Bryant Webster Elementary School
3635 Quivas Street, Denver, CO 80211-3051

Prepared For: Denver Public Schools
900 Grant St.
Denver, Colorado

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Course: Finding Common Ground LA6686
Exploring the Urban Experience
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Bryant Webster Elementary School
A Master Plan for Elementary School
Campus Improvement

Prepared for: Denver Public Schools
900 Grant Street
Denver, CO

Approved ___________________________, __________________________
Principal, Bryant Webster Elementary School  Date

Approved ___________________________, __________________________
CDM Representative  Date

Approved ___________________________, __________________________
P.M., DPS Facility Management  Date

Approved ___________________________, __________________________
Grounds Supervisor, DPS Facility Management  Date
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Project Introduction

The Challenge

Studies show that a well-planned and equipped exterior play area enhances the learning environment resulting in improved learning and achievement. Such play areas provide physical and mental challenges that translate to improved health and learning attention. Furthermore, with proper design, these areas themselves become outdoor classrooms or learning landscapes. One of the principal secondary goals of all schools, including elementary, is to provide a focus for the community – a place to gather and to meet, a place to enjoy, a place that enhances the community’s appearance. A reflection of this community importance is Denver’s Mayor Wellington Webb’s statement, “As Mayor, I have long recognized that we cannot have a great city and great neighborhoods without great schools.”

Denver Public Schools [DPS] is an urban school district with many of the same challenges of other urban districts. The infrastructure is aging – the average facility age is almost 50 years. The ongoing 1998 General Obligation Bond [GOB] will increase the number of schools to 130 but contains no funding for existing elementary or any other existing school playground. Approximately 75 DPS elementary schools require moderate to extensive renovations or upgrades to meet adequate standards. These include replacing playground equipment, providing irrigation and sod [to eliminate gravel and dirt fields], providing American with Disability Act [ADA] accessibility, and providing an outdoor classroom learning environment. Approximately half of the 75 elementary schools are located within underserved neighborhoods. It is in these neighborhoods where transforming the schoolyard is most pressing. These schools have chronic disciplinary problems that are disruptive to a school’s academic environment. Playgrounds lacking appropriate choices for children become arenas to bully and tease. Recess should be a positive experience that compliments their academic development. A place where children develop their emotional, physical and social skills.

The Solution

The” Learning Landscape” program is an entrepreneurial community-minded alliance of public and private interests that seeks to strengthen Denver Public Schools and their surrounding neighborhoods by designing new multi-dimensional playgrounds and social gathering places. The success of this program is founded on a mutual respect of aesthetic, maintenance, safety, and recreational issues.
The University of Colorado at Denver’s Landscape Architecture department offers a seminar course called FINDING COMMON GROUND—EXPLORING THE URBAN EXPERIENCE.

Students of landscape architecture, architecture and other disciplines have come together with Professor Lois Brink to research current educational, sociological, and environmental thought regarding urban space in general and elementary school grounds in particular. Each student in the course selects a school from a predetermined pool and uses this knowledge to develop a vision and master plan for each school. The master plan approach will suit a multi-faceted contemporary existence engaging a child’s educational and recreational experience with that of the community at-large.

The Intent of the Master Plan

The master plan is a written report and plan that sets forth the structure for future campus improvements. Each school has a vision that speaks to the desires of the school and surrounding community. The vision is further delineated into goals that identify the major goals for implementation. These goals are defined through the use of text and imagery. A programmatic list of uses is also developed. Lastly, each master plan sets forth the aesthetic ordering system or systems that will be used on the design phase to organize the programmatic uses. This plan once approved will provide a framework for fund raising and future construction.

“School yards are frequently located in the center of neighborhoods away from busy streets, readily accessible to residents, young and old. They represent potentially neutral territories at the social interface of schools and community where the culture of the future and the culture of the present -- childhood and adulthood -- intersect. There is no reason why “dead asphalt” cannot be converted into living spaces.”

- Robin C. Moore
Location and Background

Bryant Webster is one of 86 elementary schools in Denver Public School System. As shown below, it is located at 3635 Quivas Street in North West Denver.

History of Highland

The student body at Bryant Webster is from the surrounding Highlands neighborhood.

The West Highland neighborhood includes the northwestern part of what was the incorporated Town of Highlands. From its beginning as an elite suburb of the "unsavory" city of Denver in 1875, the town expanded until its boundaries stretched north from Colfax Avenue to 38th Avenue and west from Zuni Street to Sheridan Boulevard. By 1890, there were 35 subdivision developments in addition to the original Highland Park.

As the population of the town grew, it did not remain as exclusively wealthy as its original planners had intended. Many of the subdivisions allowed small homes to be built on 25-foot lots. However, the town did remain residential and the housing was primarily owner-occupied, with great pride shown by the owners.

In 1890, Elitch Gardens, part of a private estate in the northwest corner of the town, opened to the public as a zoological garden with free vaudeville acts. Under the operation of Mary Elitch, a theater was opened and picnic facilities were provided. From World War I until 1995, when it relocated to the Platte Valley, Elitch Gardens was known as one of the major amusement parks of the region and the neighborhood's best-known attraction. In 1978, the Elitch Theatre was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Denver first tried to annex the Town of Highlands in the 1880s, but the people voted it down, not wanting to become part of the "dirty, sinful city" they looked down upon. However, transportation from the town to Denver across the river was inadequate, and many wealthy Highlands residents found the Capitol Hill area in Denver more convenient and moved out of Highlands. Finally, in 1896, the population of 8,000 voted to annex to Denver, and the promised construction of viaducts across the river helped resolve the transportation problems.

In the 1890s, large numbers of Irish, German, and English immigrants came to the area. Later, many Italians arrived and formed a colony in the neighborhood. A large-scale influx of Chicanos began in the 1960s, but has been slowed recently by the influx of young Anglo couples and families.
The surrounding Highland neighborhood is bounded by 38th Street, Federal Blvd, Speer Blvd and the South Platter River. Four hundred and fifty eight children attend Bryant Webster within the early childhood education (ECE total of 34 students) to 5th grade. Many of the students at Bryant Webster are from low-income households; approximately 91.7% of the students receive free school lunches. The Highland Neighborhood is 66.8% Latino, 29.4% Non-Latino White, 1.4% African American, 0.8% American Indian and 0.6% Asian/Pacific Islander. Bryant Webster's students are primarily Spanish speaking.

Proficient and Advanced:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bryant Webster</th>
<th>DPS</th>
<th>Colorado</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 Reading:</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 Reading:</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 4 Writing:</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5 Math:</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More information about Bryant Webster’s 2000 test scores can be found in Appendix A & B.

Constituent groups:
The student body at Bryant Webster is approximately 95.5% Hispanic, 2.5% White, 1.8% African American and 0.2% American Indian.

The 458 students attending Bryant Webster Elementary are comprised of approximately 34 ECE students and 424 K-5 students. Of those a group approximately 25 students, 2 parents, 2 teachers and the principle assistant participated in a one hour charrette.

We began the charette with a brief discussion about the playground, landscape architecture and wishes for the future playground. The children had been asked to make drawings of things they would like to see on the new playground.

The children were all asked to chose 6 favorite photos from a selection of 19 showing play equipment, outdoor spaces, trees, rocks, water, etc. and is shown on the next page:
This is the collection of photos (19) they all could chose from:

These were the images most frequently chosen among the 2nd and 3rd grade students:

- Lizard/art wall
- Sand
- Children by pond/water
- Trees
- Colorful playground equipment
Among 4th - 5th grade the following images were favorites:

- Soccer field
- Kids climbing on rocks
- Trees
- Wooden Benches
- Colorful playground equipment
- Children by pond/water

Among the adults the following images were favorites:

- Soccer field
- Jungle gym
- Swings
- Wooden Benches
- Colorful playground equipment
- Gazebo
Additional visits talking to the principal, Pat Salazar, teachers, parents, maintenance employees and other staff members indicated that trees/shade, seating areas, grass and additional playground equipment were priority elements on the wish list for the new playground at Bryant Webster. The one single wish repeated over and over from children - either in person, in drawings or in letters - was a drinking fountain. Apparently because the children are not allowed inside during their lunch recess, the playground becomes too hot and dry, partly because of relief from shade/trees and grassy areas. That seems to be a reasonable request that should be possible to accommodate.

Staff members posted a board in the hall for drawings, letters or suggestions from students, staff or parents. After implementing the idea of giving prices to students who submitted drawing, the number of drawing rose drastically within a short period of time. These are a selection of images that perhaps show more than what words can tell:

Letter from a student:

"Imagine s classroom with the sky for a ceiling and the earth as a floor. This classroom without walls is bustling with activity as young scientists explore the world of bugs and leaves, mathematics measure rainfall, count seeds and graph their garden growth, actors rehearse their play on a windy stage, artists sketch shadows and light, and linguists name the landscape with a thousand words."

- Kirk Meyer, Boston Schoolyard Initiatives
Existing Site:

History:
Bryant Webster started out as two different schools.

Bryant School was a small frame building erected in 1872 on 15th street and Central Street. The first teacher was Miss Cooper. In 1882 a new site was purchased at a cost of $1,650.00 for Bryant School at the corner of Murdock and Witter Street, now 36th Avenue and Shoshone Street. Two rooms were added to this building in 1883 and in 1890 a new modern eight room building was erected on the west end of the block. The cost: $342,270.00

Webster School was erected in 1892 on Murduck and Justine Streets, now 36th and Lipan, to accommodate Arge Smelter workmen’s children. Four additional rooms were added in 1903-1904 at the cost of $42,893.00

Bryant Webster: Bryant School acquired the rest of the block in 1930 and on January 31st, 1931 Bryant Webster opened. The cost of the building was $245,000.00 and the furniture was $8,500.00. The building was to provide twenty class rooms, one library, one auditorium, one gymnasium, two kindergarten rooms, office, lunchroom, clinic and rest rooms.

The design of the building is contemporary or modern in form, the exterior is constructed entirely in brick. All pattern and ornamental work are adapted from the art of the South-Western Indians. The culture was the key motif actuating the design.

The Art of the Puna Indians, Hopi, the Navajo and Pueblo Indians fully called upon and can be observed in the exterior brick patterns and symbols, especially over the main entrance. The school was dedicated in on February 10th, 1931 at 8:00 pm and the enrollment was 1076.

Site Inventory
The existing surfaces areas are expressed in square footages (sf) as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gravel play field</th>
<th>Asphalt play area</th>
<th>Parking</th>
<th>Picnic area/soft surface</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48,206 sf</td>
<td>19,835 sf</td>
<td>9,326 sf</td>
<td>5,522 sf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All square footages within this site inventory are taken from DPS Existing Site Conditions drawing on the following page.
Asphalt Play Area
The existing play area asphalt is 19,835. There are games of tether ball, hop scotch, four square and basket ball.

Playground equipment
Bryant Webster has an ECE playground located on the south side of the building (1,826 sf), a primary playground located on the north-west and an intermediate playground located on the south-west side of the building. All playgrounds are graveled. Current play elements on the site includes: 6 slides, 10 swings, 8 climbers, 9 horizontal ladders, 7 horizontal bars, 9 fire poles, 1 see-saw, 1 merry-go-round, 1 balance beam and 6 travel rings.

Playing field
The playing field (48,206 sf) is graveled and non-irrigated.

Soft Surface
A picnic area (5,522 sf) is located on the north side of the building and is rarely used.

Vehicular Access and Parking.
There is one parking area located on the north-west side of the building and it contains 28 spaces + 2 handicap spaces.

Surrounding Uses
The site is bounded on all sides by single-family housing.
Adequacy of On-Site Uses

Safety:
Some of the basketball goals, pictured to the right, are not the gooseneck type and have the potential to catch hands or clothing. Metal netting is still present on some of the basketball goals. The picnic area located on the north side of the building cannot be supervised from the playground.

Playground equipment
Much of the current play equipment fails current safety standards. A completed DPS Playground Safety Site Assessment is included in Appendix C

The quantity of playground equipment is inadequate for the current 458 students enrolled in ECE-5th grade. Existing equipment can accommodate approximately 204 students (45%) of the current student body at any one time.

The ECE equipment can accommodate approximately 28 students at a time, whereas ECE enrollment totals 34.

Vehicular Access and Parking
The existing 28 + 2 parking spaces fail to meet the minimum standard. The 28 spaces seem to forget paraprofessionals, administration and visitors and street parking is widely used. Based on current DPS standards 47 spaces are required.

Drainage
Drainage problems exist on the black top surface on the west-side of the building. Especially in the winter time this area becomes a hazard.

Shade
The site contains minimum shade. All playground areas does not have any shade.

Ambience
Surrounding streetscapes are irrigated, planted and generally well maintained. The building appears to be a landmark for its neighborhood and the entrance provides for a positive arrival. However, the sense of pride and belonging is unfortunately not carried through to the playground.

“The need is to create an environment which not only provides for the developing child’s educational needs, but where a special ambience is created which signifies that young people are cherished, respected, and considered.

- Eileen Adams, 1993
“The only way to provide for a high degree of individual expression is to ensure that the environment is ambiguous open-ended, and changeable so that the children can manipulate it physically and mentally to suit their own ends.

- Simon Nicholson, 1971

The Vision

To create a playground that visually and experientially create opportunities for outdoor education. The elements of life that transcends cultures will be the primary catalyst for interaction and discovery.

Goals:

- Provide opportunity for outdoor education - interactive learning tools in the landscape
- Provide opportunity for social interaction between children
- Design spaces that will incorporate shade and seating into playground area
- Modernize and expand game areas maintaining age appropriate areas
- A functional master plan that minimizes maintenance
- Improve circulation and safety
Program Elements

- Additional play equipment to accommodate the number of students enrolled in ECE, Primary and Intermediate classes

- Hard surface area:
  a. Four additional Foursquare for a total of eight.
  b. Four additional Tetherball for a total of eight
  c. One complete Basketball area
  d. One complete Volleyball area

- Soft surface: Multi purpose field with grass—soccer field and other activities

- Observatory Path & Math Path - human sun dial, numbers, letters etc.

- Amphitheatre - community activities, arts performance, education, etc.

- Shade structure - art, shade, sense of privacy

- Drinking Fountain

- Benches and other elements to provide for seating in shaded areas

- Trees to provide for buffer and shade throughout the campus

- Erosion hill—ecology field

- Climbing rock gathering space

- Native grass area / Science Garden

- Art Wall

“Play is a significant part of children’s social education. Play is important, not just for the growing child’s physical well-being, but for its social, emotional and intellectual development. How might we provide for these different aspects by creating opportunities for different kinds of play activities? Where can they imagine themselves to be on a desert island, a high mountain or a jungle? How easy is it to find small protected spaces to dress up and play out imaginary scenarios?”

- Eileen Adams, 1993
How to achieve the goals by using the proposed elements:

I envision concrete elements similar to the structures that can be found at the Observatory in Jaipur. These elements will spark interest and curiosity among both children and adults regardless of cultural background. The elements will be combined with an experiential path that follows the pattern of the ordering grid overlaid on the ordering system. The path will contain numbers and letters and will eventually function as an interactive learning tool.

By introducing a shade structure, an amphitheatre and intimate spaces where trees are planted and benches are added, I will provide this playground with spaces that incorporate shade and seating into the playground. The amphitheatre in particular will also function as an area that allows for performance and outdoor classroom capability.

It is my intention to include the children in the process of providing artwork for the art wall as well as for elements implemented into the shade structure. The purpose of involving the children into this process is to create a sense of pride, self-esteem and ownership.

The cultural garden and the ecosystem garden will allow for children to learn aspects of ecological and scientific value. The erosion hill and climbing rock area will serve a similar purpose and additionally function as a gathering place.

Especially the multi purpose field will be great for numerous activities where only the sky is the limit.

The drinking fountain that is much needed will be given cultural attention and I imagine it being designed in a way that makes it a focal element of pride and achievement using imagery taken from the Hispanic culture.

The way these elements will be introduced into the site following a path that winds through the area, circulation will be improved yet the level of maintenance required will be kept low.

Introducing new updated play equipment will momentarily improve the safety at the playground and all new elements introduced will be following current safety standards.
Appendix A
Master Plan Drawing
Appendix C
DPS Playground Safety Assessment
Appendix D
Phase Budget Worksheet
Appendix E
Reference Material