



Alpenglow School

Natural Playground and Outdoor Learning Space

January 2019
Prepared by the Alpenglow Playground Committee



Project Team

Alpenglow Community Education Society has organized a Natural Playground Committee which consists of parent volunteers. Team Member Names and their background:

Jolene Gunn - ACES Fundraising Coordinator and Playground Committee Chair

James Gunn – Civil Engineer

Karen Escarte – Engineer

Shannon Fiendel – Designer

Vincent Ardley – Mason and Construction

Project Goals

Our goal is to turn an undeveloped portion of Canmore Collegiate and Alpenglow school yard into a stimulating and flexible natural play and learning environment where teachers and students can gather, learn, explore, experiment and interact with nature first hand, daily.

Our Vision

It is our vision to create a multi-functional outdoor learning and play space, using simple nature-based elements that will equally benefit staff, students and the greater community for years to come. It is our hope that this new outdoor space becomes a “hub” for increased hands-on environmental learning and creates a stronger connection between students, their community and their environment.

Project Benefits

- Expanded Curriculum Opportunities
- Free Form Play
- Balancing, hanging, climbing, jumping, sliding
- Respect for Nature and Environmental Stewardship
- Community
- Nature Experiments
- Hands-on Learning
- Outdoor Teaching
- Social Play
- Happier Students
- Improved academic outcomes and increased student attention
- Physical Literacy and Fitness

Our Design Process

Over the past 3 years we have devoted many hours of design research into this project. We've listened to speakers talk about the importance of free play, read numerous articles and papers on outdoor learning, spoken with a landscape architect, consulted with a variety of natural playground design and construction experts, and collected stakeholder input (students, staff, and parents).

Project Considerations

- Project Location - We worked with the existing school site plan to find the most appropriate location for our natural learning and play areas. We have consulted a landscape architect for a conceptual design using the natural landscape. We also work with Canadian Rockies Public Schools facilities management team to ensure site regulations are met.
- Design Elements :
 - Four season and all weather use
 - A spiral of rocks surrounded by a grove of native shade trees and shrubs provides a flexible outdoor classroom and learning space with seating
 - A covered teaching shelter with a potential central countertop serves many uses such as a work table for classroom sessions or for imaginative play.
 - Surrounding the shelter are small 'social nooks' for breakout sessions or small group play.
 - Active play area combines logs and boulders for climbing/stepping for group and individual play.
 - Natural play structure encouraging hanging and climbing
 - The space allows for social gathering nodes, exploration, imaginative play, motor skill development, sensory experience as well as opportunities for curriculum development and learning.
 - The space features low maintenance, drought tolerant native plantings and shade trees.

Learning Opportunities

The far-reaching benefits of having children spend time learning and playing in a natural setting is well documented. These include:

- Nature Connection. Directly engaging with the natural world is the only way to develop a deep connection and understanding. Children who have these experiences develop into adults with a strong stewardship ethic.
- Physical Activity and Health. Children are more active when they play outdoors, one study showed physical activity doubled when children were outside. The variety of

outdoor play environments allows children to move in different ways and increases their physical literacy.

- Learning. Outdoor environments provide real-world, hands on learning opportunities for students that spark their natural curiosity as they explore, question and experiment in the real world.
- Community Connections. Developing a strong sense of place is essential for healthy child development, it allows children to feel part of a safe and welcoming community. The best way to find this is by going outside!

Community Connections & Partnerships

This is more than a school project. We are working to actively engage our wider community in this process. Here are some of the ways we are doing this:

- Volunteers. Students and parents will be encouraged to volunteer their time to help plant and actively maintain and care for their green space for everyone to enjoy. We will also host community volunteer days to encourage members of the Canmore community to engage with this space.
- Greening legacy. This project will kick start a legacy for current and future generations of students and the community to nurture and build upon. This will be the beginning of this process.
- Events. This space will be available for the community to use and enjoy and to create a welcoming atmosphere, we will host community events in our outdoor space to introduce it to the community and encourage their participation and visits.

Stewardship Plan Overview

We recognize that the School Divisions maintenance budgets are being tightened every year. We have a very active parent community with lots of interest and support in this project. The maintenance responsibilities for the natural playground will be shared where possible between CRPS, ACES, and our parent community. To continue stewardship momentum over the years, ACES will ensure that at the beginning of each school year, new families arriving at Alpenglow will be educated on the responsibilities involved with the natural playground and ACES will actively recruit new volunteers as needed. If required ACES will also ensure there is a lead parent volunteer assigned each September who will schedule and arrange the annual maintenance through to the following September. There are also several teachers at Alpenglow and Canmore Collegiate who would like to integrate some of the ongoing natural playground maintenance with their classrooms as part of their students' learning and volunteer requirements. We also plan to include our students in the natural playground so that the children can be stewards of their own space and learn to respect and take care of it.

- Weed-a-thon/pruning/clean up day with 15+ people
- Planning for any new planting additions or enhancements for the coming year
- Replenishing mulch & garden soil every 2-3 years (when needed)

Design and Construction

Our committee has created a Request for Proposals to be distributed on the Alberta Purchasing Connection website. We have also engaged with three natural playground design and construction companies whom philosophies and expertise align with our vision for this space. We will receive their bids in February 2019 and will hire a contractor to complete design and working drawing for our space. With the remained funds available we hope to embark on construction of the natural play structure in the summer of 2019. Subsequent phases including the outdoor learning space and landscaping to follow in the summer of 2020 funds permitting.