

Edmonds school works hard to replace old playground equipment

The playground equipment at Westgate Elementary School in Edmonds is ancient and kids, parents and staff have been working for four years to come up with the \$65,000 for replacements.

By **Lynn Thompson**
Times Snohomish County reporter



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MIKE SIEGEL / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Kindergartner Summer Davis, 6, swings on some of the rings at Westgate Elementary School in Edmonds. The steel rings, monkey bars and jungle gym are all a half-century old.

Ask the kids at Westgate Elementary School in Edmonds what's wrong with their playground equipment, and you'll get some exasperated expressions, like, "Duh! Isn't it obvious?"

"It's rusted," said Kyle Gaul.

"It's metal," said Julia Rankin.

"It's not very fun," said Lauren Gaul.

Some of the equipment is as ancient as this 51-year-old school. The steel rings, monkey bars and jungle gym are all original and rusting. When it's cold, the metal stings. When it's wet, they're slippery. Hit your head on any of them, and you get a big lump.

Parents have been trying to raise \$65,000 for the past four years. That's in addition to the \$35,000 they raise each year for library books, buses for field trips, art supplies.

To bring in money for the new playground, they've held "Touch a Truck" events. Silent auctions. Sold pop and candy at evening meetings. They're still \$20,000 from their goal.

Now Westgate is a finalist in a national online contest to win \$5,000 in new playground equipment.

A parent filmed a video featuring the playground with its rusty bars and rings. It's set to the tune of the Beatles' song "Help!" and includes shots of posters the children made and placed on the equipment that say "Old" and "Not Safe."

The school is currently in first place in the contest, but just barely.

"The economy has made it a challenge," said principal Rob Baumgartner. "So much is on the backs of our families."

The total budget to renovate both the playground for the primary grades and the fourth-through-sixth grades is \$180,000. The city of Edmonds is contributing \$25,000 because the school playground is the only park within a one-mile radius. The Edmonds School District will kick in \$90,000 from its capital partnership program.

Even though the contest's \$5,000 prize would be a small percentage of the total, parent Karen Wolfe-Fritz said the publicity has generated interest and brought in additional donations. The school's families and staff are pretty much tapped out financially.

"We've been fundraising for so long," Wolfe-Fritz said.

The students are well aware their playground lacks excitement.

Kyle Gaul said that last summer his baby-sitter took him and his sister to different play areas in the city — playgrounds, he said, that actually had "fun things to play on."