



Staten Island Advance

APRIL 10, 2009

Children have big say in 4 playgrounds to be built

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- It's one question just about every child would love to answer: What would your dream playground look like?

Students at four Staten Island schools have been developing their own blueprints since the fall. And in September, they will see their visions come to fruition when those playgrounds are complete.

The construction projects, totaling nearly \$1 million, will begin within the next six months at PS 20 in Port Richmond, PS 22 in Graniteville, PS 29 in Castleton Corners and PS 44 in Mariners Harbor, with all four playgrounds to be completed by September.

The playgrounds are being funded by Councilman Kenneth Mitchell (D-North Shore), Rep. Michael McMahon (D-Staten Island/Brooklyn), the Carson Family Charitable Trust, the Barclays Nets Community Alliance and Out2Play, a nonprofit dedicated to building play spaces throughout the city public school system.

By the end of 2009, Out2Play will have helped to construct 80 playgrounds across the city. The group estimates that there are 118 elementary schools throughout the city lacking playground access, leaving more than 100,000 children without a safe outlet for physical activity during the school day.

"Out2Play's main focus is nurturing the health and development of our city's youth," said the group's founder, Andrea Wenner, in a statement. "With childhood obesity continuing to affect almost half of New York City schoolchildren, this is an ongoing struggle that none of us can afford to lose."

There's one additional benefit that Darline Woodhouse is looking forward to.

"We'll have fewer skinned knees," said the co-president of PS 29's Parent-Teacher Association.

Ms. Woodhouse, whose son is in the first grade, said she was looking forward to the nice, soft ground that will cover the bare asphalt currently lying adjacent to the school, where kids often play games of tag or catch. Once finished, the \$250,000 playground will have a basketball court, a jungle gym, benches and eight "high-level thinking games" like checkers and chess. She said developing ideas for the playground was a collaborative effort among teachers, parents and students from every grade level.

"The kids aren't just going outside to play anymore -- they'll also have to use their minds," Ms. Woodhouse said. "The school aides are going to be trained so that the kids really engage in physical activities, not just jumping rope and hopscotch."

The playgrounds will be open to the public during non-school hours.

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