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4 Queens Schools To Get New Playgrounds

Thousands of public school children will be surprised this September as they return to schools with brand new play spaces. Out2Play, a non-profit group with a mission of building playgrounds at economically disadvantaged New York City public schools, announced April 9 that P.S. 88, 60-85 Catalpa Ave., Ridgewood; P.S. 182, 90-36 150th St., Jamaica; P.S. 224 at P.S. 26, 195-02 69th Ave., Fresh Meadows, and P.S. 877, 76-05 51st Ave., Elmhurst are among 40 New York City public schools where play yards will be built this spring and summer as part of the 2009 roster of playgrounds. More than 26,000 students (43 percent of whom, statistically, are either obese or overweight) will return to new play structures, basketball courts and kickball diamonds in place of barren asphalt yards. Funding for these projects includes support from Borough President, Helen Marshall.

Out2Play has already successfully completed 40 playgrounds around the city since 2005, transforming more than 900,000 square feet of dilapidated, vacant lots into active, safe play spaces. The number of 40 doubles the three-year-old organization's past efforts, bringing the total number of completed playgrounds to 80 by the end of 2009.

"Recreational programs provide constructive opportunities for our youth to grow in body and spirit," Marshall said. "That's why I am happy to team up with Out2Play in its efforts to provide safe and open places for youngsters to play. Out2Play is a great example of how the private and public sectors can work together to produce results that benefit our city's children."

"Out2Play's main focus is nurturing the health and development of our city's youth," Out2Play Founder and Executive Director Andrea Wenner said. "With childhood obesity continuing to affect almost half of New York City school children, this is an ongoing struggle that none of us can afford to lose." Out2Play estimates that currently there are 118 elementary schools in New York City lacking playground access, leaving more than 100,000 children without a safe outlet for activity during the school day.

Starting this past fall, Out2Play, along with architects, students, parents and staff, let their imaginations run wild while dreaming up designs for their new playgrounds. Now that all designs are complete, construction is set to begin and Out2Play's team of contractors will work over the next six months to build bright new play spaces for the 40 schools across the city, including the four Queens locations. The renovated playgrounds will include play structures with slides and monkey bars, basketball courts, kickball diamonds, soccer and football fields, tracks, hopscotch, four square and other blacktop games, chess tables, trees, benches and more.

Students will have an opportunity to utilize the new play spaces during programmed recess time, during physical education classes when appropriate and at other times when teachers take classes outdoors as part of academic studies. Students and local residents may also benefit in situations in which schools elect to keep their playgrounds open to the public during non-school hours.

Raising funds from philanthropic donations, corporate sponsorships and government, Out2Play continues to implement their citywide program to restore the school system's playgrounds, transforming play experiences one school at a time. Some of the group's major private funders this year include the Barclays/Nets Community Alliance, the Carson Family Charitable Trust, the David Wright Foundation, the New York Community Trust and Newmark Knight Frank.

Since its founding, Out2Play has raised more than \$17 million from public and private sources, gaining the support of borough presidents, several New York City Councilmembers, prominent philanthropists, foundations and corporations.