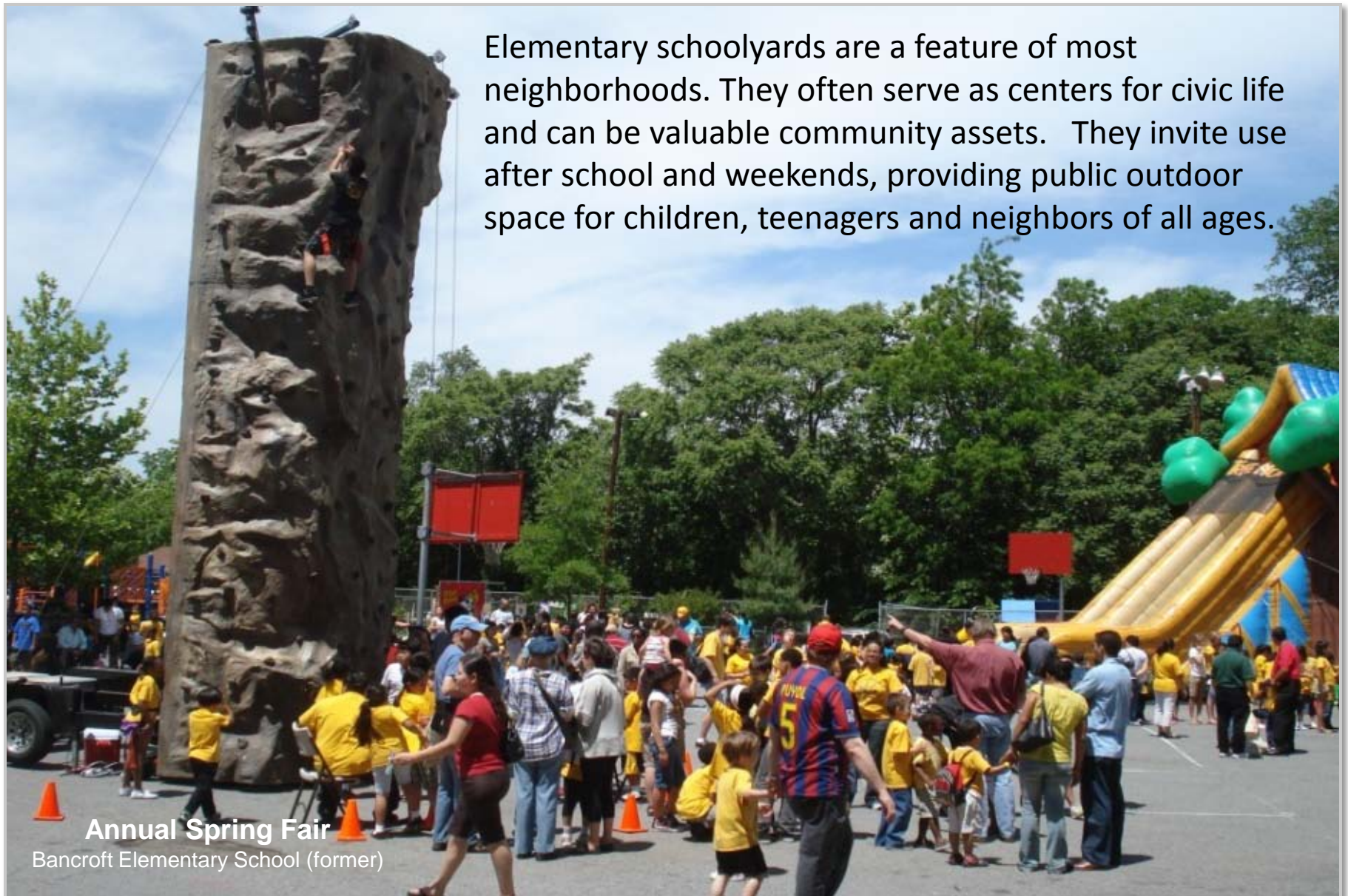
High quality schoolyards contribute to community vitality. They provide readily available green space, sun, shade and enjoyable natural habitats for residents within walking distance. Schools are important as community parks, community gardens and neighborhood gathering places.



Sunday Afternoon Baseball Practice
Lafayette Elementary School

Neighborhood Use

Elementary schoolyards are a feature of most neighborhoods. They often serve as centers for civic life and can be valuable community assets. They invite use after school and weekends, providing public outdoor space for children, teenagers and neighbors of all ages.



Annual Spring Fair

Bancroft Elementary School (former)



Playground Shade Tree
Ross Elementary School



School Garden Located Near Street
Watkins Elementary School

Safe School Yards

Pleasant, well maintained schoolyards attract responsible use that helps ensure public safety.

Schools with outdoor play areas that are visible from the street and can be informally supervised by the neighborhood and are generally safe places.

Green Open Space

Schoolyards are a critical core component of city infrastructure. They provide public open space within densely developed urban areas, which improves air quality, provides recreational opportunities, and increases livability.



School Playing Field
Miner Elementary School



**Row Houses, Streets and Parking Lots
Surround School Playing Field**
Garrison Elementary School

Policies to Support Quality Schoolyards

Citizens can work with municipal and school district officials to promote policies that encourage schoolyard improvements, school **and** community use, and on-going maintenance. Check to see if policies such as these are in place:

- Education policies allowing time in daily school schedules for outdoor activities
- Master site plans and capital funds for major improvements to school yards
- School district operating budgets that include sufficient funding for grounds maintenance and landscaping
- Policies and guidelines that keep schoolyards open to the public
- Policies that permit and encourage community gardens on schoolyards
- Environmental policies promoting tree canopies and wildlife habitats
- Storm water policies to reduce run-off and capture rain water in schoolyards
- Child health protections favoring shade coverings and drinking fountains
- Transportation and school location policies that increase school walk-ability and reduce bussing, parking and drop-off

Communities Can Improve Schoolyards

High quality schoolyards come together when parents, teachers and community members set out to improve schools and neighborhoods. School-based groups can devise processes to create and maintain high quality schoolyards.

- ✓ Assess
- ✓ Envision
- ✓ Plan
- ✓ Develop
- ✓ Implement
- ✓ Maintain



Planting a Shade Tree for the New Playground

J.O .Wilson Elementary School

Assess Your Schoolyard

Rate Your Elementary Schoolyard : Features to Look For	FEATURES ON SITE? Yes = 2 No = 0	QUALITY Good = 3 Fair = 2 Poor = 1	TOTAL POINTS
Are there multiple types of play areas?	2	3	5
Is there a variety of play and athletic equipment?	2	3	5
Is access available for children of all abilities?	2	3	5
Are there plenty of shaded areas for children and adults?	2	3	5
Is there comfortable seating for children and adults?	2	3	5
Is there open space for organized sports?	2	3	5
Is there a hardscape ball court?	2	3	5
Is there a grassy or artificial turf playing field?	2	3	5
Are there working drinking fountains on the schoolyard?	2	3	5
Is there an outdoor classroom?	2	3	5
Are working water connections available ?	2	3	5
Are there school garden beds?	2	3	5
Are there environmental habitat areas?	2	3	5
Are there varieties of interesting and educational shrubs and plants?	2	3	5
Can neighbors use the schoolyard after school and on weekends?	2	3	5
Is the schoolyard designed for passive observation?	2	3	5
Do people feel safe in the schoolyard?	2	3	5
If there are fences, are they appropriate in size, design and location?	2	3	5
Is there appropriate lighting?	2	3	5
Is the schoolyard regularly maintained and upgraded?	2	3	5
TOTAL POINTS For A Quality Schoolyard	40	60	100

Envision a Quality Schoolyard

- Meet with students, teachers, neighbors in a committee; outline a public process to discuss how your school and community will use the school grounds for education, recreation and environmental sustainability.
- Visit other schoolyards and gardens to get ideas.
- Get help and ideas from landscape architects, engineers and designers (pro bono!).
- Write and illustrate a proposed vision to take to your school community and district for review.



Schoolyard Planning
Children's Studio School (former)



Students Ready for Implementation
Children's Studio School (former)

Develop and Plan A Quality Schoolyard

- Look for public or private planning grants.
- Develop a site Master Plan, with discussions including community members, local school staff, parents and students, as well as school facilities managers and professional architects and engineers.
- Develop a schedule for implementation, including phased implementation over several years if all funding is not currently available.
- Identify amount and sources of funding need to implement site master plan.



Poor Quality Schoolyard
Original Tyler Elementary School



Improved Schoolyard
Tyler Elementary School After New Installation



Plan for Tyler Elementary School

Implementation

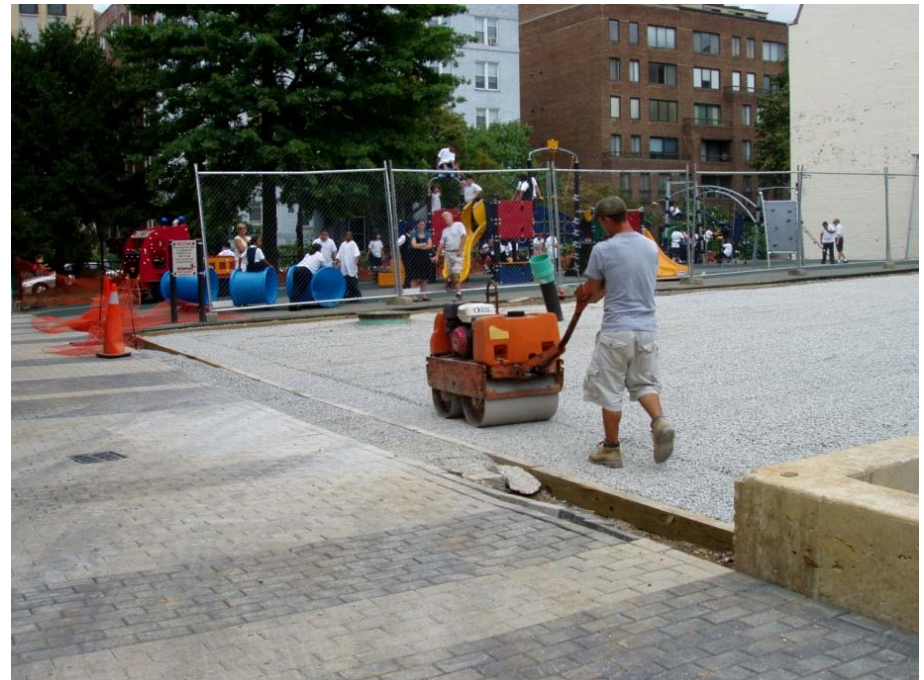


Measuring for Accuracy
Ross Elementary School



Underground Storm Water Control
Ross Elementary School

- Qualify and procure the design, engineering, and construction services that will be needed to implement the site master plan.
 - Monitor all stages of design, engineering and construction.
- Construction is exciting, time-consuming and bothersome. But it can be an great learning experience for students.



Students Watch Turf Field Installation
Ross Elementary School

Continuing Maintenance Is Critical

- Regular maintenance planning and budgeting keeps the public vision and public investment intact.
- Some organized maintenance can be community based.



Beautification Day Volunteers
Francis-Stevens Education Center



Beautification Day Volunteers
Anne Beers Elementary School

Modest Projects Make a Difference

Work with school administrators, teachers, community, private donors and non-profits to:

- Organize a seasonal work day to weed and mulch shrubs and perennials
- Match up certified volunteers to teach playground games: hopscotch, double-dutch, etc.
- Plant shade trees or native flowering plants (check for a master landscaping plan).
- Raise funds for heavy-duty playground awnings.



Students Help Build New Garden Boxes

Stoddert Elementary School

Volunteers Can Really Help

Check with principals and teachers to coordinate activities in advance.

Suggestions:

- Collect playground toys for each class: inflatable balls, jump ropes, hula-hoops, sidewalk chalk, sandbox toys.
- Pick up playground trash on a daily basis.
- Help keep school gardens watered in the summer.
- Tackle a small landscaping or maintenance project.
- Make sure there are working water spigots (follow up on existing work orders).



Volunteers Dig Up and Move a Dead Tree Stump

Bancroft Elementary

About This Handbook

With funding from **The Prince Charitable Trusts**, the 21st Century School Fund surveyed District of Columbia public elementary school outdoor space in the spring and summer of 2010. This review identified key elements of healthy, safe and educationally rich schoolyards. Please contact info@21csf.org for more information.

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Garden, Turf Field & Ball Court
Mann Elementary School



Colorful Awnings
Stead Recreation Center



Planting a Butterfly Garden
H.D. Cooke Elementary School