

All-Abilities Playground Grant Proposal Bluff Ridge Elementary | Syracuse, Utah

Executive Summary

This proposal requests Federal Mineral Lease funding to construct an all-abilities playground at Bluff Ridge Elementary. This project aligns with the Utah State Board of Education Vision of “opening doors of opportunity for all Utah Children.” It also matches the Mission of Utah’s State Board of Education to provide “academic and organizational excellence in Utah.” Most importantly, utilizing the FML funding to install an all abilities playground achieves Board’s goal of elevating student learning, by promoting equity, safety, and student belonging. The project ensures each student has access to inclusive, supportive learning environments, since the playground at a school is one of our biggest classrooms.

Statement of Need

Bluff Ridge Elementary has 860 enrolled students, with about 18% receiving special education services, including 2 Essential Elements (EE) classes. Students in EE qualify for the Dynamic Learning Maps assessment system and require signification accommodations to access education and every day life. Current playground facilities limit equitable access, particularly for our students with mobility and sensory needs, reducing participation and inclusion. Specifically, we have 4 students who are either in a wheelchair or gait trainer, who have zero access to any play equipment. We also have several students who have physical therapy and occupational therapy goals who require significant accommodations to access play equipment. The number of students with sensory needs is at least 100, with that number being only an approximation due to some students not having an official diagnosis. The lack of sensory-friendly equipment for students with autism and other related needs is a significant identified gap in allowing students equal access. Bluff Ridge has 756 other students who would like to play with their friends who struggle at recess.

Identified Gaps

- Limited wheelchair-accessible play structures
- Lack of sensory-friendly equipment for students with autism and related needs
- Reduced participation in recess for students with disabilities
- Increased behavioral challenges during unstructured time

Community Growth Factor

Syracuse continues to experience rapid residential growth, placing increased demand on school facilities. Existing city parks do not adequately meet **school-day accessibility needs**, leaving a critical gap in inclusive recreational opportunities.

USBE Strategic Alignment

The project aligns with equity, safe schools, student growth, and belonging priorities outlined by the Utah State Board of Education. It directly advances the following statewide goals:

1. Equitable Access to Education

The playground is our biggest classroom where learning takes place daily. The all-ability playground addition will ensure our biggest classroom is safe and inclusive for everyone. Installing this playground will allow Bluff Ridge to provide equitable learning regardless of ability.

2. Safe and Healthy Schools

The all-ability playground will promote student well-being through encouraging physical activity, appropriate and increased social interaction, and allowing emotional regulation for those with sensory needs. An expected outcome of having the playground will be reducing the number of behavior incidents, because all students will be interacting and working together. Reducing behavior incidents helps students feel safer, thus improving mental health. In addition, children who normally would not have access to play will finally have the opportunity for more physical activity, improving overall health (Stevens et al., 2023).

3. Student Growth and Achievement

Play-based experiences improve executive functioning skills, improve focus, and increases the readiness to learn according to research. (González-del-Castillo & Barbero-Alcocer, 2025). Increased engagement during the school day directly supports academic success.

4. Belonging and School Climate

Inclusive play environments foster positive peer relationships, empathy, and a sense of belonging, which are critical indicators of long-term student success. Research consistently supports inclusive playgrounds as a high-impact intervention. Studies show play environments increase peer interaction and cooperation while reducing conflict during unstructured time (Brussoni et al., 2022). Inclusive playgrounds also promote meaningful social participation for children of all abilities (Haugen et al., 2021)

Project Design

The all-abilities playground will include:

- ADA-compliant ramps and surfacing
- Inclusive swing and adaptive equipment
- Sensory play elements (musical panels, tactile features)
- Social play zones designed to encourage cooperative interaction

Methodology & Evaluation of Impact

Data will be collected pre/post implementation including behavior, attendance, and student engagement metrics.

Pre and Projected Impact

Indicator	Baseline Data	Projected Outcome
Students receiving SPED services	~18%	N/A
Recess participation on equipment by students with disabilities	87%	100%
Behavior incidents during recess (SY2025)	287 incidents	Decrease by 50% (117 incidents) *
Attendance rate	18% Chronic Absences	Decrease by 1%
Students with disabilities interactions with typically developing students	18%	100%
Acadience Reading End of Year Growth (SY2025)	63%	75%
Climate Survey about Belonging	90%	100%

*Student enrollment is decreasing due to a new Davis School District school opening and students starting there next year.

Research & Evidence

Research consistently supports inclusive playgrounds as a high-impact intervention:

- Increased peer interaction and social integration
- Improved physical health and activity levels
- Reduced behavioral incidents during unstructured time
- Enhanced school belonging and emotional well-being

Using this research we can confidently predict the above stated outcomes. These outcomes align directly with state goals for whole-child education.

Evaluation Plan

Bluff Ridge will implement a structured evaluation model:

Data Collection

- Behavior referral tracking
- Attendance monitoring
- Recess participation observations
- Acadience Reading Growth Data

Timeline

- Baseline: Prior to installation
- Midpoint: 6 months post-installation
- Final evaluation: 12 months post-installation

Reporting

Annual reports will be submitted demonstrating:

- Measurable outcomes in behavior, participation, academic growth
- Subgroup analysis (especially populations students with disabilities populations)
- Recommendations for replication across Utah

Budget & Funding Justification

Estimated Total Cost = \$150,000

\$30,000 has already been raised through school fundraising and grant writing.

Ask amount = \$120,000

Funding Rationale

Federal Mineral Lease funds are appropriate because this project:

- **Provides** long-term public benefit
- **Enhances** educational infrastructure
- **Advances** statewide equity goals

Bluff Ridge has already raised \$30,000 demonstrating strong community investment and support for this initiative.

Installation Timeline

Once funds are allocated, the project should take 4 weeks to complete.

Conclusion

When my son was 11, I asked him why he would not play with the other students at school. He would just sit on the ground and read a book. My sweet, child answered, “I am so worried someone is going to get hurt.” I will never forget those words from a child who was suffering from anxiety, a less noticeable limitation. How many other students would participate in recess and feel safe to play if they had support, the means, and the environment conducive to do so.

The Bluff Ridge all-abilities playground represents a **high-impact, scalable investment** in Utah’s students. By aligning directly with state priorities and demonstrating measurable outcomes, this project ensures every child—regardless of ability—can play, feel like they belong, and enjoy their short childhood.

Sources

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