

Sharing Power with Families

Madison Elementary School

Greeley, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Madison Elementary School serves low-income students with over 75% eligible for free or reduced price school meals. Quite often, parents face overwhelming barriers to participating in their child's education or school programs because they have several jobs or do not have easy access to transportation. Having a variety of outreach methods in place increased parent participation in Madison's efforts to design a new school yard.

The Great Outdoors Colorado School Yard Initiative aims to revitalize school playgrounds and outdoor learning environments. The most competitive projects are those that reflect a participatory design process led by the students and include parent participation. Great Outdoors Colorado emphasizes student leadership as a critical component of a successful grant application and requests that parents and community members are engaged as well to ensure there is buy-in from the entire school community. In many of the proposals, students make presentations to parent groups such as PTAs, however Madison Elementary, located in Weld County District 6, took exceptional steps to ensure that parent voices significantly contributed to the decision-making process.

Madison gave parents a variety of ways to participate both at the school and using online and social media tools. At the beginning of the school year during Parent Teacher Conferences, families were asked about the kinds of play structures they wanted to have on the playground resulting in feedback from 485 individuals. At the same time, parents could submit a vote using Facebook or provide input on charts hung in hallways at the school.

After the students compiled the input provided by parents, staff, students, and community members, they created a few playground plans that were then presented to Madison's Parent Group. After more feedback was collected, a group of playground design consultants prepared formal design plans to present to the school. Knowing that Science Night would draw a large portion of the school community, the design plans were posted for another voting process. Voting also took place through an online survey and the plans were posted at the school entrance following the Science Night.

As a result of the intricate yet accessible way to partner with families, Madison received the grant funding to have a new playground built.