



Playground has kids flying high

Students jump off a line of pedestals Tuesday on the opening day of a playground at Smith Renaissance School of the Arts at East 35th Avenue and Jasmine Street. The new playground and lawn replaced unsafe play structures and a dirt-and-gravel lot. Attending the dedication were 500 community members, students and teachers; Denver Mayor Wellington Webb; Superintendent of Public Schools Jerry Wartgow; and John Hereford, executive director of Great Outdoors Colorado. **ZIA**

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Project to construct new playgrounds in full swing

By Vladimir Kovalev
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

Hundreds of children jumped, shouted and laughed as they took over a new playground Tuesday at the Smith Renaissance School of the Arts in Denver.

Some were getting their first chance to use the basketball court, which was painted in bright purple, green and yellow.

"I didn't know there was going to be a playground. I didn't know, so I was surprised," said third-grader Eduardo Botello, 8.

"I like when you go and swing like this," he said, waving his hands as if he were on a swing.

It wasn't clear who was happier, the children or the adults gathered on the grass.

"This facility reduces discipline problems, injuries, vandalism and more important, it allows teachers to have more time on teaching kids.

... When they get back to the classroom, (the children) are calmer and they are ready to learn," said Tom Kaesemeyer, executive director of

the Gates Family Foundation, one of the institutions involved in financing The Learning Landscape project.

The alliance of public and private interests plans to spend \$9.5 million on neighborhood playgrounds. Sixteen have been funded, and another eight will be completed in 2003.

"The neighborhood really takes pride in this. This becomes their soul ... their community space. They take care of it," said Lois Brink, associate professor of landscape and architecture at the University of Colorado and a founder of the program.

Brink said the city donates \$1 million a year to build the playgrounds.

"Making the playgrounds around our schools look better and more functional not only helps schools, but also helps neighborhoods ... and is best for the children of our city," said Mayor Wellington Webb.

And children like it.

"I like the swings and the slides," said fourth-grader Tasharina McFalls, 9, adding, "and I like the grass and I like the sidewalk because of all the colors."