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## Vacca secures playground for P.S. 71

BY PATRICK ROCCHIO

Councilman Jimmy Vacca is at it again, this time with a \$150,000 grant to non-profit Out2Play, working with staff and students to design a state-of-the-art playground for one of the area's brightest institutions of learning.

On Friday, December 5, Councilman Vacca joined students and faculty from P.S. 71, as well as representatives from Out2Play, to announce the grant for the construction of the safe, colorful courtyard playground at the Pelham Bay school.

The event also doubled as a formal unveiling of the playground's design, which includes a medium-sized jungle gym, a full basketball court with two retractable hoops, and a painted baseball diamond.

"When we talk about a well-

rounded education, we have to consider not just reading and writing but recreation and socialization," said Vacca, a proud alum of P.S. 71. "It's through play that children learn how to share and how to respect one another, not to mention the importance of being physically active. I have worked with Out2Play twice before, and I am once again excited to see their finished product."

The P.S. 71 project represents the third collaboration between Vacca and Out2Play. P.S. 97 on Mace Avenue unveiled its new city-themed play space in June 2007, and P.S. 96 unveiled a beautiful new courtyard playground this past October.

Out2Play visited the school in late September and met with principal Lance Cooper, administrators, staff, and then with

students at the school to develop a wish list for the design of the recreational facility.

"We met with the kids and developed a wish list for what they would want to see in the playground," said Sarah Gilbert, of Out2Play. "The students drew pictures of what they wanted their playground to look like."

Construction on the project is set to begin in July, and everyone hopes will be completed by the start of the 2009-10 school year. The construction will not touch the three portable classrooms units that share the yard. In fact, a pre-K play area will also be installed behind those units.

"We are very grateful to Councilman Jimmy Vacca for all of his help through these tough times for the budget," said Principal Lance Cooper.



Photo by Patrick Rocchio

(L-r) Principal Lance Cooper, Sarah Gilbert of Out2Play, Andrea Wenner of Out2Play, and Councilman Jimmy Vacca at the presentation ceremony for the \$150,000 check that will make the new play area a reality. The presentation was made on Friday, October 5.