


# Inclusive Playgrounds and Surrounding Environments: Strategies and Considerations

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## Background

### 1. Importance of Playgrounds

- Playgrounds are unique physical and social spaces within communities that suspend traditional child-caregiver roles for a moment of rest and **play**.

#### The Importance of Play

##### Physical Development

Increased brain size (Frost, 1998), decreased risk for obesity (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005).



##### Mental Development

Improves creativity and problem-solving skills (Oostermeijer, Boonen, & Jolles, 2014) and builds mental health resiliency (Gray, 2011).

##### Social Development

Builds social skills like negotiation and cooperation (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998).



+ Playing is fun!

### 2. Playground Use for Children with Disabilities

- Some children with disabilities do not have equal access to playgrounds and the benefits they offer.
- The barriers these children face **depends on their disability** and are **systemic in nature** (Moore & Lynch, 2015; Perry et al., 2018).



### 3. Accessible Vs Inclusive Playgrounds

#### Accessible Playgrounds

Physical barriers are addressed within the playground design process, allowing children with disabilities access to the physical equipment within the playground (Fernelius, 2017).

#### Inclusive Playgrounds

Physical and social barriers are addressed within the playground design process allowing all children, including those with disabilities, to access the physical and social play within the playground (Fernelius, 2017).

- While inclusive playgrounds are accessibly designed, **accessible playgrounds are not always inclusively designed** for children with disabilities.
- Inclusive playgrounds are preferred, but **not always intuitive for practitioners to plan**.

## Research Question

What considerations and strategies could help practitioners/ stakeholders advance how inclusive playgrounds are designed and experienced?

## Methods

International environmental scan of inclusive playground practitioner materials (Contacted 23 practitioners and conducted Google searches).

154 documents obtained.

Duplicates and non-English materials removed.

132 documents kept for review.

- Simultaneously, a scoping review of the academic literature on inclusive playground design was completed.



## Acknowledgement

- Canadian Tire Jumpstart Grant: "Play Finds a Way Through Inclusive Playgrounds"

# Building an Inclusive Playground: Playground Design + Playground Surroundings + Communications + Inclusive Programming



## Results

### 1. Playground Surroundings

- Produce surroundings that allow all children to **access, play, and stay** in the playground.

#### Accessible Parking

Locate multiple accessible parking spaces close to the playground.

#### Facilities & Amenities

Include facilities like accessible bathrooms, water fountains, charging stations and mobility device parking.

#### Accessible Pathways

Create pathways that easily allow two wheelchairs to pass by one another.

### 2. Playground Design

- Consider designs that facilitates **safety, social interaction**, and access to **diverse play opportunities**.

#### Site Selection

Consider site size, grading, visibility, trees, and proximity to other institutions.



#### Play Components

Enhance play richness by including accessible equipment that facilitates a diversity of play types.

#### Layout

Place equipment of varying challenge levels in close proximity to one another to facilitate social interaction between different groups.

### 3. Playground Communications

- Consider communication strategies that allow anyone to **plan a trip** to the playground with **the most up-to-date information on its condition**.

#### Websites

Use a website as a centralized resource for accessibility information, maintenance updates, and promotional material.

#### Social Media

Use social media as one way to notify the community about maintenance or programing updates at the playground.



### 4. Playground Programming

- Use programming to **take advantage of and leverage the inclusive infrastructure** to facilitate inclusive play between children **in ways they can be replicated** outside the program.

#### Program Promotion

Advertise program details and timings using onsite signage and/or online posts.

#### Staff Training

Provide ongoing training on inclusive play strategies for staff members.



#### Program Content

Include both adult-led and child-led play, and promote social interaction between different groups.

## Conclusions

- Inclusive playground design** has been engaged in practice-oriented materials, but more attention must be given to the inclusive design of **playground surroundings, communications, programming and maintenance**.
- Report considerations and strategies should be engaged at the very **beginning** of a playground's design process, and **revisited throughout the playground's lifetime**.
- Inclusive playground design could be greatly enhanced via greater consideration of the **lived experiences** of children with disabilities and their families.



#### So What?

These considerations and strategies will help **Holland Bloorview families to access, play, stay, and feel welcome within their community playground environments**.



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