

Share Power, Get a Playground!

Shawsheen Elementary

Greeley, CO

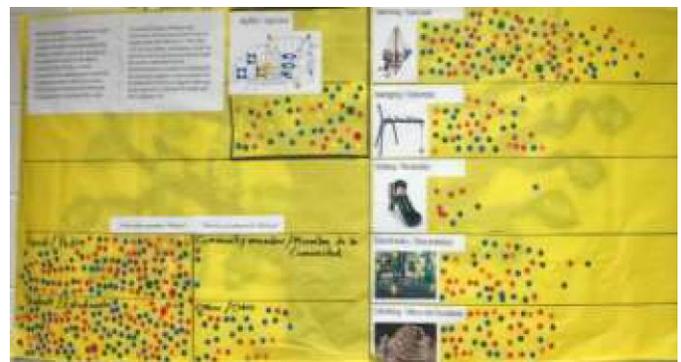


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Shawsheen Elementary School serves low-income students with over 75% eligible for free or reduced price school meals. Quite often, parents face overwhelming barriers to participating in their child's education or school programs because they have several jobs or do not have easy access to transportation. Having a variety of outreach methods in place increased parent participation in Shawsheen's efforts to design a new school yard.

The Great Outdoors Colorado School Yard Initiative aims to revitalize school playgrounds and outdoor learning environments. The most competitive projects are those that reflect a participatory design process led by the students and include parent participation. Shawsheen Elementary was fortunate to receive funding for a new playground because of the methods they used to elicit feedback from all families.

Shawsheen Elementary is a neighborhood school and a majority of the children walk to school. Therefore, it made sense to give parents an opportunity to identify the kind of equipment their children would like on the playground through a "sticky dot" activity that was posted at the school for one week. Parents learned about



the sticky dot activity through a message sent from the DOJO family communication tool and it was a quick and easy activity to take part in as they dropped off or picked up their children. Presentations were conducted at Parent Teacher Organization and School Accountability Committee meetings with time for feedback throughout the design process.

Shawsheen's principal offers the following advice when schools share power with families: "Keep in mind that parents often have large hurdles to overcome to have a presence in a school. Offering a variety of ways to provide feedback during a shared decision making process is essential. For those who are already involved in their children's education, utilizing school events like parent teacher conferences and science fairs are innovative ways to engage parents. Giving parents options to participate remotely and anonymously is helpful for those working multiple jobs and is inclusive of families whose immigration status might keep them away from public places even though they want to play an active role in their child's education."