

WILLIAMS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Frequently Asked Questions about the playground

1. Why does the current playground structure need to be replaced? It looks fairly solid to me.

The current playground structure needs to be replaced for many reasons.

Age and Increasing Equipment Failure: Generally wooden playgrounds are expected to last 15 years if well maintained, and 10 years if only minimally maintained. Our wooden playground structure is approximately 20 years old and is decaying. Many of the major footings are rotted, there are splintery areas everywhere, and there is evidence of insect damage. The current structure is no longer “to code” and would never pass a safety inspection for today’s standards and guidelines. Children are getting hurt on the structure with increased frequency. Channon Ames, a Certified Playground Safety Inspector from Newton Parks and Recreation, has inspected our playground and determined that it has seen its life and should be replaced.

Physical Fitness and Health are an Important Part of a Child’s Education. Many of us know that without the release of recess and the opportunity that the playground structure provides to climb, explore, imagine, and create, our children are less able to adequately focus during academic times. It is also important for our children to exercise to avoid childhood obesity. Play is essential to the healthy development of children of all ages.

2. Why couldn't it just be updated, repaired, and retro-fitted?

It is actually quite expensive to repair the current structure, upwards of \$15,000! If we spend such money to repair and replace the rotted areas, we will still need to replace the entire structure within a few years time, thanks to our harsh New England winters. Additionally, any renovation or alteration made after 15 March 2012 must follow the new 2010 ADA Standards. Sanding and sealing the structure does not address the rot occurring below ground and only extends the life of the structure a few years.

We don’t want what happened in Belmont to happen to us! (Two school playgrounds were recently shut down due to safety concerns!) <http://belmont.patch.com/articles/town-schools-respond-to-playground-closures>

3. *Who is on the playground committee?*

Channon Ames (Newton Parks/Recreation), Stephanie Lapham (Newton Parks/Recreation), Jennie Goldenson, Bill Harms, Christine Lacey, Michael Lorant, Danielle Hatem, Dana Lanciloti, Elizabeth Mirabile, Rachel Yee, Sarah White, Karin Wood, Karla Armenoff, Dr. Connolly, Nurse Dolly, Ms. Belcher, Gail Sokoloff, Marina Martinez

4. *What has the playground committee done to date? (December 2011)*

June 2011: Initial playground meeting

July/August 2011: Meetings with:

- Columbia Cascade: current playground manufacturers to obtain quote for updating
- KOMPAN: European playground company
- Landscape Structures:
- Ultiplay (Play World Systems):
- Kim Thurmond: Mason-Rice playground committee
- Newton Parks/Recreation
- Visited every single elementary school playground in Newton, as well as 20 other playgrounds!
- Contacted Newton Planning Department (Alexandra Ananth, Mason-Rice parent!)

September/October/ November 2011:

- Playground committee meetings
- Narrowed down to two companies
- Established design criteria with community input.
- Received bids from Landscape Structures and Ultiplay
- Selected Ultiplay for many reasons: cost, community build option, number of play features, most appealing design, Mason-Rice playground
- Refined Ultiplay design

Next steps: **FUNDRAISE!** We plan to begin a Playground Fundraising Campaign in January 2012!!! Be on the lookout for ways to donate your time, treasure, and talent!

5. *Could the City of Newton pay for our new playground?*

One look at the TAB will reinforce that City funds are extremely tight, and the only playground-related expense that the city budgets for is maintenance. Playgrounds are exempt from what is known as an **equity cap** (which limits the amount of money parent groups can donate for certain items), and many PTOs have taken advantage of that to

upgrade their structures. As a result, the city has come to rely on the fundraising ability of schools and neighborhoods to refurbish and enhance their playgrounds. The city will contribute \$12,500 of “Marathon Money” (money that the City of Newton receives as compensation for allowing the Boston Marathon to run through its communities, and which the Board of Alderman have determined are to be donated towards playgrounds) toward our campaign.

6. Why does the new playground cost so much?

The main reason for the high cost is the materials that are used. Plastics and steel are very expensive and the sophistication of their engineering can be the difference between a playground lasting 5 or 25 years. With the proper maintenance, we expect to get 20-30 years out of a new structure.

It is indeed a significant investment for the community, but it is in line with newer play structures throughout the city and its elementary schools. Mason-Rice spent \$110K, Countryside did half of their playground for \$70K, Angier spent about \$45K on one side and even more on the other side. Franklin spent about \$ 65K.

7. Can we reduce the cost of the playground in any way?

We have to option of doing a “community build.” This means that members of our community volunteer to install the structure under the guidance of several representatives from the playground company. (About a \$15K savings!!!) There are no specific skills required, everyone can help! We can also find some cost savings if parents/neighbors donate in-kind services to help install the playground (for example – if people with access to construction equipment assist with site preparation work).

8. What if we don't raise enough money to pay for the entire playground?

We can also substitute less expensive components for items not integral to the structure; e.g., play panels at the ground level. Or we can stretch out the fundraising over a few years. However, the playground company can not guarantee the price from year to year.

9. Since the City's school budget is so tight, shouldn't we be raising money for more essential things like teacher salaries or modular classrooms?

We are not permitted to fund teacher salaries or capital improvements. Each PTO has an “equity cap” or a cap on the amount of money that they can allocate towards classroom support. To date, the PTOs contribute towards Creative Arts & Science enrichment programs for all grades, field trips, and reimbursement to teachers for nominal classroom expenditures.

However, there are two items that fall outside the equity cap and can be directly funded by the PTO: playgrounds and technology. Because outdoor time is such an important part of our children's school experience and due to the increasing frequency of both injury and equipment failure, now is the time to raise money for a new playground.

10. What about technology? If we are raising all this money for the playground, will we have any left over for technology? If not, when can we expect another fundraising campaign for technology?

Funding our growing technology needs has also become a critical path for our PTO and every other PTO in the City of Newton. We plan to fundraise for technology as well over the next couple of years. The playground fundraising will be a one to two year event, and we plan to do technology fundraising as well, and continue it in the future.

11. My own children have only another year or two left at Williams. Is my support that critical?

Financial support of this effort is entirely voluntary and is a decision made within each family. The school and city communities appreciate your gift at any level so that the tradition of a strong school spirit may continue.

As a reminder, school playgrounds are city property and so are open to the public for their enjoyment. Your children may still wish to visit the playground on weekends even after Grade 5. While a new playground will primarily benefit the children attending Williams, the After School Program, in the neighborhood, and the summer camps, the community at large can benefit from a new playground as well.

Some families may wish to make a gift in honor of their graduating child or honoring a special teacher or administrator who made a difference to them while at Williams.

12. I'd like to support the campaign but I have no idea what size gift is appropriate. Can you advise me?

The size of your gift is a personal decision. We hope that you will give until it feels good! If you would find it helpful to have a conversation, you may contact the Fundraising Chairs for a confidential discussion.

13. How else can I leverage my donation?

One way to maximize your gift is to donate via a personal check or a check from a donor-advised fund. The Playground Fund will receive 100 percent of your donation this way. Giving via Paypal is convenient, but they do keep a small fee for each transaction.

You may also wish to encourage grandparents and/or extended family to make gifts to the fund on special occasions in honor of their grandchildren.

Many employers have a matching gifts program which could double your gift to the effort. You should contact your employer's HR department for more information.

14. A cash gift is simply not possible for our family at this time. Is there some other way I can help?

Yes! We need volunteers in several capacities: outreach to our own parent community this fall, and to local businesses and abutters. If fundraising is not your cup of tea, we could use some administrative help with thank-you notes and other tasks. And if we elect to do a community build, we will certainly need help with construction and support for those actively involved in the building. Please contact Jennie for more information.

15. Will the size of my gift be kept confidential?

While the PTO and the school community will be aware of the total amount of donations made towards this campaign, there are only a few people who will know the details of whom has chosen to give, and how much they have given – the fundraising chairs and the treasurer recording and depositing the checks.