

DATE: June 22, 2021

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Replacement of School Playground on Edmonton Public Schools Land
(Response to Request for Information #104)

ORIGINATOR: Kathy Muhlethaler, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Josephine Duquette, Terri Gosine, Roland Labbe, Linda McConnell, Madonna Proulx, Matthew Tam, Jennifer Thompson, Christopher Wright

REFERENCE: [Alberta School Capital Manual](#)
[Funding Manual for School Authorities](#)
[Administrative Regulation IH.AR, Public Gifts](#)
[Administrative Regulation CSGA.AR, School Generated Funds](#)

ISSUE

At the June 8, 2021, Board meeting, Trustee Estabrooks requested that Administration provide information related to the construction, maintenance, and eventual replacement of school playgrounds on EPSB land, more specifically:

1. Who determines whether a playground located on EPSB land is the responsibility of the City of Edmonton or the school division?
2. Who is responsible for maintaining and eventually replacing school playgrounds?
3. What Division supports are offered to parent groups trying to raise money to construct new or replacement playgrounds?
4. How is money for replacement playground construction generated?
5. What costs to the Division would be associated with providing additional supports to address any gaps in the system?
6. On behalf of parent groups, are there opportunities for trustee advocacy that could help improve efforts to construct playgrounds?

BACKGROUND

On May 18, 2021, Trustees Estabrooks and Draper, along with members of Administration met with parents concerned about playgrounds within our school division, specifically playgrounds located on EPSB land. The parent group provided a presentation for information and context.

CURRENT SITUATION

- 1. Who determines whether a playground located on EPSB land is the responsibility of the City of Edmonton or the school division?**

The City of Edmonton determines the level of support and maintenance they will provide related to a playground on school division lands. In the absence of City maintenance support, the Division is responsible for ensuring that any improvements on sites present no health and safety risks. There is

no specific operating funding provided to school divisions specifically to maintain playgrounds. Costs to maintain any existing or future playground in the absence of City provided maintenance would need to be absorbed within existing operation and maintenance funding grants.

2. Who is responsible for maintaining and eventually replacing school playgrounds?

Maintenance of playgrounds on Division property can be the responsibility of either the Division or the City of Edmonton. There are currently 89 playgrounds on Division land; 39 are maintained by the Division and 50 are maintained by the City of Edmonton. Of the 50 maintained by the City of Edmonton, maintenance of 47 playgrounds will revert to the Division when they reach the end of their functional life. The City has recently indicated that the City will no longer support (fund) or maintain playgrounds at these 47 sites over the next ten to fifteen years, as the equipment reaches the end of serviceable life. The City will continue to offer support and maintenance where a school property is the community-preferred or only suitable location for a neighbourhood playground (Garneau, Malmo and Windsor Park schools).

Playgrounds on school sites are not mandated as a facility requirement within school capital projects funded by the province. Funding to construct playgrounds (capital funding) has recently been included as a separate grant for some Division capital projects approved by the province, beginning in 2017. This included playground grants for four school consolidation and replacement projects: Ivor Dent School, Mill Creek School, Highlands School, and the Westlawn Cluster. It is hoped that moving forward, playground grants will be made available for all new, modernization and consolidation/replacement school projects. Playground replacement is not an eligible expense utilizing Infrastructure Maintenance and Renewal (IMR) funding available to school jurisdictions for building component repair or replacement. A provincial pilot grant proposed in 2018, specifically for playground replacement, was ultimately not funded. In the absence of a targeted funding source, playground components that require removal cannot be replaced by the Division.

3. What Division supports are offered to parent groups trying to raise money to construct new or replacement playgrounds?

The Division's support of playground projects does not have any dedicated resources specific to supporting playground project fundraising, and is guided by [Administrative Regulation CSGA.AR, School Generated Funds](#) in relation to funds raised by school parent groups. Division staff provide support in the following activities:

- continue to meet with interested parent groups and provide a written overview of the process involved with funding and constructing playgrounds. Topics captured in the document include: planning and funding, tendering construction work, and design meetings/construction. Support documents can be reviewed and revised as needed in response to parent group feedback.
- assigning a project manager from Integrated Infrastructure Services to be the point of contact for parent groups and principals regarding playgrounds
- helping identify possible locations to build a playground
- liaising with the City of Edmonton to determine level of support the City will offer
- continuing to advise on playground vendors who can support equipment selection, layouts, and establishing budgets
- providing a list of grant funding bodies and organizations to help with fundraising
 - Schools across the Division are assigned a school accountant who is available to support principals with questions about charitable receipts, grants, etc.

- assisting schools with managing funds for playgrounds when received from the parent group; Financial Services staff will provide advice to administrators in reference to best practices that are in alignment with Board Policy and Administrative Regulations.
- continue to provide letters of support for grant applications and formalize other correspondence needed in support of grant applications by parent groups
- supporting charitable donations if applicable; please refer to [Administrative Regulation IH.AR, Public Gifts](#), for further information on charitable donations
- continue to provide construction project management support to parent groups in the preparation of RFP documents and review bid submissions when approximately 90 per cent of the required construction funding is in place
- continue conducting condition assessments and safety monitoring for existing EPSB maintained playgrounds
- continue maintenance and repair services as required for some existing playgrounds on EPSB lands.

4. How is money for replacement playground construction generated?

Whether for an initial playground installation or for a replacement, funds for playground construction are typically raised through volunteer parent/community fundraising. In Alberta, grants are made available to support community and not-for profit groups for the development and replacement of playgrounds. The City of Edmonton, as well as the Federal government, may make some playground funds available for a playground on school division property in certain circumstances. There are a number of corporate and non-governmental organization grants that may be available from time to time. School jurisdictions are typically not eligible to apply for most grants directly. For this reason, specific fundraising efforts of volunteers are the main source of funding for new or replacement playgrounds on Division lands.

5. What resources would be associated with providing additional supports, with specific focus on the solutions proposed by parent groups, to address any gaps in the system?

Additional supports recommended by the parent advocacy group include:

- Creating a playground development guiding document:
 - o clarify roles of parents, school and Division staff
 - o detail policies, processes and resources
 - o recommend fundraising approaches
 - o provide key support contacts
 - o clarify allowable community roles, such as construction volunteering
 - o clarify vendor selection criteria
 - o include a Q & A
- Provide continuous project management support throughout the project
 - o designate a Project Manager from inception to installation of a playground project
 - o assign a person in Finance to support parent groups and administrators
 - o provide or fund grant writing support services through staff or contract service provider
- Provide funding for redevelopment/replacement of playgrounds or partner in advocating for additional resources.
 - o develop a playground replacement capital plan
 - o allow the use of EPSB charitable registration number for grants and donations
 - o allocate funding to schools redeveloping playgrounds
 - o advocate to the province for a school playground redevelopment grant

- o advocate to the City of Edmonton to increase Neighbourhood Park Development Program (NPDP) eligibility to these school playgrounds
- o renegotiate the Joint Use Agreement to ensure City funding can be accessed.

The Division will develop a playground development guiding document to better support schools and parent volunteers through the process, reflecting parent group feedback provided on May 18, 2021. The Division will consider grant writing support for parent groups in grant applications.

6. On behalf of parent groups, are there opportunities for trustee advocacy that could help improve efforts to construct playgrounds?

Advocating to other orders of government (City of Edmonton, or the Provincial or Federal government) for additional playground funding grants would best be conducted at the political level and through parent advocacy.

KEY POINTS

- The Division will develop a playground development guiding document to better support schools and parent volunteers through the process, reflecting parent group feedback provided on May 18, 2021.
- Integrated Infrastructure Services has a project manager assigned to be the point of contact for parent groups and principals regarding playgrounds. This information will be included in the guiding document and updated as required.
- Schools across the Division are assigned a school accountant who is available to support principals with questions about charitable receipts, grants, etc.
- The Division will consider grant writing support for parent groups in grant applications.
- Advocating to other levels of government (City of Edmonton, or the provincial or Federal government) for additional playground funding grants would best be conducted at the political level and through parent advocacy.

ATTACHMENTS AND APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Parents' Advocacy Group Slide Presentation, May 18, 2021

RL:or



EPSB Playground Redevelopment

May 18, 2021

Presenters:

Laura Mercier, Hardisty School

Nicole Schmidt, Principal, Forest Heights School

Jeanie Chin, Kildare School

Jill Tucker, Forest Heights School

Meeting Attendees

EPSB Board and Administration

- Trisha Estabrooks, Chair and Wards A/D Trustee
- Michelle Draper, Ward B Trustee
- Christopher Right, Managing Director, Infrastructure
- Roland Labbe, Director, Infrastructure
- Kathy Muhlethaler, Assistant Superintendent

Parent Representatives

- Laura Mercier & Kerry McKinstry, Hardisty School
- Jill Tucker, Mary Parsons & Anna Krall, Forest Heights School
- Joy Stevens, Clara Tyner School
- Tamara Clark & Barb Sheehan, Rio Terrace School
- Jeanie Chin, Kildare School
- Angela Moroz, Princeton School

Principals

- Nicole Schmidt, Forest Heights School
- Jim Scott, Hardisty School
- Jolene Kitt, Riverdale School



Why are we here?

To highlight current inequities between playgrounds on EPSB owned land relative to those located on City of Edmonton owned land.

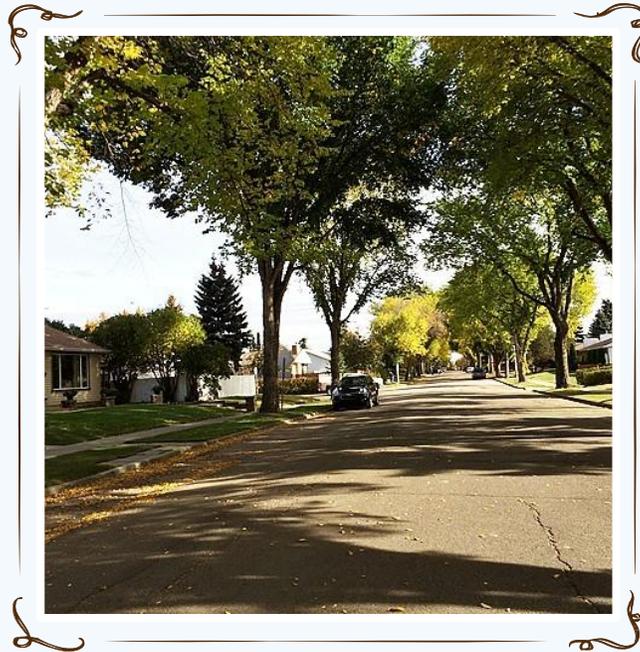
We will focus on 3 topics:

- Environmental Scan
- Our Challenges
- Potential Solutions

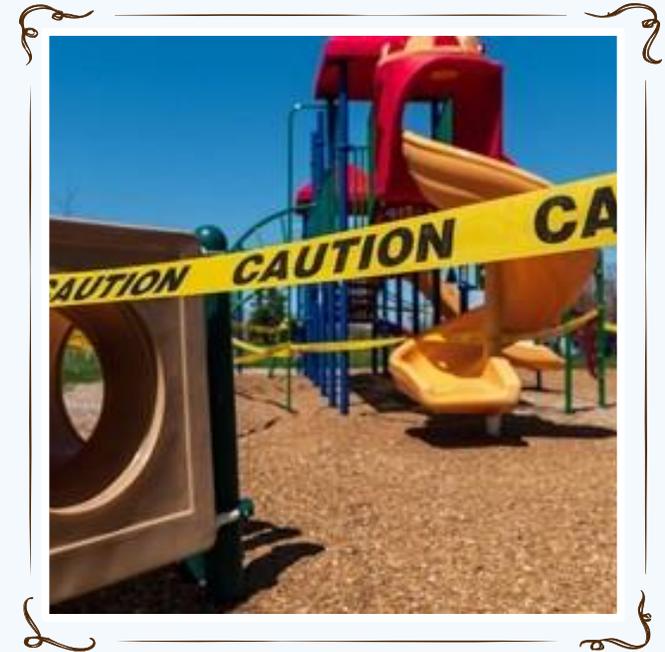
Who are our Stakeholders?



~40 Edmonton Public Schools
with playgrounds on EPSB
owned land



Schools located in mature
neighbourhoods



Some playgrounds are due for
redevelopment and/or not
meeting the needs of the
school community

What are the goals of playground redevelopment?

- All of our stakeholders are committed to developing playgrounds that:



Promote **physical literacy** and provide experiential learning in an outdoor setting



Support children with diverse developmental needs and incorporate **universal and inclusive designs**



Are **actively maintained in order to ensure** that they are in accordance with safety codes

Connections to EPSB Strategic Plan

PRIORITY ONE

Foster growth and success for every student

Goal 1. An excellent start to learning outcome

More children enter Grade 1 reaching emotional, social and physical developmental milestones

PRIORITY TWO

Provide welcoming, high quality learning and working environments

Goal 1. A focus on well-being and student citizenship

Our learning and working environments are welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy

Goal 2. Quality infrastructure for all

Students and staff benefit from high quality learning and working environments that facilitate quality program delivery through effective planning, managing and investing in District infrastructure

PRIORITY THREE

Enhance public education through communication, engagement and partnerships

Goal 2. Enhance public education through communication, engagement and partnerships

Community partnerships are established to provide supports and services to foster growth, well-being and success of students and families

Environmental Scan

Playground Redevelopment Support(s)	City of Edmonton	Elk Island School Division	St. Albert Schools (City Led)	ECSD	EPSB
Project Manager (Comprehensive support throughout the Playground Development Lifecycle)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Landscape Architect & Site Surveys	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Guiding Document (Policies, Tips, Process, FAQs)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Playground Capital Planning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	?
Funded Grant Writing Support	No	No	No	Yes	No
Funding	Yes	Yes (Municipality funded)	Yes (Municipality funded)	No	No
RFP & Construction Support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes



What are our challenges?

1. Gaps in Policies & Procedures
2. Comprehensive Project Support
3. Funding Sources/Eligibility
4. Volunteer Capacity & Burnout

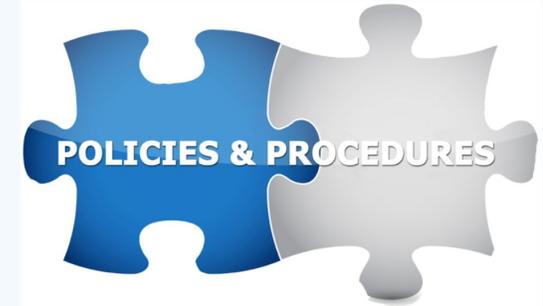
Challenge 1: Gaps in Policies & Procedures

- **Financial**

- Capital Plan for redevelopment or renewal
- Charitable Receipts (Individuals, Organizations)
- Accounting Practices (G.S.T., Interest, Reporting requirements)
- Maintenance Costs

- **Playground-Specific**

- Assessment, Site Surveys & Development Permit Process
- Sponsorship Signage/Recognition
- Inclusive Design Requirements
- Vendor Partnerships & RFP Selection Criteria
- Volunteer Community Builds
- Unclear Roles and Responsibilities for School Administration



Standards in Industry (Jeanie Chin – engineer/project manager/Kildare School parent)

- A playground redevelopment is a big undertaking, with multiple interconnecting tasks that require management such as fundraising, coordination with EPSB grant writing, procurement, and vendor oversight.
- Currently, there is no project management support from the EPSB to help with the parent groups to plan and execute their playground initiatives. The lack of defined processes further compounds the problem because parents don't know what to do.
- Parents groups vary in capacity and expertise.
- Lack of single point of contact and connection to subject matter experts create confusion.
- To fill that void, many parents' groups rely on playground vendors for information and guidance. However, with the current procurement procedure, this creates inherent conflict of interest.

Challenge 2: Comprehensive Project Support

- **Lack of project management support**
 - Parent groups have been told that project management support will be offered from EPSB once approximately 95% of the funding has been raised
 - Support is currently limited to coordinating the RFP and construction process
- **Lack of financial management support**
 - Currently we do not have a dedicated role within the Finance Department to support parent groups and school administration to answer questions about financial management/policy at the school level (charitable receipts, grants, signage)



Challenge 3: Funding Sources/Eligibility

- Playgrounds cost ~\$300,000 – 100% of which is funded by parent groups, without financial support from EPSB.
- Our projects are ineligible for 3 major funding sources:
 - **Federal Investing In Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) Grant**– Which funds up to 40% of the total project
 - **Municipal Neighbourhood Park Development Program (NPDP)** - Up to \$250,000 matching funds
 - **New School Playground Grant** - \$250 000 (non matching), ONLY available to playgrounds at new schools
- Schools located next to community league playgrounds benefit from not having to pay for the playground that their students use and are eligible for these grants.



Challenge 3: Funding Sources cont'd

- **Casino Revenue**
- **Provincial CFEP Grant** - \$125,000 matching funds
 - Over 50% reduction in accessible funding
- **Other Funding Challenges**
 - Charitable receipts
 - Grant application complexities



Challenge 4: Volunteer Capacity & Burnout

- Difficult to find dedicated parents that will commit extensive time and expertise to a long-term volunteer project
 - Most fundraisers generate an average of \$1,500
 - \$300,000 is an extraordinary amount of money for small parent groups
 - Low success rate on grants
 - Skill sets differ widely between parent groups
 - Attrition and burnout due to extremely long timeline (~10 years)



Parent's Perspective – Jill Tucker, Forest Heights School

Volunteer Hours

- \$90 000 in 3 years
- 1200 volunteer hours to date (conservative estimate)
- require 5 more years for \$300 000 unless funding eligibility changes

Grant Success Rate

- to date, 165 applications with 11 successes (\$38 000 in grants)
- 3% success rate
- grants are small (<\$5000) and field is highly competitive

Biggest Challenges for FH

- grant ineligibility (NPDP, Federal, New School Playground) for which other schools are eligible > inequitable situation
- lack of written roadmap or guiding document for parents and administrators
- support is limited to RFP/construction, but ongoing personnel support is needed throughout
- unclear who to ask questions to, lack of consistency of personnel
- information is confusing and inconsistent, we rely on vendors and word of mouth

Proposed Solutions

Proposed solutions will improve clarity and consistency, remove barriers and decrease project timelines:

1. Create an integrated EPSB playground [redevelopment guiding document](#) that can be used to consistently guide parent groups and school administrators through this process
2. Provide [comprehensive and continuous](#) support throughout the playground redevelopment process
3. [Provide funding](#) or [partner with us](#) to advocate for access to additional funding sources



Solution 1: Redevelopment Guide

Develop a comprehensive Playground Redevelopment Framework document to facilitate a consistent approach and streamline supporting processes.

1. Consult other jurisdictions (ECSD's Doris Paquette, City of Edmonton and City of St. Albert) for best practices
2. Collaborate with School Administrators and Parent Groups to identify what this document should contain to support schools
3. Ensure that this document is kept up to date and changes are communicated to stakeholders



Solution 1: Redevelopment Guide

Contents should include:

- Playground redevelopment specific policies, processes and resources
- Answers to frequently asked questions e.g. How to set up accounts
- Recommended fundraising approaches
- Key contacts for support
- Policy on community builds
- Vendor Selection Criteria
- Terms of reference to clarify roles of parent groups, school administration, and EPSB staff



Solution 2: Comprehensive & Continuous Support

Designate subject matter experts:

- Designate an EPSB Project Manager to provide comprehensive support and guidance throughout the playground redevelopment process
- Assign a support person within Finance to support parent groups and school administrators
- Provide or fund grant writing support (either within EPSB or contracted externally)



Solution 3: Funding Sources

- [Advocate with us](#) to City of Edmonton to broaden municipal (NPDP) funding eligibility
- [Renegotiate](#) playground land ownership / joint use agreements so municipal funding can be accessed
- [Advocate with us](#) to the Provincial Government to create a playground redevelopment grant similar to New School Grant
- [Allow](#) use of EPSB charitable registration number for grants and donations
- [Allocate funding](#) to schools redeveloping playgrounds on EPSB-owned land





Playgrounds are a valuable investment of time which enhance physical literacy and social development. In the EPSB Strategic plan, a key goal is to ensure inclusive, safe and healthy learning environments for our children.

Our joint partnership will support the Division, School Administrators, Parent Groups and most importantly our children in achieving this goal.

Questions & Discussion

- Questions or Clarifications
- Next Steps: how do we move forward?

