

DAILY NEWS

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ELEVEN SCHOOLS IN BRONX WILL HAVE NEW PLAY SPACES FOR SEPTEMBER

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When students at 11 Bronx schools return in September, ready to buckle down to work, they'll also have a place to play for the first time.

The nonprofit Out2Play is building playgrounds this summer at elementary schools that have dilapidated play spaces or lack playgrounds altogether.

Andrea Wenner, the group's founder and director, said a recess period without a playground can lead to trouble.

"They're not being physically active," she said. "They're getting into fights and not interacting in a constructive way."

A lack of exercise coupled with overeating is a serious problem in the Bronx, where the obesity rate is 42% - the highest in the city - according to a report by Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion's office.

The three-year-old organization has already put up 15 city playgrounds, but Wenner said there are still more than 120 elementary schools, including 25 in the Bronx, lacking a place for kids to play.

At Public School 55, a playground has meant fewer fights and falls, fewer scraped knees and fewer bloody noses, said Principal Luis Torres.

Because the students helped design the playground, they feel protective of it and watch out for vandals, Torres said.

"I make sure to tell all the kids, 'This is your playground,'" Torres said.

Out2Play prioritizes the schools it wants to help, ranking them based on income levels, asthma rates and access to parks, and then works with local elected officials to find out which playgrounds they are willing to sponsor.

The organization is building 26 playgrounds across the city this summer, at a cost of \$5.5 million, with \$4.8 million of that publicly financed.

Bronx schools soon to get new playgrounds are PS 32, PS 65, PS 73, PS 92, PS 96, PS 107, PS 170, PS 226, PS 279, PS 307 and PS 396.

With 22 trailer classrooms, the most of any school in the district, there's little free space at PS 96. But, this fall, students there will get a playground - albeit a tiny one.

Principal Marta Garcia said the playground will be a good social hangout for her students.

"It's something more than just watching a video or TV," Garcia said.

For more information or to donate money for a city playground, call (917) 648-5291.