



# Let Kids Play!

*Because every child deserves to play*

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May 3, 2021

Dear Playground Planner,

This letter certifies that both of these playground designs meet our criteria for an Inclusive Playground.

Let Kids Play uses the principles laid out in *the Inclusive Play Design Guide* to determine how inclusive a playground design is. We believe that playgrounds need to meet these top-level requirements listed below to be truly inclusive.

### Top Level Requirements

- Include Sensory, Physical & Social Activities on the playground to create a rich environment for everyone
- Ensure multiple levels of challenge within each activity
- Ensure that the "Coolest Thing" in the playground is accessible to all
- Use unitary surfacing

### **Physical, Social and Sensory**

Both of the designs do an excellent job of providing various physical, social, and sensory experiences.

#### **Physical Activities**

The Inclusive Play Design Guide recommends eight different types of physical play. Both designs offer opportunities for seven of them. There is swinging, sliding, climbing/strengthening/crawling, balancing, jumping, and "walking, running and rolling."

#### **Sensory Activities**

There are seven different sensory systems, and we like to see five of them represented in an inclusive playground. We do not look for taste or smell in our review. Both designs incorporate five of the other sensory systems: vestibular, proprioceptive, tactile, auditory, and visual. Attached is a list of what equipment in the design engages what sensory system for each of the designs.

## Social

Social play and cooperative play experiences are essential for all children but become especially crucial tools for children with autism and learning disabilities. Often, we see that cooperative play experiences are missing on the playground as we do in Option 1. Option 2 includes the Double Decker Cone Spinner, which is an excellent group cooperative play experience.

The double slide, the train, and the anywhere seats provide places for children to socialize with one another.

The playground is rich in pretend play experiences. The train and the train station and even the design in the surfacing help make a statement and give children many different ways to engage in symbolic play.

## Multiple Levels of Challenge

Providing multiple levels of challenge on the playground ensures a challenging activity for a child to participate in regardless of age and ability. Often when designing a playground, some children are not challenged. Either we make the playground too simple to ensure a young child or a child with a disability can play on it or create a playground geared towards the oldest child and the ones with the best motor planning skills. To create a truly inclusive playground, each and every child coming to play must be challenged.

	Option 1	Option 2
Balancing	2 out 3 levels of challenge	2 out of 3 levels of challenge
Swinging	Complete range of challenge	Complete range of challenge
Spinning	Only 1 level of challenge	Complete range of challenge
Climbing/Crawling/Strengthening	Complete range of challenge	Complete range of challenge

Option 1 puts its challenge into climbing. That design's structure goes up to 96" with challenging climbers at that end of the structure. However, it only provides a straightforward spinning activity.

On the other hand, Option 2 puts its challenge into spinning. The Double Decker Cone Spinner is a wonderful piece. It provides challenging climbing while at the same offers three levels of spinning challenge. There are many ways to play on the Double Decker Cone spinner, and it is an excellent group cooperative play piece. The trade-off is that the structure only goes up 72".

If I were making a choice, I would go with Option 2, but it is up to the community to decide your priorities.

## **The "Coolest Thing" is accessible to All**

Nothing excludes, separates, and creates differences between children more than having the special piece of equipment that everyone wants to play on be inaccessible to some of them. It is essential to include these "Cool Things" and ensure that they are accessible to children of all abilities.

The Coolest Thing is the piece of equipment that everyone will run to as soon as they get to the playground. It is subjective, and we often identify multiple pieces of equipment. I believe that the train is the Coolest Thing in both of the options. Every child can have a meaningful play experience, whether wheeling in to drive the train or climbing up to the top. The train offers physical, sensory, and social experiences. So not only is it the "coolest thing, but" it is also accessible to all, ensuring that it meets this criterion.

## **Other Inclusive Features**

1. There are wide wheelchair access routes throughout the layout.
2. To support a child with autism, it is crucial to have cozy spaces, cooperative play opportunities, opportunities to experience vestibular motion, and equipment that offers auditory experiences. Option 2 meets this criterion, while Option 1 does not because there is no cooperative play event.
3. To support a child who uses a mobility device, it is important to have equipment where a child can play without leaving their device and laid out so that he/she can be in the middle of the play. Both designs provide for these experiences.
4. Unitary surfacing is one of the most crucial aspects of an inclusive playground. The other critical element is a fence surrounding the playground. The number one request of parents who have a child who uses a wheelchair is unitary surfacing. The number one request of parents who have a child with autism is fencing, followed by unitary surfacing. Children with autism are often not taken to the playground because it is not fenced.
5. The layout of the environment in this design will help children with an autism spectrum disorder, visual impairment, and/or sensory processing disorder prepare for their time at the playground. The sidewalk that surrounds the play elements acts as an orientation path helping children determine in advance where they would like to play. It also becomes a quieter, safe place to return to and then choose where to go next.
6. I would recommend adding an Inclusive Whirl. This piece allows a child who uses a wheelchair to have a movement experience without leaving her wheelchair.

On behalf of families who are raising children with disabilities, I would like to thank you for your commitment to inclusive play. Either one of these **Inclusive Certified Designs** will bring joy to children of all ages and abilities for years to come.

Respectfully submitted,



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## Top Inclusive Equipment included in this design

**Slide a Side** -- Slide-A-Side gives children the chance to take their time when leaving the slide. Whether they need assistance from a caretaker, a mobility device, or just a moment to regroup, Slide-A-Side provides a relaxed exit while allowing other kids to continue sliding. (In both Option 1 and Option 2)



**Balance Trax**-- Playgrounds are great places for children to practice balancing. Most balance activities were geared toward typically developing children. The unique Balance Trax by encourages children of all ages and abilities to practice their balancing skills. Particularly children with delayed gross motor skills benefit from this new product. Balance Trax was developed in coordination with a physical therapist who works with children with autism, cerebral palsy, and Spina Bifida, just to name a few. He lamented that when people develop equipment for children with disabilities, they make it so easy there is no challenge to push the child to the next step. Challenge is important for all children. By putting the different pieces together, you create a series of challenges for young children and children with balancing issues. The textured Balance Trax pieces provide a tactile grip so children can better sense the surface. (In both option 1 and 2)



**Accessible Swing Seat**—Swinging is not only one of the most fun things that happen on a playground; it is also one of the most beneficial for a child's development. The Accessible Swing Seat ensures that children who require postural assistance have the opportunity to swing next to their peers. (In both option 1 and 2)



**Concerto**-- The Concerto line of outdoor musical equipment allows children of all abilities to experience the joy and benefits of making music. Designed at a more accessible angle and height, all kids can play these instruments comfortably, including those with mobility devices. The instruments are tuned to a traditional seven-note-scale enabling children to play actual songs. (In both option 1 and 2)



**Double Decker Cone Spinner** This spinner combines the excitement of spinning with the challenge of climbing for an exhilarating play experience. This cone spinner is great for children of all physical abilities. Children can challenge themselves by climbing to the top or socialize and play toward the bottom. The floor level opening enables a child who is unable to climb to crawl into the middle. This highly cooperative play equipment engages children of all ages and abilities.



**Accessible Whirl**—The Wheelchair Whirl provides all children with the excitement of spinning. Spinning engages the vestibular system. Spinning activities help with improving balance, muscle control, and gross motor skills. Children AND adults using wheelchairs and other mobility devices can join in the fun. The wheelchair whirl is flush with the ground for ease of access. The change of textures from the playground's surfacing to the Whirl allows children with visual impairments to easily maneuver onto the equipment. There is room for two wheelchairs. For children who need support and aren't using a wheelchair, there is a seat and rails to hold on to.



There is room for friends to join in on the fun or a parent to sit side-by-side. The Wheelchair Whirl is one of only a few products that lets you meet the goal of providing a movement experience from a mobility device. Meeting this goal leads to a fully inclusive playground where all children are actively involved in the playing. (Recommended)

Sensory integration is the neurological process that organizes sensation from one’s own body and the environment and makes it possible to use the body effectively within the environment. Sensory processing is the brain receiving, interpreting, and organizing input from all of the active senses at any given moment. Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) SPD is a condition that exists when sensory signals don’t get organized into appropriate responses. A person with SPD finds it difficult to process information received through the senses, which makes performing everyday tasks challenging. Because of motor clumsiness, social anxiety, auditory and visual disturbances, and balance and performance problems, SPD can make simple “play” difficult.

**Sensory Systems:** These are part of the nervous system responsible for processing sensory information. A sensory system consists of sensory receptors, neural pathways, and parts of the brain involved in sensory perception



## TACTILE

Touch is a perception resulting from activation of neural receptors, and a variety of pressure receptors respond to variations in pressure. The system works when activity in a sensory receptor is triggered by a specific stimulus; this signal eventually passes to an area in the brain uniquely attributed to that area on the body and this allows the processed stimulus to be felt at the correct location.

Equipment that enables children to engage the tactile system:

- Garden Sensory Wall
- Wildwood Climber
- Climbing Squares Block Climber
- Train



## PROPRIOCEPTIVE

Proprioception is the sense of the relative position of neighboring parts of the body and strength of effort being employed in movement. This sense is very important as it lets us know exactly where our body parts are, how we are positioned in space and to plan our movements. Examples of our proprioception in practice include being able to clap our hands together with our eyes closed, write with a pencil and apply with correct pressure, and navigate through a narrow space.

Equipment that enables children to engage the proprioceptive system:

- Unity Stepper
- Verticlimber
- Deck to Deck Climber
- Wildwood Climber
- Climbing Squares Block Climber
- Twisted Climber
- Tower Climber
- Rock Climber
- Silo Climber
- Solar Climber
- Twist-n-Twirl
- Train
- Overhead Ladder
- Step Around
- Stationary Buttons
- Balance Trax
- Play Seat
- Anywhere Seat



## VESTIBULAR

Explains the perception of our body in relation to gravity, movement and balance. The vestibular system is a unifying system.

Equipment that enables children to engage the vestibular system:

- Belt Seat
- Accessible swing Seat
- Toddler Seat
- Slither Slide
- Nuvo Spiral Slide
- Nuvo Double Slide
- Spin Cup



## AUDITORY

Hearing is the ability to perceive sound by detecting vibrations, changes in the pressure of the surrounding medium through time, through an organ such as the ear. Auditory processing relies on how the brain interprets, recognizes and differentiates sound stimuli.

- Concerto Instruments



## VISUAL

Sight or vision is the capability of the eyes to focus and detect images of visible light and generate electrical nerve impulses for varying colors, hues, and brightness. Visual perception is how the brain processes these impulses recognizing, differentiating and interpreting visual stimuli through comparison with experiences made earlier in life.

Equipment that enables children to engage the visual system:

- Treasure Tumble Panel
- Hypnotize Panel
- Funhouse Panel
- Very Buried Panel

### References:

Playworld’s Inclusive Play Design Guide  
7 Senses Foundation  
Play and Playground Encyclopedia  
AB 5876 | Exhibit 3 | Page 25

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Equipment that enables children to engage the tactile system:

- Garden Sensory Wall
- Climbing Squares Block Climber
- The Wildwood Climber
- Window Planter Panel
- Train



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- Rock Climber
- Solar Climber
- Silo Climber
- Twist-n-Twirl
- Train
- Double Decker Cone Spinner
- Overhead Ladder
- Step Around
- Stationary Buttons
- Balance Trax
- Anywhere Sea
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- Slither Slide
- Nuvo Double Slide
- Spin Cup
- Double Decker Cone Spinner



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