University Park Elementary School
Learning Landscape Initiative

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Table of Contents

University Park Elementary history and context
University Park Elementary existing conditions and focus
Learning Landscape goals and vision
Learning Landscape site plan and context
Learning Landscape concepts: process and development
Learning Landscape concepts: sections and space
Learning Landscape concepts: precedence and images
University Park Elementary school is centrally located in the middle of University Park neighborhood. The neighborhood boasts a historic appeal, with two community parks; Observatory Park and McWilliams Park. Observatory Park is home of the Chamberlin Observatory and McWilliams Park is bounded by the Harvard Gulch, both of which University Park Elementary hopes to incorporate as a strong inspiration and theme.

The character of the University Park neighborhood receives significant influence in it’s demographic make up, as well as commitment to the elementary school from near-by Denver University. The elementary school historically served as a teacher training elementary school for Denver University.

University Park Elementary is bordered by St Paul street; which is the main drop off for students. East Illif Avenue; serving as the faculty and staff access and bus drop off, and Wesley street. The main entrance to the school is on the corner of Illif and St Paul; however, most kids enter the school and meet parents after school through play ground doors. Because of this the community gateway and central gathering area will be primary importance as a central core to the design.
Play areas are generally outdated and lack a cohesive function. The Early Childhood Education (ECE) area has relatively new play equipment, which was built in 1998 and will be saved per this plan. The overall ECE area lacks sufficient play surfacing and equipment for outdoor play and exploration.

Primary play area is an area of great need for improvement. The play structure and other play equipment is outdated and under used, while the space is enclosed by a concrete wall built last year. The school and parents have expressed a desire and concern to utilize this wall, while allowing for movement through the playground.

The intermediate play area also needs significant upgrading, as all equipment is outdated and non-compliant under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the surfacing is pea gravel and is fairly compacted. There has been a desire to incorporate this play area into the playground better.

Asphalt surfaces are expansive, making the very open playground a hot area during warm months. The asphalt has many cracks and uneven surfaces, it will need resurfacing.
“allow children to explore the many facets of their environments and their creative selves”

“share a love of discovery and take joy in our journey”

“endless possibilities”

“play areas provide physical and mental challenges that translate to improved health and learning attention”

“improve circulation and increase movement”
A well-planned and well-equipped exterior play area can enhance the learning environment, resulting in improved learning and achievement. These play areas provide for physical and mental challenges that translate into improved health and learning.

Playgrounds can be woven into the fabric of a neighborhood providing safe and exciting places for kids to play, while also empowering a neighborhood spirit that resounds with a sense of pride, and a comfort in the quality of the play, learning and social landscape.

Goals:

- Provide a wide array of safe and enjoyable play possibilities to allow children to explore the many facets of their environment and their creative selves.
- Create more natural areas to encourage a greater awareness of the physical environment, that the state and the region offer, allowing students greater access to the natural world.
- Provide multi-use spaces that allow for a wide range of possibilities to be explored within flexible environments.
- Identify and highlight spaces that change with the seasons to give perspective on the myriad of cycles of life and nature.
- Improve circulation and drainage patterns, and playground areas to create a safer environment that allows for increased movement throughout.
Site Plan and Neighborhood Context
Process sketches and conceptual diagrams begin to help shape the overall plan and define social spaces used for gathering, performance and contemplative areas.

Through this stage the design begins to show form. The form dictates what surface materials may be used and what each type of material represents to play and childhood development.

**Intermediate Play Area**
Defined by challenging and active play equipment. Play equipment should be interactive; combining skill building with gross motor skills to help students build physical strength, balance, creativity, and problem solving skills.

**Asphalt Play Area**
Offering an array of hard surface play activities. Focus is given to individual sports and cooperation. Asphalt is minimized using raised planting beds to break up expansiveness and provide seating and shade opportunity.

**Community Entrance and Central Gathering**
Main entry into playground, to be developed to engage and inform users. Central gathering area will serve as a meeting place, both for students during recesses and for parents after school. Area will be a durable surface and will be highlighted by a shade structure and amphitheater performance area.

**Early Childhood Education and Primary Play Area**
Incorporating a variety of surfaces types for children to begin to understand how different tactile surfaces function in the play environment. The Primary area will feature new play equipment that is both enticing to children and allows for long term play opportunities.
Section 1. View West to Primary Play Area and Existing Concrete Seat Wall
Community Gateway

Drainage Swale and Primary Play Mound

Vegetated Surface Areas, Turf, Native Grasses, and Shrub/Perennial Beds

Hard Surface Play Areas, Asphalt, Concrete, Water Plays, Crusher Fines Areas, and Engineered Wood fiber

Concepts: Sections and Spaces
Playground equipment and plant material will be selected for interest, educational availability, and playability.

Climbing structures and play mounds will be highlighted in the University Park Learning Landscape, this provides children with multiple uses and multiple skill levels of activity. These structures must also provide for interactive learning, creativity, and drama.

Plants will be used as educational resources, as well as creating space, providing shade, and beauty. Plants used in native areas must be durable, water tolerance, and seasonal interest. Secondly, plants that provide for play props and art projects will be selected first.