



## DPS bond promises \$29 million for playgrounds

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DENVER - When voters approved the largest school bond issue in Colorado history, they allowed the expansion of Learning Landscapes, which designers say is good for students' bodies and minds.

"It's the complete redevelopment of the school yard to provide open space, natural areas, developmentally appropriate play equipment," said Rachel Cleaves, associate director of the Learning Landscapes program at the University of Colorado Denver.

UCD had already partnered with Denver Public Schools for the creation of Learning Landscape playgrounds at 48 sites. The playgrounds are designed by teams of landscape architecture students who work closely with administrators and parents.

"So, this allows (college) students to be involved and to practice innovative design," said Cleaves.

The passage of the bond issue means 37 more schools will change their older lots and equipment for gardens, landscaping, and playground gear designed with other aspects like puzzles, music, and math.

Many of those 37 schools currently have lots with little or no grass. Cleaves says that's a detriment to Denver kids.

"Absolutely important to give kids places to get exercise, especially in the inner city," said Cleaves.

Cleaves says UCD conducted a two year research study looking at the impacts of Learning Landscapes at the schools already using them. Cleaves says the study showed that the kids engaged in 75-to-90 percent more exercise.

Erica Ramlow is the principal of Eagleton Elementary. She says her Learning Landscape has had an impact in the classroom.

"It makes a difference in their academics in that they've gotten exercise and oxygen," said Ramlow.

Cleaves says other studies show kids back up the notion of academic performance and exercise. "And (kids who) have exposure to green space have higher test scores, but that's still being researched."

The garden will allow students like Bryan Sandoval to learn first-hand about agriculture and nutrition.

"Teachers give us the seeds and we plant them," said Sandoval, 4th Grader at Eagleton. "Well, it helps us learn what's inside vegetables."

Cleaves says the UCD study showed that there is a 300 percent increase in kids trying new vegetables and fruits.

Principal Ramlow says the bond will create a \$29 million improvement to neighborhoods citywide.

"This is an investment in this community and in these children," said Ramlow.

Sandoval says every kid deserves it.

"It's better if they have playgrounds because they can get exercise like how we do," said Sandoval. "And, they can have fun."

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