



10 YEARS STRONG

Principals volunteer to build playgrounds that enhance learning

Principals working together do great work. That was never more apparent than during the 10th anniversary of the National Association of Elementary School Principals' Community Service Day. More than 100 principals from across the nation congregated at Catalina Elementary School in Orlando, Florida, to build a playground and complete other beautification projects.

Since the inception of Community Service Day in 2009, NAESP and Landscape Structures Inc., a Delano, Minnesota-based commercial playground equipment manufacturer and

NAESP Partner, have come together every year to build a playground at a deserving elementary school. Landscape Structures donates the playground, and volunteers from the host city of the annual conference install it. Together, we've delivered play and learning opportunities to thousands of students throughout the nation.

"The Community Service Day Project personifies the tremendous spirit of NAESP members across the nation by providing an opportunity to make a profound impact upon the children in a local community," Eric Cardwell, NAESP president and principal

Photography by Lifetouch



of Besser Elementary School in Alpena, Michigan, said at the event.

Each of the 10 Community Service Day projects met a specific need for the school that it affected. In Houston in 2010, the playground delivered an inclusive play experience through a

Principal Toynita Martinez. “A lot of math and science classes take place outside. Plus, reading groups disperse in the space to finish a reading assignment and then come together to discuss [it]. The outdoor classroom concept has helped improve the behaviors of some students. It gives students a break from sitting inside and allows them to get fresh air [and] focus for the remainder of class.”

In 2013, Inglewood Elementary School in Nashville, Tennessee, was the recipient of a playground that featured ZipKrooz®. According to then-Principal Carrie Mickle, the industry’s first playground zipline was one of the first in the area and is a huge draw to families throughout the Nashville community.

variety of sensory-stimulating playground components. The goal of this playground design was not to meet “special” needs, but instead focused on meeting all children’s needs in the same place and in a variety of ways.

At B.T. Washington Elementary School in Tampa, Florida, Community Service Day created an outdoor learning environment for students. “All of our teachers take advantage of the outdoor classroom,” said B.T. Washington

The playground design for a school in Prince George’s County, Maryland, considered space restrictions while also planning to accommodate a whole class at once. Principals worked together to construct Venti®, which incorporates 20 exciting activities into its design. The Smart Play® play structure offers nets, slides, belts, and climbers to help promote physical development as well as strategic thinking for students.





“The playground has added the magical touch to our school. It has allowed our students and families the opportunity to play, interact, and be social with one another. Our community is forever grateful!”

—Seth Daub, principal of Catalina Elementary School, Orlando, Florida



In Philadelphia, principals built a PlayBooster® play structure featuring modern GeoPlex™ climbing panels. The abstract geometric design not only delivers a fun play experience to children of all abilities, but it also extends students’ learning opportunities. Additional Community Service Day events have taken place in New Orleans, Seattle, Baltimore, and Long Beach and Compton, California.

“The school is a hub for the neighborhood, where parents would come and let their children play while they got to catch up with each other,” said Mary Donnelly, principal of John Rurah Elementary School in Baltimore. “Our school worked for years trying to raise money to build a playground; our playground was probably about 15 years old and not safe.

“The parents and staff were ecstatic when we received word that we would be the recipient of a playground from NAESP,” Donnelly said. “I was so proud of how they and my staff members got together to provide a home-cooked meal and entertainment for the principals, who generously gave of their time to build us a playground. We are all still enjoying the playground.”

An Experience of a Lifetime

The playground build experience has had an impact on volunteers. Many principals have made a point to volunteer year after year, often arriving at the conference a day early to participate. Because not only does a Community Service Day give principals a chance to give back to the community they’re visiting, it also gives them an opportunity to network with other principals from across the country. Principals learn about the challenges other schools are facing, as well as the successes they have achieved.

Donnelly now participates in other schools’ playground builds. “I keep coming back to continue to give back,” she said. “I want another school to be able to have their students experience the joy my students have. I hope to continue to volunteer even after I retire in a few years.”

Community Service Day has been a huge success over the past decade, and NAESP and Landscape Structures look forward to bringing this experience to more schools and volunteers going forward. Stay tuned for details about Community Service Day during the 2019 Annual Conference in Spokane, Washington. 