

February 23, 2023

Greater Nicollet Area Community Foundation
401 Pine Street
PO Box 416
Nicollet, MN 56074

To whom it may concern,

My name is Katie Stein. I currently have a toddler who has attended the Nicollet Early Childhood Center (NECC) since she was 13 weeks old. She is now two years old and enjoys her time in the NECC's toddler room. I am writing this letter in support of updating the current playground that is attached to the Nicollet Early Childhood Center.

The current playground has been home to many children for almost 20 years. While the playground has served its purpose in the past, it is time for an upgrade. In this letter I would like to shed some light on some of the visible concerns with the current playground; specifically, lack of accessibility for children of all ages, and safety. By the end of this letter, my hope is to clarify why the need for a new playground is important to our children and to our community.

The first concern is the lack of accessibility. "Good 'old-fashioned' outdoor play is essential for healthy development, especially in a child's early years. Being active outside provides little ones with valuable experiences that can directly impact their physical development, social skills, creativity, and even their intelligence." (*cmosc, (2021)*) I have been a witness to seeing the lack of accessibility for all children to enjoy the playground. When my daughters (now ages 2 years and 8 years) were in the infant room, the lack of usable space for an infant to enjoy and grow their fine and gross motor skills was apparent. The current playground only allows them to feel sand, grass, and a sidewalk. As much as children need to be introduced to different textures, the development of fine and gross motor skills is very important as well. This is only one example, but something as simple as a swing for an infant can help develop those motor skills and push an infant to start walking. A swing can help activate muscles, including the muscles that strengthen their ability to sit up.

Another example is the lack of handicap accessible equipment for children who rely on a walker, wheelchair, etc. There is one child in particular enrolled at NECC that relies on his walker. With the current playground he is limited to what he can and can't do.

While there are other concerns that I could include in this letter, one of the most eye-opening issues is the need for safety upgrades. A couple of years ago, I was involved in building a new playground in our small town of Courtland. There was much research done on the different safety guidelines that had to be put in place to ensure a fun and safe environment. There are multiple places that you can visibly see cracked/broken pieces. Another ongoing issue is uneven ground, which can be a tripping hazard. With uneven ground, accessibility lacks for a handicapped child as well. The absence of sunshade poses a great problem during the summer months, so much so that because of this issue, at times the infants and toddlers are unable to utilize the playground. Current safety guidelines also include the need for at least 12" of mulch, wood chips, sand, pea gravel or approved rubber mats underneath the play structure. As cost effective as the current wood chips may be, they do not work for various reasons. Wood chips pose a choking hazard for younger children and they also interfere with wheels, making it difficult for a child with a walker or wheelchair to access the playground.

NECC is important to my family and me. I worked at NECC while in high school and college. When I had my two children, there was no other place I wanted to send them to but NECC. NECC's mission statement states, "Nicollet Early Childhood

Center (NECC) strives to provide a safe and nurturing educational environment for the children and families in the community.” Not only do the children deserve to have a place to love and grow, the teachers also deserve this. The love and care our teachers display daily allows my children to want to go to daycare, which as a mom is one of the most important things. A new playground will support bringing in new families that will help grow our community and school. With this statement, I support a new playground facility to replace the current playground that is attached to NECC.

Sincerely,

Katelyn Stein
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Reference: Childrens Museum Team. (2021, May 4). The Benefits of Outdoor Play in Early Childhood Development.
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