

Playgrounds

in Bellingham Public Schools

A PLAN FOR UNIVERSAL DESIGN

All school spaces are learning spaces, and our playgrounds are outdoor classrooms providing critical learning opportunities through play.

In Bellingham Public Schools, we design playgrounds to support healthy child development and physically literate* children.

When we design playgrounds and outdoor learning spaces, we 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 foundation of this thinking in Bellingham Public Schools is found in our strategic plan **The Bellingham Promise**.

The vision of The Bellingham Promise states:

"We, as a community, make a collective commitment to Bellingham's children. We will empower every child to discover and develop their passions, contribute to their community, and achieve a fulfilling and productive life."

The key strategy of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in The Promise states: "We envision and strive for a more diverse, inclusive and equitable organization."

Action and character outcomes in The Promise

support our playground design work. These outcomes include developing students and graduates who are:

- leaders, collaborators, and team players;
- confident individuals who continuously challenge themselves;
- healthy, active individuals; and
- well-rounded community members engaged with the broader world.



Values Statement

(as developed by the Playground Standards Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee, Spring 2021):

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 needs, providing experiences to stimulate sight, sound, tactile, vestibular* and proprioceptive* senses, 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
- Community-centered, connected to nature, and most of all, welcoming.



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*See definitions on reverse



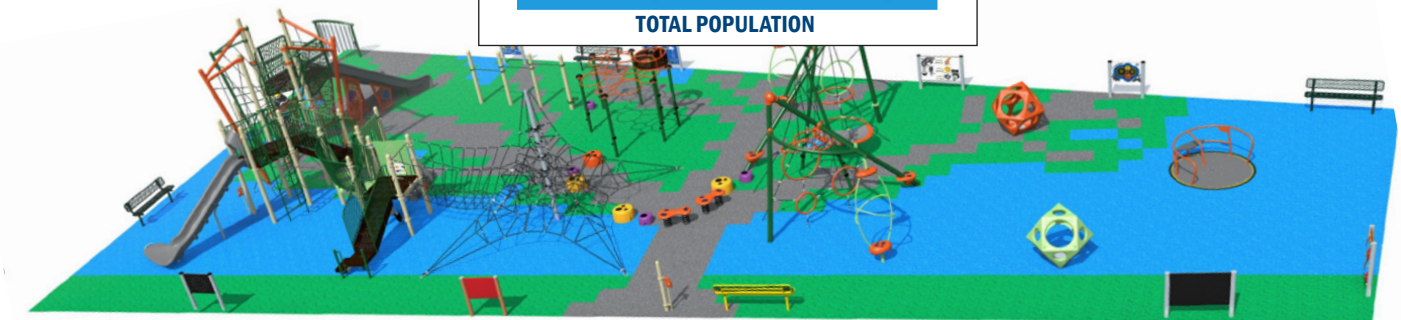
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Definitions

UNIVERSAL DESIGN	INCLUSIVE DESIGN	ACCESSIBLE DESIGN
Products and environments are usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.	An inclusive playground considers not just physical equipment, but also emotional, social, and psychological benefits of play. It encompasses the philosophy that children and adults of all abilities benefit from being able to play and interact together.	Accessible design meets the environmental and communication needs of the functional limitations of people with disability. Accessible design aims to meet minimum ADA requirements to achieve usability.
FIVE OF SEVEN SENSES	VESTIBULAR STIMULATION	PROPIOCEPTION
Five of our seven senses are important on playgrounds: sight, sound, tactile, vestibular and proprioceptive. (We leave the senses of taste and smell in the cafeteria!)	The vestibular system is essential for movement and equilibrium. Vestibular stimulation is input that your body receives when you experience movement or gravity. It can be mild (nodding your head or climbing stairs) or it can be intense (skydiving or a rollercoaster).	Proprioception is the perception or awareness of the position and movement of the body.
PHYSICAL LITERACY	SPORT FOR ALL, PLAY FOR LIFE MODEL BROAD ACCESS LEADS TO SUSTAINED PARTICIPATION 	



PHOTO BELOW: Digital rendering of a segment of Alderwood Elementary School playground to be installed in fall 2021.



Resources

The playground values of the Playgrounds Standards Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee were based on the following resources and presentations:

- [The Bellingham Promise](#)
- [Policy & Procedure 3440](#)
- [Discover Inclusive Playgrounds](#)
- [Inclusive Play Design Guide](#)—Playworld
- [Inclusive Play Training](#)—Playworld
- Mara Kaplan of Let Kids Play! 7 keys to an inclusive playground:
 1. Surfacing
 2. Perimeter containment
 3. The coolest thing is accessible to all
 4. Fun and challenging for all
 5. Includes zones
 6. Sensory play
 7. Social/cooperative play
- [Bellingham Public Schools video "Imagining Playgrounds"](#) produced by Jen Mallett, Sarah Catudio and Cindy Pearson