



Elkhart Lake – Glenbeulah School District

DISTRICT OFFICE / HIGH SCHOOL

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ELEMENTARY / MIDDLE SCHOOL

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*Imagine a playground where ALL students can play together.
A place where individual disabilities do not limit where, with what or with whom
a student can interact and play.
A play area where children who have a disability are not limited to one small section,
with their “own” playground equipment, and with only a friend or two with whom to play.
An area that can be used for both enjoyment and therapy.
An area where parents and grandparents with mobility issues can play alongside
their children/grandchildren.
A playground that is **INCLUSIVE FOR ALL**.*

***Construction of just such a playground is the goal of the
Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah School District.
But to do so, we need the support and assistance of others.***

District Background and Mission:

The mission of the Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah School District is to challenge, inspire, and empower in a caring and innovative learning environment. Over the past years, we have done much as a district to challenge and prepare our students to be college and career-ready. Increasing our college credits available on-site to 60+; developing certification programs in the areas of culinary arts, customer service, technical education; promoting continual growth in our participation in the Youth Apprenticeship program; constructing a new greenhouse/classroom laboratory and aquaponics center; and renovating/adding a “Maker Space” lab area in the elementary/middle school to allow students to explore concepts such as coding, robotics, engineering, etc. are just a few of the examples of how ELG School District is continually working to meet its mission.

However, as a District, we now want to address an area where a need has arisen. The number of students with disabilities—physical, emotion, and behavioral—has increased. This has led us to make changes in our instructional program within the school building, but it is also requiring us to analyze and plan for modifications that need to happen outside our building. For this reason, a plan for renovating the elementary/middle school playground into an “inclusive playground/therapy extension center” has been developed. A team consisting of members of the administrative team, a playground designer, special education staff, an area construction firm, and a local organization that focuses on providing assistance to students with disabilities met several times to share ideas and explore various options until a final design was reached that will best meet our desired outcome.

Overview of the Inclusive Playground/Therapy Extension Center:

When the playground was renovated and moved to its expanded location on the north side of the school nine years ago, an area was included in the plans that allowed access for our handicapped students. This included several pieces of equipment that allowed them to play with one or two students in a limited area. While it provided some activity, the options were few, the ability to play with others limited, and accessibility to other equipment or areas extremely restricted. Due to water issues in the elementary building last year, new piping needed to be installed which ran under the playground and took away the paved access that had existed. While very unfortunate, this provided an opportunity for us to look at the playground and see how better we, as a District, could meet the needs of all our students. Over time, the number of students with disabilities and the spectrum of these disabilities has increased. A design was created that would renovate approximately the eastern fourth of the existing playground (right alongside the basketball hoops)—much of which is currently not in use. A rendering of the design that would fit in the existing playground area is attached, as is the financial estimate for the project. Construction of this area is not cheap. To do this planned construction (Phase I), the estimated cost is approximately \$150,000. This total would include the new playground equipment, the installation of rubber surfacing which would allow accessibility to all students (and adults) to the play structure, and the removal of the pea gravel on the entire area with replacement of wood fiber surfacing (this is necessary as the pea gravel could/would cause damage to the rubber surfacing).

The goals of the playground are many. Completing this phase of the playground renovation would allow:
An area where ALL children can play together, including children with emotional impairments as well as cognitive impairments and physical disabilities—from moderate to severe.

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An area where students with limited mobility (wheelchair bound, walkers, etc.) can have access to playground equipment with their peers, as well as using the various equipment pieces as part of their therapy plan. The double-wide ramp provides accessibility to everyone, while connecting the various playground components.

Areas that will provide sensory experiences from which all our students will benefit, but especially those who have sensory/motor and emotional/social needs.

Physical therapy teaching tools are incorporated into the equipment design, as well as providing a recreational structure. The design includes playground equipment pieces that can work on both fine and gross motor skills. For example, students can work on stepping, climbing, and traversing on uneven surfaces; developing their sensory systems, etc.

An area where able-bodied and disabled children learn to play together. When kids are able to play together, differences become less. Kids just become kids!

Where people of all abilities (and ages—parents and grandparents too) can come together, play, and learn. This playground renovation would provide equitable access for children and grown-up companions of all ages and address a need of the community. While we do have several village parks, none are Inclusive Playgrounds--allowing access to all. This playground would make that environment available.

An area that complies with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) guidelines. A resilient surfacing is supplied underneath the equipment, including and around the auxiliary ground level equipment. In addition, an access pathway is provided. If/when the District would have additional funds available (beyond the \$150,000) we would explore the option of expanding handicapped access to the entire playground in the future. However, we feel at this time Phase I will be a fantastic start to meet our current needs.

While all our students would benefit from this playground, comments that give a glimpse into the impact it could have for our students with disabilities are shared below by Rayner, an ELGS third-grader, and the staff who work with our students who have occupational and physical therapy needs.

I'm excited for this new playground because I can play on it with my friends. I can't wait to be able to wheel on it with my wheelchair. With this new equipment, I can be closer to my friends during recess. I can also use the new playground with my therapists by wheeling up the ramp to build my arm muscles and learning how to go down a slide and play some new games on the play panels. This new playground will be lots of fun, but will help me lots too!

Rayner, Grade 3 Student



The Occupational and Physical Therapy programs at ELGS support the Inclusive Playground so all students can participate and engage in play at recess. The ramps and decks would accommodate multiple users including wheelchairs and encourage movement throughout the structure. The igloo would provide a cozy spot where children can seek sensory relief. Most importantly, the soft surface will provide safe and accessible routes of travel throughout the playground for all abilities. No one will be left out in this new playground, making ELGS a

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leader in inclusion among the school districts in the area. This playground will enable therapists to address IEP goals in a functional school setting.

Angie Roth - Occupational Therapist & Special Education Teacher
Colleen McConnaha -- Physical Therapist

**Community/Business/Foundation/Individual Support is Needed –
Current Financial Situation//Impact of Projects:**

Due to numerous factors outside of the District's control (state legislation, declining enrollment, etc.), our ability to raise revenue was severely reduced in 2010. We were faced with decreasing our operational budget by almost \$500,000—out of a total operational budget of \$5.5 million. Added to this was the necessity to replace most of the roofs on our buildings. To address our financial situation, in April 2012, the community passed a three-year referendum that would provide the much needed funds for maintenance and operational expenses. However, in response to the economic climate at the time, the amount which was requested in the referendum was need-based to cover the District's costs to maintain programming and complete the roof project. The referendum brought the District back to a flat budget level, which the District has worked hard to maintain. At the end of the referendum timeline, the loan taken out for the roof project was paid in full and we were once again a debt-free District.

However, as was brought up when discussing the referendum in 2012, another major project existed in our District—replacing the HVAC systems in the elementary and high school buildings, most of which was outdated and no longer effectively and/or efficiently heating our buildings. Again, the community stepped up in April 2015 to support a four-year referendum which would address this maintenance issue and support revenue flexibility that brought us back to a flat level for operational expenses. Upon the end of this period, the plans are for ELGS to again be a debt-free District—one of very few in the state.

Although the District has received community support through referenda approval and as a result, has managed to address several major building needs and expand our programming to better meet our students' and community's needs, we are still not able to financially support all the projects that would be beneficial to our District and the students within it. We have been fortunate that in those times, others from in the community have stepped up and generously provided support. Examples would include the raising of approximately \$250,000 to support the building of our new greenhouse/aquaponics/classroom laboratory building; the donation of a new football/soccer scoreboard; the installation of a fully-equipped, restaurant-style culinary arts kitchen; upgrades to the technology infrastructure and student/staff technology access. All this has been possible, in large part, due to the generosity of supportive donors.

As we have had such success with these partnerships and sponsorships, it is this same avenue which we are pursuing to obtain funding for the renovation/addition of an ALL INCLUSIVE play area to the elementary/middle school playground. Although we are just beginning our "official" fundraising campaign, we have already received several very generous donations to "kick start" this project. These include \$40,000 from an area charitable organization: \$10,000 from the ELG Education Foundation (which they hope to raise matching funds); and approximately \$1,000 from the Ladies of the Lakes.

This is a great start. However, almost \$100,000 still needs to be raised. Our goal is to purchase the equipment before year end (to guarantee the 2016 pricing) with installation to occur in the spring—as soon as Mother Nature allows us to do so. Ideally we want this in place so our students can realize the benefit yet this school year, and it also becomes available to our community members and guests.

With the support given to the District in the past, we feel very optimistic about reaching our fundraising goal and thus, being able to meet the timeline outlined above.

Any assistance you could give would be greatly appreciated—financially, in-kind, or leads to other possible donors. Contacts regarding this project can be directed to:

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The District is working cooperatively with the Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah Education Foundation (ELGEF) to raise funds for this project. Donations can be directed to ELGEF at the above address, with notation for the funds to be restricted for the playground renovation project. ELGEF is a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. ELGEF contacts: Julia Loo-Sutcliffe (920) 226-1680 or Mia McMillan (414) 801-8736.

On behalf of the ELG School District and the students and staff within it and the board of ELGEF, we thank you for your consideration of our request. We are all excited for the possibility of an ALL INCLUSIVE playground to be built in our District.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ann Buechel Haack

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