



San Francisco Playground Reassessment 2009

A Project of the Playground Initiative

Introduction

The Playground Initiative is a partnership between the Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC) and the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department (RPD). The Initiative works towards ensuring that all children in San Francisco have access to a safe and engaging play space in their own neighborhood. By building strong partnerships with the community, elected officials and RPD, the Playground Initiative ensures that playgrounds are valued, protected, and improved citywide.

As part of the Playground Initiative, NPC and RPD survey public playgrounds every two years for safety and maintenance. Results are published in a Playground Report Card. The Report Card helps determine which playgrounds are in the worst condition and in need of the most attention. Through advocacy and community volunteerism, the Playground Initiative works to upgrade or replace these needy playgrounds.

This reassessment report summarizes the second phase of the Playground Initiative wherein playground improvements in the form of volunteer workdays were conducted at 13 sites throughout the 2009 calendar year. Each playground that received attention was reassessed in the fall to determine the impact of the work completed through the Playground Initiative in 2009.

Background: Review of Playground Initiative Work Completed in 2008

Throughout 2008, NPC and RPD made improvements at 11 of the 26 failed playgrounds identified in the 2008 Playground Report Card. These improvements varied by playground, but included the following tasks: trash pickup, sand sifting, beautification projects, plantings, weeding, sand addition, and equipment painting. Community volunteers, led by RPD and NPC staff, completed most Playground Initiative work. However, some improvements were carried out by RPD staff at the request of NPC and with NPC's support. In total, there were 12 Playground Initiative workdays in 2008.

All 11 playgrounds were reassessed after improvement work was completed and results were published in the 2008 Playground Reassessment Report. The Report showed improvements in grade at 7 of the 11 playground sites.

Playground Initiative Work Completed in 2009

Playgrounds

In 2009, NPC and RPD held volunteer workdays at 13 playgrounds. While the Playground Initiative was originally designed to focus on failing playgrounds (grades D & F), NPC recognized early in 2009 that many playgrounds that had received a failing grade in 2008 were beyond the point of being improved by a workday. Instead, these sites need to be renovated. As such, NPC began advocating for capital improvements for these playgrounds while simultaneously engaging community volunteers in workdays at C grade playgrounds that *could* benefit from such improvements. Therefore, Phase II of the Playground Initiative included C playgrounds as well as failing playgrounds. Of the 13 playgrounds where the volunteer workdays took place, 5 were failing and 8 were C grades.

Improvements varied by playground, but often included the following tasks: trash pickup, sand sifting, plantings, weeding, sand addition, and equipment painting.

Reassessment Schedule

NPC staff reassessed all 13 playgrounds in fall of 2009:

Date Reassessed	Playground
9/15	Fulton Playground, Kimbell Playground, Buena Vista Park Playground, Cabrillo Playground ¹
9/22	Palega Playground, Christopher Playground, John McLaren Park Playground (Shelley Dr.), Glen Canyon Park Playground
9/24	McCoppin Square Playground, Stern Grove Playground
9/25	Potrero Hill Rec Center Playground, Silver Terrace Playground
10/9	Precita Park Playground

Survey Instrument

All 13 playgrounds were reassessed after improvement work was completed. To ensure comparability, playgrounds were reassessed using the same survey that was implemented in the 2008 Playground Report Card.

¹ Cabrillo Playground was closed for capital improvements at the time of the fall reassessment and will not reopen until 2010; therefore, Playground Initiative staff were unable to conduct the reassessment. Cabrillo Playground is slated to be renovated in 2012 using funds from the 2008 Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond.

Reassessment Results by Playground

The following table details the workdays completed at each site, the initial grade of the playground as well as the reassessment grade.

Workday Date	Playground	2008 Grade	2009 Grade
3/25/09	McCoppin Square Playground*	D	B
8/5/09	Christopher Playground	F	B
8/5/09	John McLaren Park Playground (Shelley Dr.)	F	F
8/5/09	Potrero Hill Rec Center Playground	D	D
8/4/09	Silver Terrace Playground	D	C
8/4/09	Glen Canyon Park Playground*	C	B
8/5/09 & 8/13/09	Buena Vista Park Playground	C	B
8/5/09	Cabrillo Playground*	C	N/A
8/5/09	Fulton Playground*	C	C
8/5/09	Kimbell Playground*	C	B
8/5/09	Palega Playground*	C	B
8/5/09	Stern Grove Playground	C	B
10/3/09	Precita Park Playground	C	C

*On the 2008 Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond list. These parks will be renovated using bond funds in the next 2-4 years.

Overall Results and Trends: 8 Playgrounds Upgraded

Of the 13 playgrounds, 8 improved in grade after Playground Initiative efforts. Many of the playgrounds that did not improve in grade presented challenges that could not be easily addressed by a volunteer workday such as inadequate fall zones, missing signage, poor lighting, and corrosion. While some playgrounds could not be upgraded by a workday, others were greatly improved by simple tasks such as trash removal and sand sifting, since hazardous materials such as broken glass present a significant risk to children. Simply painting wooden elements also helped to upgrade playgrounds by sealing in arsenic, eliminating splinters, and beautifying the play area. Adding new playground sand was also a valuable volunteer task, as having sufficient depth of sand decreases the probability that playground children will hurt themselves falling or jumping off of equipment.

Conclusions

Playground Initiative staff conducting playground reassessments noticed much improvement in general playground maintenance compared to 2008. Overall, sand was clean, trash cans were provided, equipment was well-painted, and litter was not present. RPD staff have clearly been working tirelessly to address these issues.

As in 2008, structural issues presented the largest challenge at many of the playgrounds. Fall zones² were consistently less than the desired six feet. Corrosion also plagued metal equipment, such as swing chains and slide beds. The following photos illustrate some of the most common challenges many of our city's older playgrounds face. These are issues that often contribute to a poor grade on our Playground Report Card.



Inadequate fall zone



Deteriorating wood



Lack of trash cans



Corrosion

Next Steps

The Neighborhood Parks Council and the Recreation and Park Department will be surveying all RPD maintained playgrounds in February of 2010 and publishing the 2010 Playground Report Card shortly thereafter. The Playground Initiative will then use 2010 grades to focus volunteer efforts during 2010-2011. Throughout the two-year effort, the Initiative will continue to advocate for high-quality, safe playgrounds citywide to ensure that *all* children in San Francisco can play and exercise safely outside.

² A fall zone is the space under and around playground equipment where a child might fall. A fall zone should be covered with protective surfacing and extend a minimum of six feet in all directions from the edge of stationary play equipment.