



REPORT TO

**CORPORATE SERVICES, STRATEGIC  
PLANNING AND PROPERTY  
COMMITTEE**

**PLAYGROUND IMPROVEMENT UPDATE  
(ALL WARDS)**

*"I can do all things through HIM who strengthens me."  
Philippians 4:13 (NRSVCE)*

Created, Draft	First Tabling	Review
October 29, 2019	November 14, 2019	
M. Iafrate, Senior Coordinator, Asset Renewal P. de Cock, Comptroller, Finance and Business Services D. Friesen, (Acting) Superintendent of Capital Development and Asset Renewal		
<b>RECOMMENDATION REPORT</b>		

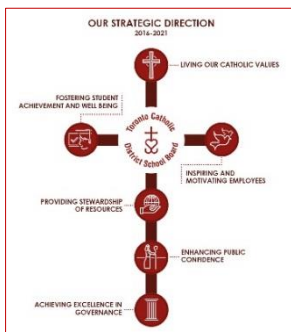
**Vision:**

*At Toronto Catholic we transform the world through witness, faith, innovation and action.*

**Mission:**

*The Toronto Catholic District School Board is an inclusive learning community uniting home, parish and school and rooted in the love of Christ.*

*We educate students to grow in grace and knowledge to lead lives of faith, hope and charity.*



Rory McGuckin  
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Associate Director of Facilities,  
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Chief Financial Officer

## **A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In June 2019, the Board approved the establishment of a strategic Ward Priorities School Playground Reserve fund of \$1.2M from in-year surpluses (if available). This report recommends the approval of selection criteria and a process for the allocation of Playground Reserve Funds by the Board. The goal of the process is to ensure equitable distribution of funds.

This report also provides an update regarding the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for playground improvements initiated by school communities. The SOP has been revised to reflect changes in delivery of landscape consultation and project management services and feedback received from involved parents at three pilot schools. The SOP is designed to ensure efficient and accountable delivery of services, conformance with the Board's Procurement Policy and Procedures and responsible ongoing maintenance of school sites.

Support for sustainable playground/outdoor revitalization investment is also reviewed in this report. Funding of playground improvements through the annual operating budget would not be appropriate and would not achieve the desired equity goals. Sustainable funding for enhanced outdoor environment could be realized if the Ministry of Education considered the following:

- that the condition of outdoor play and learning elements be included in building condition assessments for determination of School Condition Improvement grants;
- that Capital funding be made available for outdoor environment improvements at existing schools; and
- that enhanced outdoor learning and play environments be considered as an integral and essential component of the Capital funding benchmark for new schools and additions.

*The cumulative staff time required to prepare this report was 22 hours.*

## **B. PURPOSE**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Board's standard operating procedures with respect to outdoor play environments including development of sustainable funding for playground improvements as well as a methodology for equitable distribution of the approved Playground Reserve

Fund. The report addresses a number of Board motions and inquiries regarding playgrounds as follows:

- May 9, 2019 – *Request for Standard Operating Procedures and forms for outdoor environment improvements to be more “parent-friendly.”*
- May 16, 2019 - *Support for Playgrounds/Outdoor Revitalization Investment;*
- June 11, 2019 – *Approval of a strategic Ward Priorities School Playground Reserve fund to be established from in-year surpluses, with \$0.1M to be allocated for each ward from the in-year surpluses for a total of \$1.2M, and this allocation will be reassessed on an annual basis; further that staff develop a criteria for prioritizing the use of the playground reserve funds that may include, but is not limited to, equity considerations (socio-economic demographic data), age of playground infrastructure, consideration towards the playground plan, distance from existing playgrounds and green space.*

## **C. BACKGROUND**

1. ***The last update to the Outdoor Play Environments Policy B.G. 01 in November 2016 included a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for playground improvements.*** The SOP was intended to help facilities staff organize, track, and supervise all improvements to the outdoor environments on TCDSB property as well as provide schools with design consultation and support. At that time, a consultant employed by Evergreen, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating and sustaining healthy urban environments, had been retained by the Board to assist with playground improvement projects.
2. ***To reflect the Board’s changing relationship with Evergreen and the creation of a new landscape project supervisor position in the Renewal Department, the SOP for improvements to Outdoor Play Environments required revision.*** In August 2018, the Evergreen consultant assigned to the Board left the employment of Evergreen. Evergreen decided not to replace this consultant and to change the focus of its services to school boards. The revised SOP and Project Request Form, reflecting the role of the new Landscape Supervisor position in the Renewal Department are attached as Appendix A. A link to the SOP and all forms required to complete a playground improvement project can be found in Policy B.G. 01.

3. ***The creation of a Playground Reserve Fund, as approved by Board, will further assist school communities to carry out playground improvements.***  
As stated in the Board motion, criteria need to be established to ensure equitable distribution of this fund. Staff have developed a criteria matrix and a high level process for selection of schools for allocation of Playground Reserve funds, for Board approval. Administrative procedures for implementation will be further developed by staff.
4. ***Finance staff have reviewed suggestions for playground revitalization investment through the annual budgeting process.*** A delegation by the St. Vincent De Paul Catholic School Parent Council (CSPC) to the June Corporate Services Committee meeting requested that the Board investigate playground funding through school block budgets and/or other areas of the annual operating budget. Benefits in the areas of Mental Health, Safe Schools, Student Success and Nurturing Our Catholic Community were cited.

#### **D. EVIDENCE/RESEARCH/ANALYSIS**

1. ***Policies, standards and legislation related to the Playground Reserve and/or referenced in the SOP, include but are not limited to:***
  - Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)
  - CSA Z614 Standard
  - B.G. 01 Outdoor Play Environment Policy
  - F.P 01 Purchasing Policy
  - F.F.02 Donation and Sponsorship Policy
  - F.F.26 Sponsorship Policy
  - Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, O.Reg. 191-11 (Outdoor Play Spaces)
  - OPHEA Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines
  - S 25 Good Neighbour Policy
  - S.M. 04 Fundraising in Schools Policy
  - Education Act R.R.o. 1990 Regulation 298, Operation of School, s 24 (1) & (2) s. 25 (1) & (2)
  - TCDSB Facilities Operating Procedure
  - TCDSB FDK Playground Standard
  - The Ontario Building Code
2. ***The SOP for playground improvements in Policy B.G.01 outlines the following (refer to Appendix A):***

- Formation of an Outdoor Environment Committee, led by the Principal;
  - Completion of a ***Project Request Form***, submitted to the Renewal Department;
  - Grouping of projects into categories based on budget and scope to determine project lead, consultation requirements and approximate timelines;
  - Process for community engagement by the Outdoor Environment Committee with the assistance of the Landscape Project Supervisor;
  - Completion of a ***Project Details Form*** in collaboration with Landscape Project Supervisor, Area SQS and/or consultant;
  - Required procurement process;
  - Confirmation of funding source(s).
3. ***A draft revised SOP was “test-driven” with three school communities embarking on playground improvements through the summer of 2019.*** Parents from St. Conrad, St. Simon and St. Vincent de Paul provided feedback that was used to refine the SOP and supporting documents. Items such as clarification of Outdoor Environment Committee members, simplification of language and inconsistencies were addressed in revisions. See Appendix B for the details of feedback and resulting changes.
4. ***An application and selection process will be established for allocation of the Playground Reserve.*** A deadline for applications will be publicized and the Project Request Form for Outdoor Environment Improvements will be adapted to include an option to apply for the Playground Reserve funding. Proposed selection committee members are the local trustee for each ward, a Business Supervisory Officer and an Academic Supervisory Officer. Decisions will be by consensus. In the event that a consensus cannot be reached, the Director of Education and/or Associate Directors will be consulted.
5. ***The criteria listed in Table 1 are proposed to evaluate and rank school submissions for consideration for the Playground Reserve.*** Refer to Appendix C for definitions of criteria and terms used in the evaluation.

**Table 1**

	Primary Criteria	Points
1	Socio-Economic Ranking	20
2	Existing Site Condition	10

3	Existing Site Elements	10
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6. ***Schools will be evaluated on the criteria as follows:***

- Socio-Economic Ranking: *N-Tile Scores*, ranging from 0-9, will be doubled to provide scores from 0 - 18 (refer to definitions in Appendix C for data used to generate *N-Tile Scores*) and 2 points will be added for schools that are part of the E-PAN (Equity-Poverty Action Network) initiative.
- Existing Site Condition: This information will be provided through the Ministry building condition database. Existing site conditions (for example, hardscapes and softscapes) will be based on the percentage of the element’s lifespan. If an element has reached its expected life span, the condition will receive a full score of 10, where as an element that has reached half of its expected life span will receive a score of 5. On-site verification will be required to ensure the accuracy of the data.
- Existing Site Elements: Site elements include play structures, outdoor sports courts, outdoor classrooms and play elements will be evaluated based on their presence (lower score) or lack thereof (higher score) and condition.

7. ***The selection committee may consider the additional criteria listed in Table 2.*** Depending on the number of submissions received and a determination by the selection committee whether to distribute the available funding to one or more schools, these criteria will be used to further rank similarly high scoring schools being considered for funding.

**Table 2**

	Secondary Criteria
1	Existing comparable play structure, outdoor sports court or play element within walking distance
2	Community green space within walking distance
3	Access to shade on site
4	Access to natural features/play surfaces on site
5	Availability of partnerships/external funding

8. ***All proposed playground improvement projects are required to be AODA compliant.*** Accessibility improvements and compliance with the



Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act are understood to be necessary and expected to be included in all projects. This is outlined in the SOP.

9. ***The St. Vincent De Paul CSPC delegation's suggestion that school block budgets include a specific allocation for school yard improvements, while good intentioned, may cause inherent inequities.*** School Block Budgets are calculated by enrolment and socio-economic factor differences between school communities. Playground repair and replacement is generally not driven by enrolment, but rather, a function of the age and condition of the playground infrastructure. A simple illustration of this would be if School A was a large school in a higher socio-economic area with a larger school block budget, but had a new playground. School B is a smaller school in a lower socio-economic area with a smaller school block budget and has a very old playground. Under this scenario the school with a newer playground in a higher socio-economic area would likely receive much more funding if the formula were largely driven by enrolment. This would be an unintentional consequence of budgeting for playgrounds using school block budgets.
10. ***The CSPC delegation's suggestion that a portion of the Board's operating budget be allocated to playground improvements, while good intentioned, presents many operational challenges.*** The use of Operations & Maintenance funds would require offsetting reductions in other areas such as custodial and maintenance staff services, plant operational supplies, lower service levels for grass-cutting and snow-removal, utilities, etc.
11. ***The addition of a "school yard" component to the annual School Condition Improvement Grant would be the most ideal and equitable way to fund playground improvements.*** Staff agree with the delegate that outdoor education forms a fundamental part of the learning. One of the best ways to ensure this is recognized is to establish a stable stream of funding for both new and replacement playgrounds; no different than how the Ministry would fund new or replacement gymnasiums. Staff recommend that the Chair of the Board and Director of Education should write to the Ministry of Education to request that a school yard component be added to the School Condition Improvement Grant to generate an ongoing and sustainable solution to playground improvement and outdoor learning environment challenges.

## **E. METRICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

1. ***The SOP for Outdoor Environment Improvements will be reviewed on a five year cycle with the policy.*** Continued feedback from parents, principals and staff will be taken into consideration for future updates.
2. ***The Playground Reserve criteria will be reviewed following its first application to ensure it is fair and equitable.*** Administrative processes will be further refined and an update report will be provided if significant changes are required.
3. ***Transparency and accountability will be ensured by reporting to Board on how the Playground Reserve funds are expended.*** Staff will provide an annual report to the Corporate Service Committee following completion of playground projects utilizing the reserve funds in each fiscal year, outlining the amount allocated to each ward and listing the projects completed and final costs.

## **F. IMPLEMENTATION, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN**

1. ***Stakeholders have been engaged in the roll-out of the revised SOP for playground improvements over the past several months.*** The SOP has been reviewed by Asset Renewal and Environmental Support Services staff, Communications, Education Council and at Principals' meetings. It has been in use in draft form for CSPC initiated projects since early 2019.
2. ***The SOP will be made available on the TCDSB's School Ground Greening web page, the TCDSB's CSPC web page as well as sent directly to all Principals.*** Supporting documents, including community engagement resources, landscape design resources and guidelines, frequently asked questions and relevant grant information, will also be made available in the same location. The link referenced in the Outdoor Play Environment Policy B.G.01 on the Board website will be updated to link to the revised SOP.
3. ***The Asset Renewal and Operations departments continue to look for ways to improve the delivery of services to school communities striving to improve outdoor play environments for students.*** Verbal feedback from multiple CSPCs since the hiring of the Landscape Supervisor has confirmed that the



position has increased efficiency for locally funded school ground improvements, as they act as the primary contact and resource at the TCDSB.

4. ***The amount of available Playground Reserve funding will be assessed after fiscal year-end financial statements are finalized.*** If the TCDSB has a surplus, \$1.2M of that surplus will be designated into a fund called the Playground Equipment Reserve Fund. Equal amounts will be distributed to each ward once a project or projects have been approved and work begins, up to a maximum of \$100,000 per ward. The execution of projects will follow the SOP process referenced in Policy B.G.01.

## **G. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the Ward Priorities Playground Reserve selection criteria and process as detailed in this report be approved.
2. That the Chair of the Board and the Director of Education send a letter to the Minister of Education requesting:
  - that the condition of outdoor play and learning elements be included in building condition assessments for determination of School Condition Improvement grants;
  - that Capital funding be made available for outdoor environment improvements at existing schools; and
  - that enhanced outdoor learning and play environments be considered as an integral and essential component of the Capital funding benchmark for new schools and additions.