

*DRAFT 3-As Amended-no inference for funds being used for
compliance-strictly Research and Development-Deputy
Superintendent Jones (with permission) amended
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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 as an experimentation in the use of facilities development designed to improve the quality of education for elementary students in Utah. 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.” The project ensures each student has access to inclusive, supportive learning environments, since the playground at a school is one of our biggest classrooms and is used daily by all students.

Statement of Need

Bluff Ridge Elementary is the ideal location for an experimentation on facilities all-abilities playground design, measure engagement and outcomes for students with special needs within public schools. This school 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 of accommodations to access education and everyday 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 trainers, 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. Those facilities with accommodations are not on school property or useable during school hours for students.

The Importance of Proactive and Inclusive Playground Design

While some communities have dedicated substantial resources to developing community playgrounds, relatively few elementary schools have taken steps to address the unique needs of all their students. Many school districts have not sufficiently considered the diverse needs of students within their neighborhoods. Schools have a responsibility to plan proactively for inclusivity, regardless of the current student population, by constructing accessible playgrounds from the very beginning. All-abilities playgrounds are essential in closing this gap, as they accommodate a wide range of needs and help schools not only meet accessibility requirements but also ensure that both present and future students are able to participate fully. This research study serves as a vital foundation for future planning, especially when considering upcoming new construction projects or renovations to existing school buildings.

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 measurable outcomes for elementary students 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. Social Connection and School Climate

This research proposal is intentionally designed to remove barriers to participation by supporting students with disabilities to participate in, initiate, and lead free-time activities alongside nondisabled peers. 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:

- Ramps and surfacing
 - Inclusive swing and adaptive equipment
 - Sensory play elements (musical panels, tactile features)
 - Social play zones designed to encourage cooperative interaction
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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 social connections **and emotional well-being**

These outcomes align directly with state goals for opening doors of opportunity for all children.

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
- **Informs** future building needs

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

Installation Timeline

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

Conclusion

The all-abilities playground innovative study 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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