

Growing Up Boulder's Teen-Friendly Parks Report

Summary of findings from Spring 2016

report produced January 2017 by Mara Mintzer, Growing up Boulder Coordinator



Overview	3
By the numbers	4
Summary of youth recommendations	5
Design themes requested by teens	5
Specific features requested by teens	6
Desire for voice in the process	7
Why engaging teens in the design process matters	8
Project 1: Casey Middle School Leadership Class	10
Class 1: Overview of the project and pre-project survey	10
Class 2: Ideas for teen-friendly parks	12
Class 3: Howard Heuston Park overview and project guidelines	14
Classes 4 and 5: Work on group projects	15
Class 6: Share out event	16
Class 7: Reflections	16
Project 2: COSI workshop	17
Partners and appreciation	20
Conclusion	21
References	22
Appendix 1: Casey Middle School Student Projects	23
Compilation of CMS requested features	23
CMS group park proposals	27
Appendix 2: Student Survey Results	34
Oral feedback regarding share out session	34
Pre and post-project survey results	34

Overview

Growing Up Boulder (GUB) is a child and youth-friendly city initiative established in 2009 as a formal partnership between the City of Boulder, Boulder Valley School District, and University of Colorado. Housed in the Environmental Design Program, Growing Up Boulder is a program of the Community Engagement Design and Research (CEDaR) Center. GUB aims to make Boulder an exemplary child and youth-friendly city by empowering Boulder's young people with opportunities for inclusion, influence, and deliberation on local issues that affects their lives.

In 2016, GUB began work with the City of Boulder's Parks and Recreation Department to engage youth, ages 11-18, in the design of teen-friendly parks. This project was initiated in response to repeated requests from Growing Up Boulder youth for more youth-friendly park opportunities. Participants included 26 middle school students from Casey Middle School's leadership class, 2 high school students from the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI), and 7 undergraduate Environmental Design students from the University of Colorado Boulder. More than 50% of all students were from underrepresented backgrounds. Students studied the City's Howard Heuston Park as a prototype for how to re-design parks to be teen-friendly throughout Boulder. This report summarizes all outreach activities and outcomes and was produced in January 2017.

“We want Boulder Parks to be a place for all ages”

-Thirteen-year-old student in Boulder

“Teens don’t usually have a say.”

“Adults got an ‘A’ for listening.”

- Middle School participants in GUB’s Teen-Friendly Parks project



High school students partner with undergraduate environmental design mentors to design a teen-friendly park. Photo by University of Colorado Program in Environmental Design’s Digital Media Center.

By the numbers

- 28 teens, ages 11-18
 - 7 undergraduate environmental design students
 - 10 community leaders and experts
 - 5 community partners coordinating the experiences
 - 1 GUB coordinator
 - 15 classroom hours
-

Summary of youth recommendations

Design themes requested by teens

The requests from Boulder teens on this project echo previous requests from Boulder's young people and are supported by literature in the areas of children, youth and the environment.

Boulder teens want:

- Thrill-seeking opportunities
 - Climbing walls, tall slides, zip lines, trampolines--our teens want adventure and adrenaline-inducing activities built into their parks.
 - Hang-out spaces
 - Teens want spaces for social interactions with their peers, while also allowing spaces for all ages within the park. Young people expressed interest in a mix of social spaces; some spaces should include wifi while other areas should be located within nature and disconnected from wifi.
 - To play!
 - Through our visual preference surveys, drawings and 3D models, our young people told us they still want to play. Giant chess boards, zip lines, and splash zones are park elements that retain the joy of childhood for a slightly older audience.
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Specific features requested by teens

Water features (fountains)



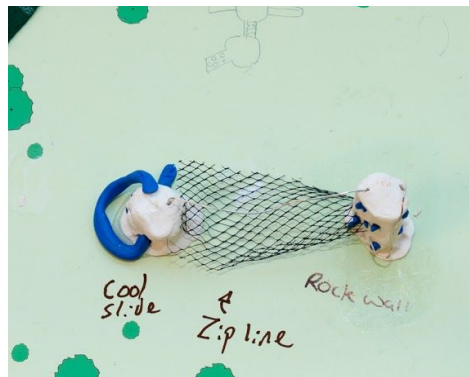
Zip lines



Hangout spaces (shaded tables)



Climbing structures



Games (life-sized chess board)



Lighting for night-time park use



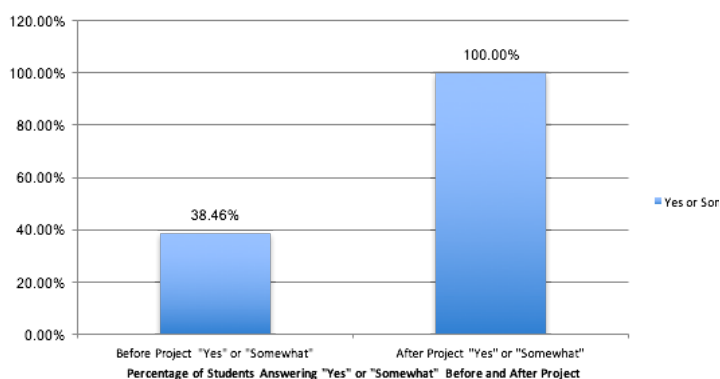
Desire for voice in the process

Both the youth (11-18) and young adults (undergraduates) involved in the Growing Up Boulder projects responded enthusiastically to helping shape park design for their city. Teens loved the back and forth process of discussing their ideas with parks planners, and each group (adults and youth) learned from the other.

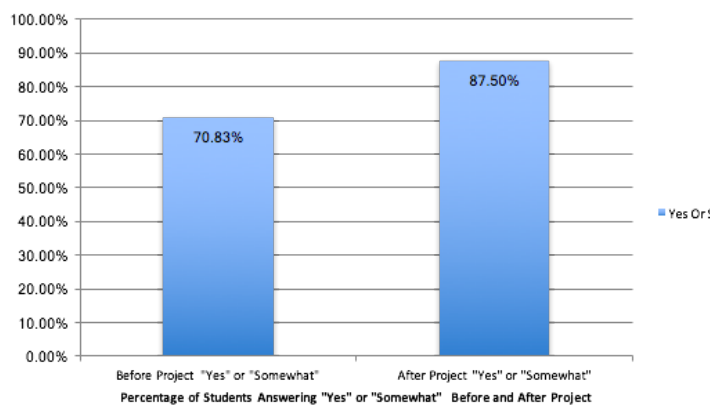
“I liked how they actually asked the kids and not just assumed [what we wanted],” stated one Casey Middle School student. When asked whether they would like a voice in local decision-making, another student stated, “Yes, Because if we did, I think kids would go more places because we designed it [sic].”

While fewer than 40% of CMS students felt they had a voice in local decision-making (at school, in the neighborhood, and/or in their city) before the project, 100% of students felt they had a voice after. This and other survey results (see Appendix 2 for complete results) show support for GUB’s mission to offer opportunities for young people to engage in decisions that affect their lives.

Do you feel like you have a voice in local decision making (at school, in your neighborhood or in your city)?



Would you like to have a voice in local decision making?



Why engaging teens in the design process matters

“We want parks for teens, too... I am so tired of moms yelling at me.” -Junior Ranger

Photo by Victoria Derr:
High-school-aged Junior Rangers play on equipment designed for preschoolers.



Boulder has many wonderful parks and recreational facilities. As mentioned in the quote above, however, few parks offer equipment and activities specifically designed for 11-18 year olds, and park use diminishes by youth as they become teenagers. Work with Junior Rangers during the 2015 North Boulder Trail Study Assessment highlighted this issue as the teens played on equipment designed for 2-5 year olds: “Foothills [Community Park] is better [than the Wonderland Lake playground], but there aren’t really parks for teens.” Many Junior Rangers felt that they were not welcome in city parks, that mothers do not accept them in existing playgrounds, and that they would love a place to play and hangout (Final Report for North Boulder Trail Study Assessment 2015; Derr 2016).

Since Growing Up Boulder’s inception in 2009, youth have repeatedly requested more places to hang out, more spaces where they feel welcomed, and more opportunities for adolescent play (GUB reports: Teen Action Business Group 2009, Great Green Neighborhoods 2013, Civic Area 2012 & 2014, Valmont Park 2014, Final Report North Boulder Trail Study 2015). The City of Boulder’s Youth Opportunities Advisory Board (YOAB) echoed this sentiment in their 2014 presentation to the

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) when they presented findings from surveys they conducted with Boulder teenagers regarding general park requests.

According to studies, teenagers tend to feel marginalized and unwanted in parks and other public spaces leading to increase social and civil isolation. Research shows that incorporating the views of teenagers in the design of parks and public spaces leads to increased satisfaction by youth, and feelings of increased interconnectedness with the community. (Day and Wagner 2010, Madanipour 2010, Vivoni 2013).

With the opportunity to upgrade four City of Boulder parks, Growing Up Boulder decided that spring of 2016 was an ideal time to partner with local teens to provide the City and other planners specific design solutions to improve parks for teens.

Project 1: Casey Middle School Leadership Class

During the spring of 2016, Growing Up Boulder asked 26 Casey Middle School Leadership class students, ages 11-13, to share their vision of a teen-friendly, Howard Heuston Park. Growing Up Boulder staff and interns worked with the class every other week, for 6 hourly sessions, to implement a customized curriculum. Students divided into 6 groups and produced either a 3D model or a digital presentation, as well as a written statement of their ideas.

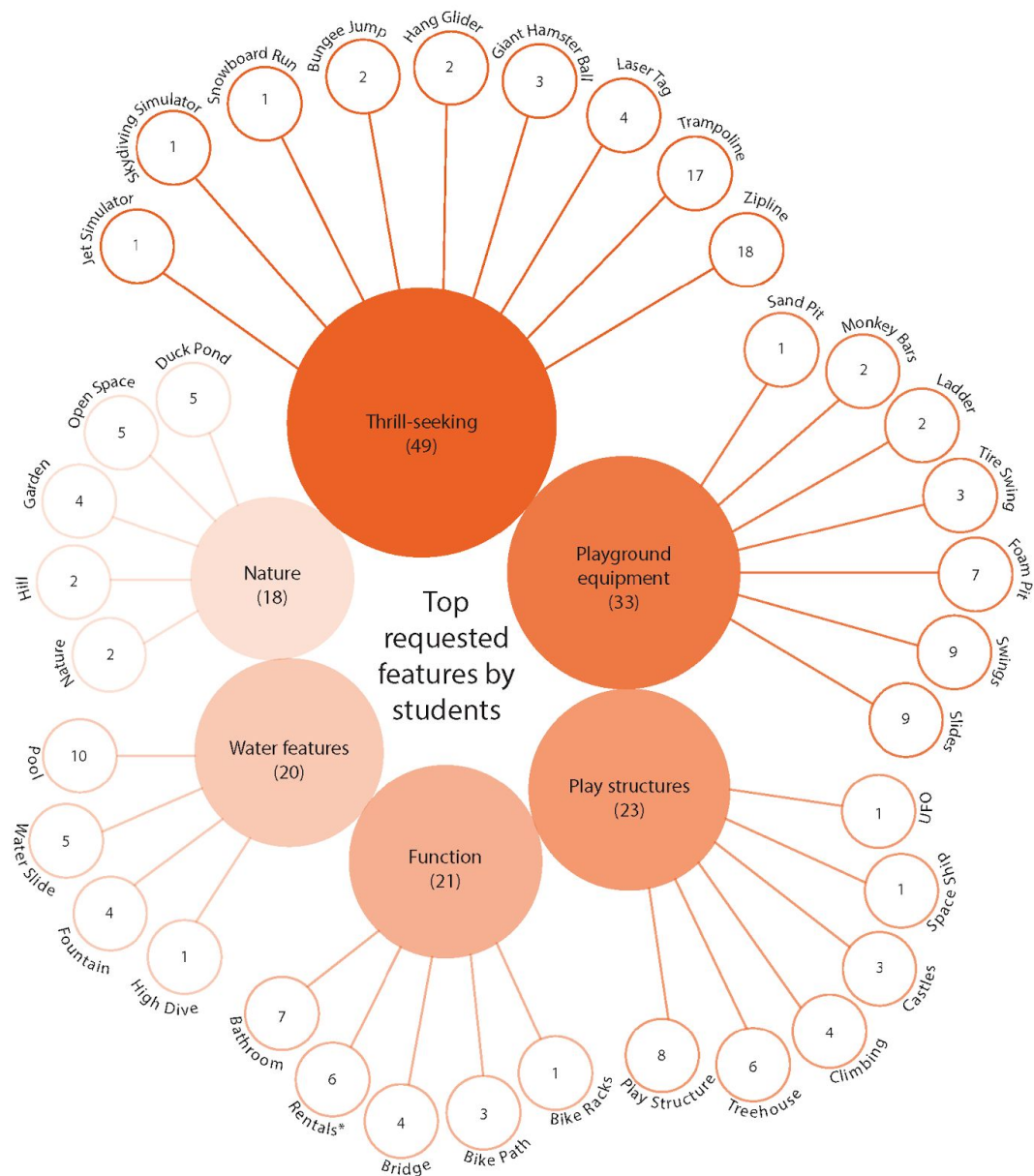
Class 1: Overview of the project and pre-project survey

After sharing an overview of Growing Up Boulder and the project for the semester, students were asked to draw their ideal of a teen-friendly park.

Drawing exercise by middle school student



A content analysis of the 32 student drawings revealed that thrill-seeking activities, followed by play equipment, were the features most in-demand.



Infographic by Joanna Mendoza.

Students also completed a pre-project survey, which asked the following questions:

- How old are you?
- Are there outdoor spaces where you like to hang out?
- Are there good parks for kids your age in Boulder?
- Do you feel like you have a voice in local decision-making (at school, in your neighborhood and/or in your city)?
- Would you like to have a voice in local decision-making?

Questions were answered using a Likert scale, with the additional option of open-ended comments.

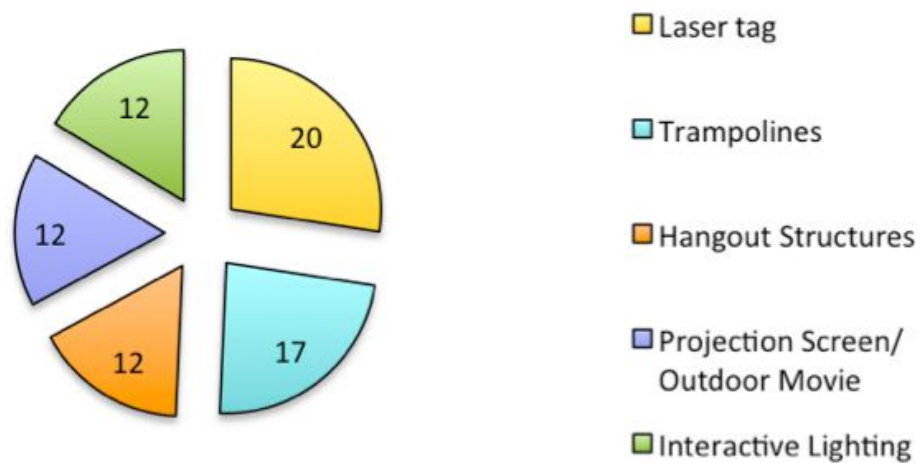
Class 2: Ideas for teen-friendly parks

The goal of this class was to expose students to best practices in teen-friendly park design from around the world. Beginning locally, the GUB team shared features requested by Boulder's teens through 7 years of previous GUB projects, as well as through a survey conducted by YOAB. Combining feature requests from the CMS class, the YOAB survey, and GUB projects with innovative global examples, GUB conducted a visual preference survey with the class.



Photos by Mara Mintzer: Image of zip line presented as part of the visual preference survey, and Image of an interactive music park for teens in Malmo, Sweden, presented as part of the visual preference survey.

Top Requested Features from Visual Preference Survey



Class 3: Howard Heuston Park overview and project guidelines

City Parks planner, Tina Briggs, presented an overview of Howard Heuston park, the goals of the redesign project, and why the City wished to gather teen input in general. The GUB coordinator then laid out guidelines for the students' projects. Students worked in teams of 3 or 4 to create either 3D models or digital presentations of their ideal, teen-friendly parks that responded to the following questions:

KIDS: How does your design serve kids?

ALL AGES: How does your design serve people different from you (people of other ages and abilities)?

DO: What will people do in the park? Climb, bike, walk, picnic, sit, play, get wet, other...

UNIQUE: Why should the city choose your design?

NATURE: What role will nature play in your park? Consider trees, boulders, rocks, dirt, mud, ditch (with and without water), grasses, bushes, flowers, plants.

TIME OF YEAR AND DAY: How will the park be used differently during different seasons? During different times of the day? Should it only be used during daylight? If it used before and after dark, how would that work?

KEEP OR CHANGE: What parts of the current park will you keep? What will you change?

Classes 4 and 5: Work on group projects

Students spent classes 4 and 5 building their models or digital presentations. They were provided a base map of Howard Heuston park mounted on foam core, and an array of craft materials for building. They also used laptop computers to conduct further research for their parks.



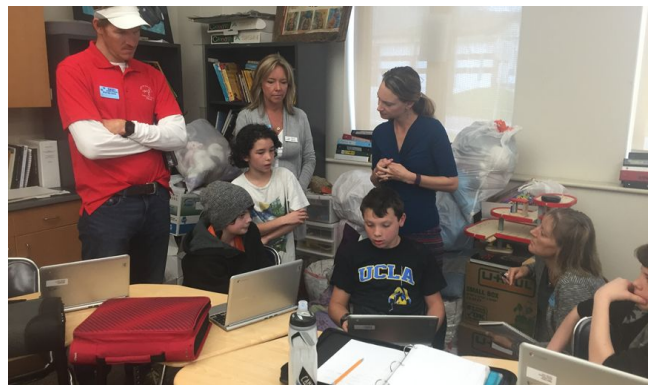
Photo by Joanna Mendoza: Students research and build their designs.



Photo by Darcy Varney Kitching: This student model includes a scavenger hunt, performance stage, dog park, water fountains, open space, picnic benches, and a zip line.

Class 6: Share out event

Middle school students shared their final teen-friendly park designs with community leaders including 3 Parks and Recreation Advisory Board members, one County Sustainability planner, the City's YOAB coordinator, a university professor, and a City Parks planner. Five groups created 3D models and one group designed a digital presentation. All groups wrote persuasive paragraphs to accompany their designs to help explain design elements (see [redacted] for complete photos and paragraphs; the digital presentation is available upon request). During the share out event, community leaders circulated to each student team and engaged in two-way dialogues about the students' proposed ideas and processes.



Photos by Joanna Mendoza: Students discuss their final projects with City and County leaders.

Class 7: Reflections

The final class session focused on student reflections of both the process and the project. In a whole-class activity, students provided oral feedback regarding their experiences with the share out

session. They provided written feedback through a post-project survey, which posed two of the same questions as the pre-project survey, and included several additional questions as well.

Project 2: COSI workshop



On a Saturday in May 2016, Growing Up Boulder conducted a collaborative, day-long workshop focused on teen-friendly parks with high school students from Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI) and the University of Colorado's Environmental Design Program's Designers Without Boundaries program. COSI is a year-round pre-collegiate program started by the "I Have a Dream" Foundation, which serves primarily low-income and Latino middle and high school students. Designers Without Boundaries (DWB) is an academic scholarship program for first-generation and underrepresented college students in the Program in Environmental Design. The college students mentored the high school students in the field of environmental design and also provided the high schoolers a chance to explore the college experience in a supportive setting. Over the course of the 6-hour workshop, these two groups of young people came together to design a teen-friendly, Howard Heuston Park, which they named, "(Re)claimed--a park for the youth." The theme of the park was "adventure."

(Re)claimed featured the following areas:

Study/social

- Wifi
- Community areas/tables
- Interactive smartphone area
- Creating seating area
- Interesting shading structures
- Tie wifi and music together

Games

- Whole body movement
 - Games--life-sized chess board and pieces
 - Built-in ping-pong and laser tag
-

Active

- Zip line
- Modern square towers
- Rocks
- Spiderweb climbing--netting
- Slide rails
- Trampolines

Natural

- Trees
- Shrubs
- Natural big rocks

Overall features

- Have a well-lit park at night
- Have atmospheric lighting--interactive lighting (i.e. with an app you can choose the lighting)
- Include a man-made water element for teens to play in
- Connect park to nearby pathways

All of the features requested in this park design from high school and undergraduate students were echoed in the requests from the middle school students who participated in the parallel study.

It should be noted that this workshop had much smaller attendance of high school students and undergraduates than anticipated due to a spring snowstorm which caused the workshop date to be rescheduled. In the future, Growing Up Boulder will choose a snow-date in advance for all one-day events.

Partners and appreciation

The Teen-Friendly Parks project is the result of a truly collaborative process; GUB thanks all of the partners below. Financial support for this work came from the City of Boulder and the University of Colorado.

Project Partners

- City of Boulder, Parks and Recreation
 - Tina Briggs
- Boulder Valley School District, Casey Middle School
 - Dr. Lester Lurie
 - Chelsea Hernandez
- COSI leaders
 - Arielle del Rosario, I Have a Dream
 - Rick DeVoss, I Have a Dream
 - Annie Beall, Boulder Housing Partners and I Have a Dream
- University of Colorado
 - Alea Richmond Akins, Designers Without Boundaries

Share out attendees

- City of Boulder, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) members:
 - Marty Gorce
 - Kelly Wyatt
 - Mike Guzek
 - University of Colorado, professors
 - Louise Chawla
 - Willem van Vliet
 - Boulder County
 - Steve Giang, Planning
 - Brad Smith, Sustainability
-

University of Colorado undergraduate participants

- Growing UP Boulder interns
 - Joanna Mendoza
 - Alyssa Rivas
 - Sarah Bartosh
- Designers Without Boundaries
 - Hannah Watson
 - Elyse Skinner
 - Alicia Gonzales
- Environmental Design Student
 - Keenan Robles

GUB coordinator and report writer

- Mara Mintzer

“This city is actually open to [our] new ideas.”

“Those big people actually came to hear us.”

- Middle school participants in GUB Teen-Friendly Parks project

Conclusion

Through Growing Up Boulder’s Teen-Friendly Parks project, we confirmed that not only do young people want to have a voice in designing their parks, but they have many great ideas for how to do so. Requests from Boulder’s teens for age-appropriate park features proved consistent: they want parks that include play equipment designed for their age and bodies, adventurous activities, and spaces to hang out. They want to be able to use park spaces not just during the day, but in the evening as well. In warmer months, they would like to get wet. They want a mix of spaces which include natural elements and opportunities for wifi connectivity. Finally, they wish

to be part of the fabric of Boulder's community, not a group set apart. The Growing Up Boulder team hopes that this report provides the tools for policy makers, both locally and beyond, to design the teen-friendly parks requested by young people themselves.

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Youth Opportunities Advisory Board (YOAB) presentation to City of Boulder's Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB), 1/26/15.

Appendix 1: Casey Middle School Student Projects

Below is a compilation of student park requests, in ascending order of frequency (numbers written after park features describe the number of groups requesting a given feature out of all 6 groups).

Compilation of CMS requested features

Dog Park (6/6)

All groups would like the dog park to remain, with the majority of groups requesting that the dog park be physically separated from the rest of the park.

Climbing Structures (5/6)

“play towers with nets to climb and zip lines”

“giant mantis structure for climbing”

“large, kid-friendly butterfly to climb on and sit under”

“really cool hangout places with an rock climbing wall”

“two rock walls connected by a zip line with a net just in case you fall”

“spider web structure for climbing and games”

“small climbing structure for young kids, teens, and adults to climb on”

Water Features (5/6)

“there is a cooling system which includes a water fountain to play in”

“our park also has an nighttime theme with some water fountains that glow up it for night use”

“water fountains like the ones at Pearl Street”

“water walkways--beautiful to see and a nice place to be”

“water fountains for thirsty people and animals”

“a small pond with fish and a lifeguard to make sure nobody falls in”

Zip line (5/6)

“Zip line that stretches across the park and over the pond”

“two rock walls connected by a zip line with a net just in case you fall”

“play towers with nets to climb and zip lines”

Open Space (4/6)

“plenty of open space”

“a soccer/football field”

Picnic Tables/Hangout Areas (4/6)

“Shade structures for eating and hanging out under on hot summer days”

“We have some tree houses for kids to play while maybe some of the parents socialize”

“The outcome [of our project] is many people will come to have somewhere to hang out”

Basketball court (3/6)

Performance Stage (2/6)

The two groups comprised primarily of girls requested this feature.

“for people that want to perform something”

Other requested features

(2/6)

- Maintain swings for younger children,
- bathrooms,
- nets for climbing and catching if one falls,
- lighting for nighttime park use,
- play equipment for older kids,
- treehouse

(1/6)

- trash and recycling cans,
 - rental shop,
 - trees,
 - baseball field,
 - skate park,
 - scavenger hunt,
 - safety,
 - foam pit,
 - indoor building,
 - human hamster ball,
 - sledding hill,
 - free wifi,
 - bike path and walking trail
-

“Have bathrooms for girls, boys and other genders or people not comfortable with male or female bathrooms (nonbinary, genderfluid, transgender, etc.)”

“Lights for night use”

“Our park also has an nighttime theme with some water fountains that glow up it for night use.”

“a slide that goes through the rock wall”

“swings for babies and other people”

“two treehouses connected by a bridge called Pixie Hollow because it’s in the trees”

“plenty of trees to make the place look really pretty and like a place that people want to spend a day”

“small shop to rent harnesses for the zip line”

“Foam pit: Fun to jump in and dig around with your friends”

“Hamster ball: Good for exercise and fun to use”

“Sledding hill: Something for winter, fun with your friends”

“A building for inside fun and elderly activities”

“Pathways so people can go to and from the park on: bike, foot, skateboard, etc. Adults that may not want to be at the park can take a walk”

CMS group park proposals

Group 1



The is very safe and also games are very safe and there is also a dog park if you can not worry for your child and dog at at the same time can leave the dog park safe. We have some treehouses for kids to play while maybe some of the parents socialize. This park will have a great amount of attractions from zip lines to really cool hangout places with a rock climbing wall. Our park also has an nighttime theme with some water fountains that glow up it.

Group 2



Our approach to redesigning Howard Heuston Park focuses mainly on outdoor activity, and has plenty of open space. In the new park, we have added a performance stage, a dog park, and a scavenger hunt. We also want to add more to the playground and make it bigger, as the current playground is mostly for younger kids. We are planning to put in more picnic tables and lighting, for night use. Overall, we believe our approach is a simple yet creative and fun way to make Howard Heuston Park the best place for families and friends to spend time together.

Group 3



In our park we have:

- two rock walls connected by a zip line with a cool zip line in between with a net just in case you fall
- water fountains like the ones at Pearl Street
- a dog park
- two treehouses connected by a bridge called Pixie Hollow because it's in the trees
- the old basketball court will still be used
- and a soccer/football field
- a slide that goes through the rock wall

The outcome is many people will come to have somewhere to hang out. The park will attract a lot of attention with its modern design. The park has a many fun hang out spots to where people won't want to leave and it's meant for all ages. Though this will cost a lot it is worth every penny and will make kids smile.

Group 4



Our park will help people of all ages. Our park is large and has lots of open space for adults, animals and children to run around or enjoy the scenery and sun. There are swings for babies and other people. There is a basketball court for anyone who wants to play a game or practice. There are water fountains for thirsty people and animals. There are trash cans to encourage people not to litter and recycle. A small shop to rent harnesses for the zip line. There are plenty of trees to make the place look really pretty and like a place that people want to spend a day.

We have a small stage for people that want to perform something and we have a dog park so people can drop off their dogs and hangout with their families and other areas. We have a small pond with fish and a lifeguard to make sure nobody falls in. There is a zip line that stretches across the park and over the pond. We have bathrooms for girls, boys and other genders or people not comfortable with male or female bathrooms (nonbinary, genderfluid, transgender, etc.). We also have a small climbing structure for young kids, teens and adults to climb on.

People will want to come to this park because we have things for all ages. You can use this park all year long, however, maximum satisfaction will probably be found on a sunny, warm summer day. Our park is unique because we feature bathrooms for all gender identities, designated dog area, a zip line and a performance stage. I think everyone will love our Growing Up Boulder Park idea.

Group 5



KIDS

- The play towers with nets to climb and zip lines
- The baseball field, turf field, and basketball court
- The giant mantis structure for climbing
- And the water fountains

ALL AGES

- Basketball court
- Turf field
- baseball field
- Play tower
- Skatepark
- Restroom
- Fountain

Our park is a fun creative park to play and hang out in. There is a cooling system which includes a water fountain to play in. We have fun zip lines and ropes to climb on. A large kid-friendly butterfly to climb on and sit under. It includes a soccer/football field, baseball field, basketball court, and skate park. It also includes two bathrooms one for women and one for men. And the best part is that the whole park includes dogs!

Group 6

Boulder Park (digital presentation)



Our park will be accessible to people of all ages. There will be climbing spider webs for children, and activity buildings for the whole family. There will be fun things to do in the warmer months like playing in human hamster balls, and cool things to do in the winter, like going down a snowy sledding hill. Shade structures provide cool areas to hang out when it's hot outside, and there will be no lack of outdoor cell phone activity with free wifi. Also, a beautiful dog park provides a place for your furry friends to get some exercise off leash. Also, a bike/walk sidewalk is the perfect place to go for your morning stroll or bike ride. So come out to our park.

Appendix 2: Student Survey Results

Oral feedback regarding share out session

- Pathways, lighting good, new ideas from adults
- Adults came in with own vision
- Would have been helpful to visit parks
- Cool to have adults listen to kids
- Adults didn't have to consider kids' opinions, but chose to
- Not sure what to expect, but exciting work
- Adults got an "A" for listening
- Liked freedom to create without restrictions
- Adults asked good questions; kids hadn't thought about safety
- Adults gave good feedback - real dialogue
- Crazy (good) supplies allowed for creativity

Pre and post-project survey results

Question: How old are you?

The majority of students in the class were 12 years old (63%), with a third of the students age 11 (30%) and only a few 13 year olds (7%).

Question: Are there good parks for kids your age in Boulder?

Yes-26%, Somewhat-56%, No-19%

Question: What did you like best about the Growing Up Boulder curriculum (teen-friendly parks)?

- I like designing my own park (5 responses)
-

-
- I liked how us kids had a voice in something we normally wouldn't and how we could bring our creativity to it
 - They gave the kids a voice
 - The idea to have a voice
 - Expressing my ideas
 - I liked best that they asked us what we wanted to do to the parks
 - Cuando preguntaron de nuestro proyecto (When they asked about our project)
 - I liked how they actually asked the kids and not just assumed
 - Building a model
 - I liked that we got to be an inspiration for park builders
 - I like that they asked us what we would like to have at a park
 - I liked when they brought the stuff to do a park project
 - The adults coming

Question: Are there outdoor spaces where you like to hang out?

Yes—54%, Somewhat—38%, No—8%

- There is not many fun parks
- There are places but they're not fun for some kids
- Park nearby my house. North Boulder
- I hang out at the park
- Boulder Park
- My backyard and hiking trails near my house

Question: What would you suggest changing or improving about the Growing Up Boulder curriculum (teen-friendly parks)?

- Nothing (4 responses)
 - Going on a field trip to Howard Heuston park (3 responses)
 - Hire nicer people (3 responses)
 - Voting about ideas (2 responses)
 - Maybe more time at schools
 - I liked the idea
-

-
- It was great
 - You could like be a little less involved
 - Maybe getting some teens on their team
 - More things to build the park with
 - The park that we did (worked on) was cool and they brought a lot of adults

Question: Do you feel like you have a voice in local decision-making (at school, in your neighborhood, and/or in your city)?

Pre: (Yes–4%, Somewhat–35%,No–61%)

- Not at all (3 responses)
- I don't want neighbors
- The government did it
- Because it seems to be a big thing for someone like me to be in
- I'm only a kid against adults and the big world
- I have a voice at school but not in my city
- Because sometimes people would come in and ask for our opinion
- People want kids' ideas for kids parks so I'm getting more opportunities

Post: (Yes–56%, Somewhat–44%,No–0%)

- I had a voice
 - Yes because those big people actually came to hear us
 - Thanks
 - Not until now
 - I don't go outdoors so I don't really care
 - This city is open to new ideas
 - Because of GUB
 - They listened to our ideas
-

Question: Would you like to have a voice in local decision-making?

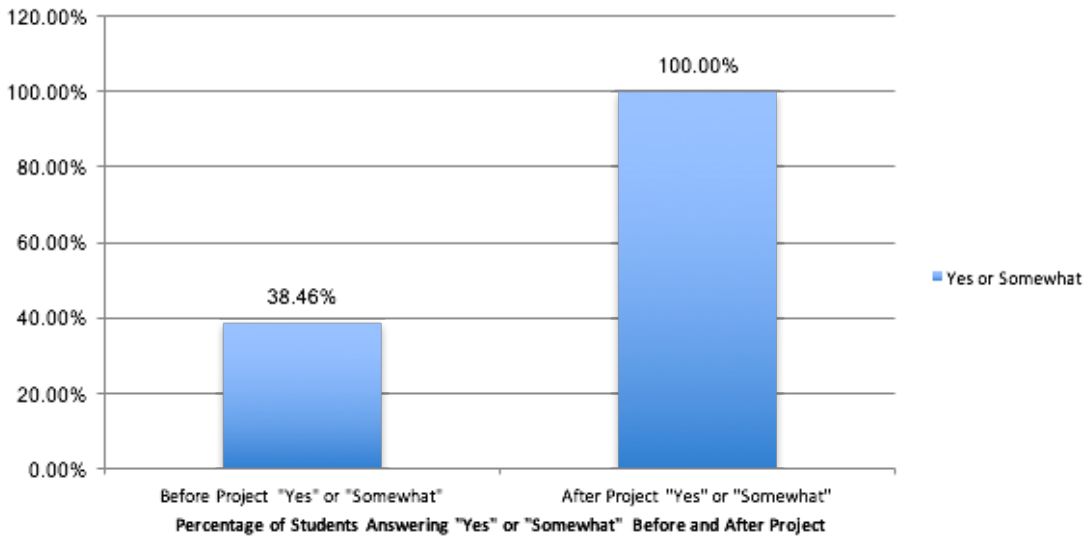
Pre: (Yes–0%, Somewhat–71%,No–29%)

- Why or why not? Pre
- No, because I'm shy
- I want people to realize that kids like me have big ideas
- I can build parks
- Because if we did, I think kids would go more places because we designed it
- Because then I would know if it was good or not
- To make it more fun to have exercise and be outside

Post: (Yes–38%, Somewhat–50%,No–12%)

- Thank you for doing this (2 responses)
 - Because teens don't usually have a say
 - No, because I do not think I would help
 - Somewhat, I don't know if I have good ideas
 - Somewhat, because I don't want too much pressure on me
 - It's fun!
-

Do you feel like you have a voice in local decision making (at school, in your neighborhood or in your city)?



- Somewhat, because it is scary talking to adults

Would you like to have a voice in local decision making?

