



Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update Report

Growing Up Boulder's Summary of Findings
Published May 2021



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Overview

About Growing Up Boulder

Growing Up Boulder (GUB) is Boulder’s child and youth-friendly city initiative established in 2009 as a formal partnership between the City of Boulder, Boulder Valley School District, and the University of Colorado. **GUB’s mission is 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 affect their lives.** Since its inception, GUB has engaged with 6,500 young people on more than 100 projects. In April 2021, after 12 years successfully housed at the University of Colorado’s CEDaR Center, GUB became a nonprofit under the fiscal sponsorship of the Colorado Nonprofit Development Center (CNDC). GUB will continue to partner closely with the CU’s CEDaR Center, CU’s School of Education, BVSD, the City of Boulder, and other key partners while expanding its efforts to impact communities beyond Boulder. In fulfilling its mission, GUB is helping create a generation of civically engaged citizens while promoting resilient and sustainable communities where all members feel they belong.



Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update

In 2020, Parks and Recreation began the process of updating the 2014 Master Plan, and phase one outreach began in February 2021. The master plan update identifies new and evolving areas of focus and provides recommendations for strategic ways to address gaps in service within the existing 2014 framework. The

master plan update will seek to incorporate strategic direction from city-wide initiatives such as the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan and other department master plans, such as climate initiatives and equity, among others. Six key themes guide how the Boulder Parks and Recreation department prioritizes facility renovations, recreation programs, and its operations through the master plan update:

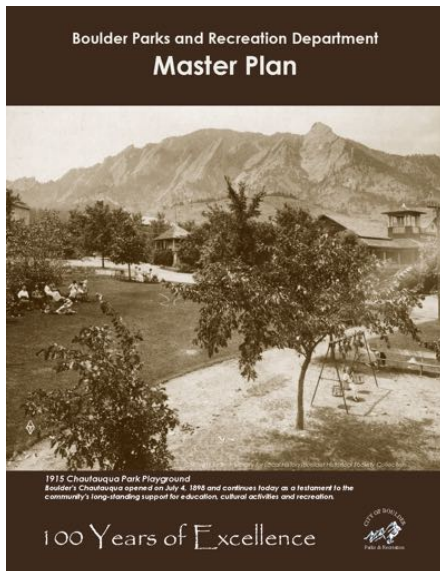
1. **Building Community Relationships:** Build community engagement and cultural activities through outreach programs and initiatives. Promote a healthy community to address social and cultural inequities.
2. **Community Health and Wellness:** Ensure public health and wellness through parks, facilities, and programs to keep Boulder a healthy and vibrant community.
3. **Financial Sustainability:** Balance multiple and increasing demands within existing resources, recognizing the limits of public funding and the need to focus on core services.
4. **Organizational Readiness:** Leverage the use of new technologies, data driven decision-making, and collaborative decision-making tools to respond to changes over time within the parks and recreation industry.
5. **Taking Care of What We Have:** Prioritize investments in existing parks and facilities to ensure the long-term viability of the park and recreation system.
6. **Youth Engagement and Activity:** Engage youth with parks, facilities, and programs that provide direct experience with nature, experiential learning, and opportunities to close the educational achievement gap.

Two additional themes, Equity and Resilience, weave throughout each key theme above:

7. **Equity:** Provide safe, inclusive, culturally relevant, and welcoming parks, facilities and programs in a way that works to address systemic and historic inequities.
8. **Resilience:** Create a parks and recreation department that is prepared to absorb the shocks and stressors of environmental and societal changes.

“We promote the health and well-being of the Boulder community by collaboratively providing high-quality parks, facilities and programs.”

--Mission of the Boulder Parks and Recreation Department



Parks & Recreation Master Plan Project Description

In January 2021, GUB began conducting phase one master plan engagements with ten different groups, including six school groups and four non-school groups. Although engagement details varied, each student group was asked to learn and think about Parks and Rec facilities, parks, and programs, consider how they currently use them and identify what recommendations and priorities they had for the master plan update. GUB staff utilized a “Values, Hopes, and Concerns” engagement framework, and students presented their recommendations in share out events throughout spring 2021.

COVID-19 Accommodations

Because of the continued presence of COVID-19 in Boulder, GUB conducted the majority of spring 2021 engagements online via Zoom and Google Meet. Two engagements were conducted outdoors and in-person. Share out events were virtual events.

By the Numbers (All Engagements)

- 161 Total Children, Youth, Parents, and Adults
- 114 Children and Youth (2nd-12th grades)
 - 53 Eisenhower Elementary School, 2nd grade
 - 16 EXPAND participants, ages 11-21
 - 23 Watershed School, 9th-12th grades
 - 3 Whittier Elementary School, 3rd grade
 - 6 Whittier Elementary School, 4th grade
 - 15 Youth Services Initiative (YSI) program participants, 5th-11th grades
- 20 Parents
 - Parents of EXPAND program participants
- 6 Educators
 - 5 Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) teachers
 - 1 Watershed School teacher
- 12 City of Boulder staff
 - 1 Communications and Outreach
 - 5 EXPAND program
 - 3 Parks and Recreation Planning
 - 3 Youth Services Initiative program
- 3 BVSD administrators
- 2 GUB staff
- 3 GUB University of Colorado Undergraduate Interns
- 1 GUB University of Colorado Undergraduate volunteer
- **900 hours** GUB team designing, evaluating, and reporting on PRMP
- **1676 hours** of child, youth work on the project
- **200 hours** educator work on the project
- **54 hours** GUB team directly engaging with children, youth, and adults
- **Total child, youth, educator and GUB time on project: 2,830 hours**



"When I first heard about this GUB opportunity, I was nervous. I thought, 'Do we really have time this year (when there's so much to catch kids up on)?' Through this experience, however, I was reminded that this project is all about learning--through reading, writing, researching, and presenting. In fact, my students grew 3-4 times the rate that they usually do! This project was our COVID catch-up...and that was because students were so excited and motivated to do a project where they felt they had such an authentic audience listening to them. It turns out that when we carve out the time to work on GUB/city projects, it becomes EXACTLY what was needed--even more than we ever realized."

--Whittier, English Language Development Teacher

Summary of Findings (All Groups)

About the process

GUB staff and interns worked with 10 groups representing 114 students, 6 teachers, and 20 parents for a whopping **2,830 hours dedicated by the GUB team, children, youth and educators to the project**. Because of the large amount of data collected, this section focuses on data highlights and the story it tells. The data analyzed here originates from elementary, middle, and high school student engagements and share-out event recommendations, posters, watercolor paintings, in-person surveys and discussions, student-researched and created digital presentations, and student videos. It also includes engagement data from an EXPAND parent focus group. Some student work samples are embedded throughout this report. Other work samples and project materials are housed in the [appendix](#) at the end of the report. For the complete collection of engagement documents, please contact: growingupboulder@gmail.com.

Most Salient Student Recommendations

GUB participants overwhelmingly viewed the Parks and Rec Master Plan Update engagements as a great opportunity to acknowledge what was working well in our city's parks, playgrounds, and recreation facilities, and were excited to think about what aspects might be improved. Students (and EXPAND parents) expressed a deep appreciation for Boulder's Parks and Recreation department as a whole, and often made comments like, "We're so lucky we have such good Parks and Rec programs in our city." Young people's values strongly aligned with the department's mission to "promote health and wellness of the Boulder community." They expressed enthusiasm to improve upon Parks and Rec programs, parks, and facilities and repeatedly asked for Parks and Rec to bring even more people together in community--to connect, learn, play, celebrate, and develop new talents. Importantly, even the youngest students expressed the desire for equity to be apparent in all aspects of the department's master plan update.

One hundred fourteen students generated design recommendations by researching Parks and Rec facilities, programs, and parks, and then considered what they would most like to see included in the master plan update. Summaries for each separate youth engagement follows after this section on page 7. Each group's section has a table with student recommendations, general themes, and Parks and Rec master plan themes.

Teenagers

Before we discuss themes common to all ages, we would like to call specific attention to the demographic of *high school aged teens (ages 14-18)*. This age group had requests that were distinct from the other age groups, and not surprisingly, their recommendations closely align with research about how teens use space and wish to interact with their community at this particular developmental stage in life. Their responses also align with GUB's previous work with high school students (see [GUB reports](#) on teen-friendly parks, the civic area, OSMP master planning, and more). Growing Up Boulder's teens have been so articulate in their past recommendations that child-friendly cities urban

planning expert, Tim Gill, turned Boulder teens' recommendations into a tool called, "checklist for teen-friendly parks" in his best-selling new book Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and Design Can Save Cities (2021, see p. 162). In their feedback for *this* Boulder Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update, teens recommended:

- That teens be offered **leadership** opportunities to **co-create** activities with Parks and Rec staff for their peers; in other words, "**nothing for us without us**"
- That Parks and Rec offer safe, welcoming spaces for **teen-only gatherings**; this ranges from active events, such as non-competitive sports leagues to movie nights
- Opportunities for **teens across the city** to meet each other; covid has only increased a sense of isolation, and young people now want to get out and spend time together in safe group settings
- **Teen-friendly play equipment**; even though they are in high school, teenagers still want to play on playgrounds and in the water; they just want equipment that is **challenging enough, and sanctioned**, for them to use

All ages

The themes that were most frequently requested *across age groups* are listed below in conjunction with some examples of each theme:

- 1) **Water play**: students want new and improved pools with upgraded amenities for enhanced fun such as water jets, slides, and diving platforms; they want this for their pets, too!
- 2) **Active play**: students voiced their hopes for new and improved parks and playgrounds; they are asking for more play structures, sports fields, adventure parks, and novel concepts like underground playgrounds and tunnels
- 3) **Extended play**: to keep them (and their families and friends) comfortable, playing all day and night, students want shade, seating, drinking fountains, first aid kits, and lighting
- 4) **Equity and Inclusion**: young people repeatedly expressed their desire for Boulder's Parks and Rec department to find ways to include everyone in our city; from thinking about transportation services to/from rec centers to equipping our parks and playgrounds with accessible play structures for all ages and abilities, young people are interested in everyone feeling that they belong; teens want to step into leadership opportunities and be more integrated into the larger community
- 5) **Nature and the outdoors**: students appreciate the beauty and natural spaces in our community. They want more climbing trees and time outside at parks and playgrounds; they want to create and interact with fairy gardens, engage in nature play, and see more flowers and enhanced garden spaces
- 6) **Novelty and challenge**: students are seeking updated equipment in our playgrounds; they are asking for new and greater physical challenges as found in obstacle courses, bike and skateboard parks, and roller skating rinks
- 7) **Caring for animals and pets**: students want more opportunities to interact and play with their pets--off-leash dog and cat parks with all kinds of creative amenities (treat dispensers, obstacle courses); many would like a petting zoo
- 8) **Environmental awareness and respecting what we have**: taking care of our facilities in and outdoors were on young people's minds; for example, they suggested goat lawn mowers and using sustainable materials for building

- 9) **Classes, camps, and lifelong learning:** students love taking Parks and Recreation classes, going to rec centers and camps; students have a hunger for a broad range of classes (from horseback riding and gymnastics to mini golf)
- 10) **Welcoming, safe public spaces:** teens in particular strongly expressed a need for gathering with friends in welcoming, hangout venues; after a year of being isolated, teens requested more opportunities for social interaction, belonging, and community, and they want support from the Parks and Rec department to help them make these connections

During engagements, each student group considered their values (“things that are important to me”). They used their values to guide their thinking as to what recommendations they wanted to bring forward into the master plan update. The top values expressed by young people are shown in the table below:

Top Values Expressed by Youth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Family and friends ● Community, inclusion and belonging ● Taking care of our parks and recreation facilities ● Safety ● Pets ● Health and wellness ● Exercise ● Active play ● Water play, water access, and pool time ● Love of nature and wildlife ● Being outdoors ● Appreciation, enjoyment, and use of parks, playgrounds, and recreation centers ● Learning and taking classes and camps ● Novelty and challenge ● Equity

For a more complete explanation of GUB’s engagement partners and process, please continue on to the next section.

GUB's Engagement Partners and Engagement Process

School Groups:

Eisenhower Elementary School: 2nd Grade Classrooms (3)

By the Numbers

- 53 students, ages 7-8
- 3 teachers
- 18 hours engaging directly with youth

Engagement Description

April - May 2021

Virtual engagements

Over a six-week period, GUB staff and interns explored Boulder Parks and Recreation facilities, parks and programs with 53 second grade students. The GUB team worked virtually, some students also worked virtually, and the majority of teachers and students were in-person at school. GUB facilitators began by introducing Parks and Rec to each class, and explaining the master plan update process. Students came to understand that their voices and ideas would be shared and considered by city officials and adult decision-makers. Initially, students were sent home to complete a family interview and think about where they currently like to go in Boulder, identify what they do in these places, and consider their hopes for the future of Boulder Parks and Rec. GUB interns helped students build their Parks and Rec department background knowledge by exploring the range of opportunities Parks and Rec offers, and students considered their values, hopes, and concerns relating to the same. With their considerations and thoughts at a peak, students were asked to think about what recommendations for the master plan update they would like to present in a share-out event. On the day of the share-out event, students presented their ideas to a virtual panel of attentive city officials and adult decision-makers.

Summary of Findings

Classroom 1: Miriam Parker

Ms. Parker's students developed ideas tied to Boulder Parks and Recreation key themes of Equity, Taking Care of What We Have, and Community Health and Wellness. These key themes overlapped with students' concerns for taking care of the natural environment, as well as the lack of accessible play structures for their fellow classmates, resulting in a list of student recommendations listed in the table below. Many students were thinking about the need for adaptive zip-lines, swings, slides, and safe play structures for kids of all abilities. Other students hoped for interactive nature play through the implementation of fairy gardens, petting zoos, and a healthy assortment of foliage in parks to

attract wildlife. Children had precise solutions to their concerns and they expressed these through watercolor paintings and other media.

Student Recommendations	Themes	Parks and Rec Master Plan Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptive zip-lines, swings and slides for kids of all abilities • Play structures that are low to the ground and wheelchair-friendly for kids of all abilities • Accessible transportation to Parks & Rec camps and rec centers • Interactive fairy gardens designed and planned with the help of kids • Challenging obstacle courses for kids and dogs • Health & lifestyle classes for kids • More essential amenities near playgrounds (bathrooms, first aid, drinking fountains, snacks and drinks) • Plant more flowers for bees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equitable/all ability play structures • Nature play experiences • Child-friendly collaborative design • Updated parks for more comfortable and more imaginative play • Upkeep of the natural environment and its wildlife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity • Taking Care of What We Have • Community Health and Wellness



Students research the Parks and Recreation website and finalize their recommendations



Student paintings show ideas for interactive fairy gardens and youth health classes

“Giving my input on the Parks and Rec Master Plan made me feel happy and important”

--2nd grade student, Eisenhower

Classroom 2: Suzanne Ohlson

When the 2nd graders reflected on their values, many identified Taking Care of What We Have and Community Health and Wellness as their most valuable key themes. Students proved to be very creative and innovative. As the table below shows, many students had hopes for cat parks and underground play spaces (see appendix for a link to a UNICEF article re: underground playgrounds). Other students were interested in opportunities for water play at pools and in/around Boulder Creek. Students were concerned about the safety of cat parks and the cost and maintenance of their ideas. In the time after their presentation to Parks & Rec staff, second graders had the opportunity to ask questions, most of which were focused on the implementation of their ideas. Students were clearly invested in their ideas and wanted to have a voice in the master plan update.

Student Recommendations	Themes	Parks and Rec Master Plan Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cat parks ● New and enhanced playgrounds and equipment (ie. an underground playground, a rocket simulator, trampolines and a digging-for-fossils area) ● More water play along Boulder Creek and more features at pools ● New water park ● New winter outdoor park ● Public tree house ● Enhanced summer camp programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fun with animals and raising healthy pets ● Updated parks ● Updated playgrounds with novel features ● Water play ● Play, imagination ● Nature play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building Community Relationships ● Taking Care of What We Have ● Community Health and Wellness



Students sketch their recommendations for the master plan update



Ideas for a rocket simulator and winter playground

Classroom 3: Ashley Novak

Students in Ms. Novak’s classroom presented their recommendations via posters within a slideshow. Their hopes and dreams for the Parks and Rec master plan focused on improving dog parks with water features and opportunities for shade, improving and expanding Boulder’s pools by adding heat, interactive ziplines, and including opportunities for snacks and drinks, and expanded rec center programming. Students also expressed recommendations for a roller skating rink, a skateboard park, and an obstacle course to provide young people a novel experience with variety and challenge.

Student Recommendations	Themes	Parks and Rec Master Plan Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improved amenities at existing dog parks (ie. water fountains, shade, pools, dog treat dispensers) and expand the number of dog parks ● Expanded rec center programming (ie. horseback riding, dance, summer camps) ● New and improved pools (ie. zipline, slides, lazy river, diving platform, heat, snacks and drinks, areas for relaxing) ● New roller skating rink (ie. disco ball, snacks and drinks, lockers) ● New skateboard park ● New bird park ● New and improved park (ie. 4 person seesaw, climbing wall, shade trees) ● Add an obstacle course and mini golf within existing parks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fun with pets ● Water play ● Shade structures (for pets and people) ● Active play ● Nature and the out-of-doors ● Educational play ● Rec center programming ● Adding new amenities to existing facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building Community Relationships ● Taking Care of What We Have ● Community Health and Wellness ● Youth Engagement and Activity

“Part of Watershed’s mission is to engage kids in ‘work that matters beyond the walls of the classroom.’ Partnerships like this are so valuable...it helps students learn about and address real world problems. GUB’s mission aligns so well with our school’s mission to have our students’ voices and actions matter in the world.”

--Watershed School Educator

Engagement Description

March 2021

Virtual engagement

A multi-aged classroom of 9th through 12th graders partnered with GUB to answer the innovation design challenge question, "How can the City of Boulder Parks and Recreation better serve youth?" Students conducted in-depth research about the Parks and Recreation department by studying the city’s website, the 2014 Parks and Rec Master Plan, and the current master planning update process. Students brainstormed 20-30 proposal ideas each and then formed like-minded small groups to expand on their strongest concept. Groups were tasked to design an activity, program, or solution that they felt would be innovative, attract and serve diverse needs and populations, work within the existing Parks and Recreation framework, and be safe and legal. Teams then created 2-minute visual presentations that outlined the problem they were addressing, their proposed solution, and feasibility logistics. Students presented their ideas to Parks and Recreation planners, GUB staff, and their classmates in a virtual Zoom share out event.

Summary of Findings

Watershed student presentations centered on solutions that Each proposal met the design challenge criteria in that they were innovative, attractive, service-oriented, safe, and legal. Notably, GUB frequently hears from teens that they want more opportunities to connect with one another in a safe and welcoming space. In this year of increased isolation due to the pandemic, this sentiment was expressed more loudly than ever. Teens also voiced wanting more opportunities to be integrated into the larger Boulder community. Interestingly, teens were interested in the Parks and Recreation department’s support in bringing teens from different schools together. The chart below captures the expressed needs of this age group:

Student Recommendations	Themes	Parks and Rec Master Plan Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teen movie nights at the Boulder Reservoir ● Parks and Rec teen opportunities website ● Skateboarding integration project ● Dedicated study space and teen-managed cafe ● Boulder teen festival with teen-run booths, food trucks, competitions ● Weekly winter social events (ie. bonfires, food, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Opportunities for socialization and belonging ● Integration of more teens into the Boulder community ● Opportunities for teen leadership, employment, community involvement and/or internships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth Engagement Activities ● Equity ● Boulder Community Relationships

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> activities) • Program dedicated to creating and maintaining teen clubs • Teens-only Rec Center days or teens-only activities/sports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teen agency and ownership of their experiences in Boulder 	
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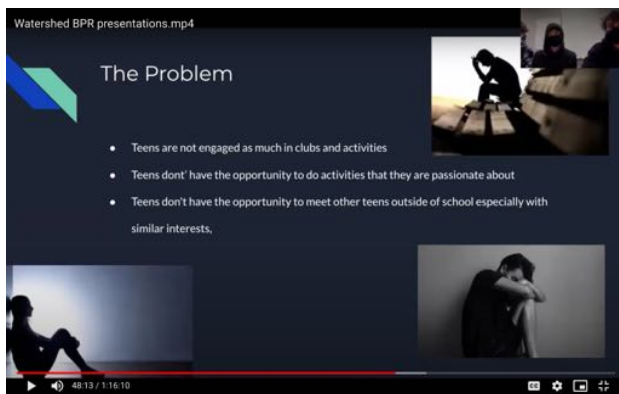
“Something I was pleasantly surprised by was how well thought out and thorough the students’ ideas were. They considered so many details and were so insightful, in a way I don’t know that I would have been at their age. It was refreshing and exciting to see.”

--Parks and Rec Planner

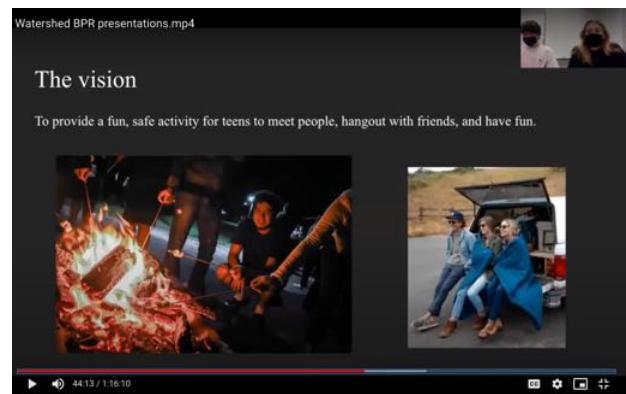


Overall themes heard from teens (graphic created by Savanna Terrell, GUB intern)

Samples of virtual share out presentations:



Students present the problem that their 'Teen Club' Initiative would help solve.



Students present their vision for a Winter Social to bring together Boulder teens during isolating winter months



Boulder Teen Festival student presentation

“Something I want to remember about today is the distinction of activities directed at youth [children] was demonstrated to be expressly different than teens and we (Parks and Rec) should work to make a better distinction.”

--Parks and Rec Planner

Whittier Elementary School: 3rd Grade, English Language Development (ELD) Classroom

By the Numbers

- 3 ELD students, ages 8-9
- 1 ELD teacher
- 6 engagement hours



The virtual share-out begins!

Engagement Description

February - March 2021

Virtual engagements

For four weeks, ELD students engaged with the Parks and Rec master plan update work. Following a GUB project introduction, students brought a Parks and Rec Department family interview home to document their family’s personal experiences with Boulder’s Parks and Recreation centers. Students then mapped out their experiences on a digital map of Boulder and identified what they enjoyed doing there. They then drew their favorite places and activities, and shared these with each other. To expand their knowledge about the Parks and Rec department, students generated a list of questions, collaboratively located the answers on the Parks and Recreation website, and created a class “padlet” (digital note-taking platform) to highlight their findings. For questions they could not find answers for, students emailed a Parks and Rec planner and she happily answered their inquiries. Students then studied the key themes and learned how they would be used in shaping the master plan. Next, the kids worked together to create a Values, Hopes, and Concerns jamboard (digital list) for the future of the department. Students researched unique park precedents from around the world, and then drew

their recommendations for either a Boulder park or recreation center. Finally, students created a slideshow for a virtual share out event showcasing their month-long learning process and students' final ideas.

Summary of Findings

Whittier third graders demonstrated altruistic concerns for others' health, safety, enjoyment, and widespread use of the Parks and Recreation centers. They felt strongly about designing and accommodating for community members with differing abilities, as well as their families and animals. The key theme that they valued most strongly was 'Community Health and Wellness.' When discussing their values, hopes, and concerns, students valued having fun with their families, taking care of the parks and recreation centers, health, and safety. They hoped for more classes for people with special abilities (disabilities) as well as more new, interactive play structures in the Parks and Rec centers. They were concerned that Boulder's three Parks and Recreation centers wouldn't be taken care of and kept clean, and that people would not like the Parks and Recreation centers.



Student drawing highlighting their favorite parks and activities

"I want Growing Up Boulder to know that I am always impressed with their ability to take very complicated subject matter into classrooms, provide a core understanding in a short period of time, and collect feedback that is timely and useful to guide decision-makers."

--3rd Grade Teacher, Whittier Elementary

"I was pleasantly surprised by how incredibly altruistic Tamar's students were in thinking about the needs of our differently-abled Boulder community members and the ways in which they would use the different parks, rec centers, and programs - it truly inspired me and put a smile on my face!"

--CU Environmental Design student and GUB intern

Student Recommendations	Themes	Parks and Rec Master Plan Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classes for people with special abilities • New, interactive play structures in the Parks and Rec Centers • Designing and accommodating for people with special abilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking care of parks • Family fun with other families • Time with family • Taking care of the parks and recreation centers • Health • Safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Health and Wellness • Equity • Taking Care of What We Have • Youth Engagement and Activity

3rd Graders’ Recommendations Expressed in a Word Cloud



Whittier Elementary School: 4th Grade, English Language Development (ELD)

By the Numbers

- 6 students, ages 9-10
- 1 ELD teacher
- 10 hours engaging with youth

Engagement Description

February - April 2021
Virtual Engagements

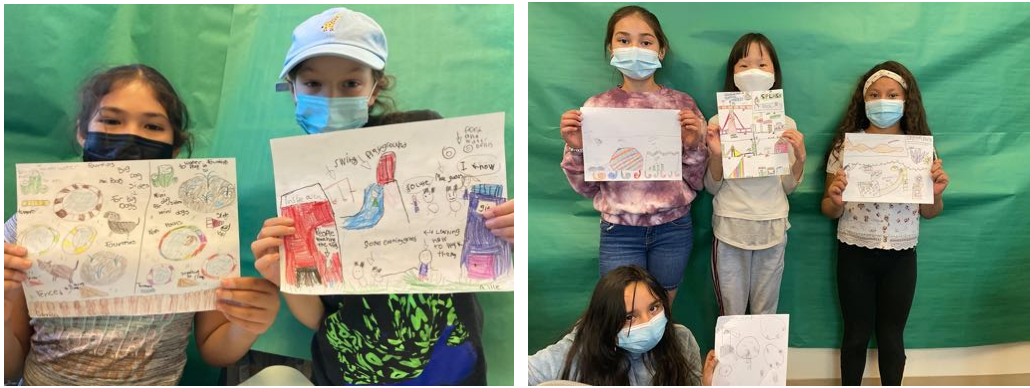
As part of their “Engagement Encourages Democracy” International Baccalaureate (IB) unit, 4th graders took a similar path as Whittier 3rd graders. After an introduction to the project and completing the pre-questionnaire and family survey, students explored the Parks & Rec website and recorded their findings. They used this information to think about what could be added to Parks & Rec. Next, students reflected on their values, hopes, and concerns to think more deeply about what parts of Parks & Rec were important to them. Students prepared their ideas and some questions to ask GUB environmental design interns. With the intern feedback in mind, students crafted persuasive essays to explain their ideas in detail. Students were motivated to edit, rewrite, and finalize their essays because they knew they were presenting to adult decision-makers who were interested in their ideas. Students then collaborated to build a slideshow which included their thinking and drawings for the Parks & Rec staff. Finally, students presented their slideshow and shared their persuasive essays at a virtual share out event.

Summary of Findings

Whittier fourth graders saw value in taking care of the environment and promoting accessibility for all, while also centering fun and play. Their ideas highlighted the improvement of youth interest and overall inclusion at Parks and Rec facilities. In their family interviews, almost every student indicated that they wanted to focus on the Parks and Rec key themes 'Community Health and Wellness' and 'Youth Engagement and Activity.' During their class discussion about values, hopes, and concerns, students said they valued family, accessibility, and fairness. They hoped for equipment at Parks and Rec facilities to be accessible for youth as well as those with disabilities. They were concerned about affordability and the activities only offered for specific groups. In a post-engagement interview with an intern, students expressed their pride for their hard work and unique ideas. They also reflected on how nice it felt to know that adults were listening to their ideas, which positively influenced their sense of belonging in the community.



Students' dream park and rec center drawings



Students proudly share their Parks and Rec artwork

“The questions asked of the students and their ideas generated were a perfect fit for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. I truly believe these students' ideas provide the department with some very valuable feedback that we can implement into the future of the Parks and Rec department in Boulder. As always, AMAZING work!”

--Master Planning Coordinator for the City of Boulder

Student Recommendations	Themes	Parks and Rec Master Plan Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Goats as lawn mowers ● Make pools more fun for kids and grown ups ● More and better dog parks ● Make playgrounds more interesting and exciting ● Colorful parks with LED lights, zip lines, and slides ● Make fun places for kids at Rec Centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improving Parks ● Environmental Consciousness/ Eco-stewardship ● Inclusion ● Improved services and facilities for all ● Accessibility for all ● Fun and play ● Love for animals ● Fairness ● Affordability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Equity ● Community Health and Wellness ● Youth Engagement and Activity

Non-School Partners:

EXPAND Participants

By the Numbers

- 16 participants, ages 11-21
- 1 EXPAND Program Coordinator
- 3 EXPAND Program Leaders

- 1 EXPAND intern
- 3 GUB staff and interns
- 1.5 hours engaging directly with youth

Engagement Description

March 2021

1 in-person engagement

The City of Boulder’s Parks and Recreation Department runs a program called “EXPAND,” which works to enhance the lives of people with disabilities through the fun of recreation while promoting development and growth through their programs. On March 1, 2021, EXPAND youth and program staff hosted an in-person engagement with GUB staff and interns in order to learn what recommendations they had for the Parks and Rec master plan update. EXPAND staff informed the GUB team that students loved the EPIC (Yay, we love it!) or FAIL (Boo, we don’t like it!) framework to determine if they like something or not, so the GUB team designed the engagement using this framework. EXPAND participants and staff walked around the East Boulder Rec Center grounds* using green (EPIC) and red (FAIL) frames to prompt feedback and frame a discussion. Participants enjoyed the activity and readily identified what they liked and didn’t like and why. To document participant opinions and recommendations, staff scribed what participants shared and took photographs. When our tour of the outdoor facilities were completed, EXPAND and GUB staff shared photos of Boulder’s commonly used Parks and Rec Center facilities** and received feedback from participants. Again, GUB staff scribed what participants shared and took photographs.

*East Boulder Rec outdoor locations:

Turf fields	Pond/lake	Paddle ball courts
Playground	Basketball courts	Volleyball courts
Pickleball courts	Tennis courts	Dinosaur Park
Dog Park		

**Boulder’s Commonly Used Parks and Rec location photographs:

Eben G Park	Scott Carpenter Park	Boulder Reservoir
Gym at North Boulder Rec	North Boulder Rec Pool	Spruce Pool
South Boulder Rec Pool	South Boulder Disc Course Fields	Creekside Playground

Summary of Findings

EXPAND participants were interested and engaged in the EPIC/FAIL activity and shared many opinions and recommendations for the master plan. Commonly requested themes included facility improvements which would allow Boulder residents to spend time outdoors comfortably--more shade coverings to sit and eat under on hot summer days, separated walking and biking paths, and lights for using parks and playgrounds in the evenings. EXPAND participants valued beauty and wildlife, and expressed a strong desire to take care of what facilities we have. They expressed facility improvements that would bring more joy and opportunities to be active in both indoor and outdoor

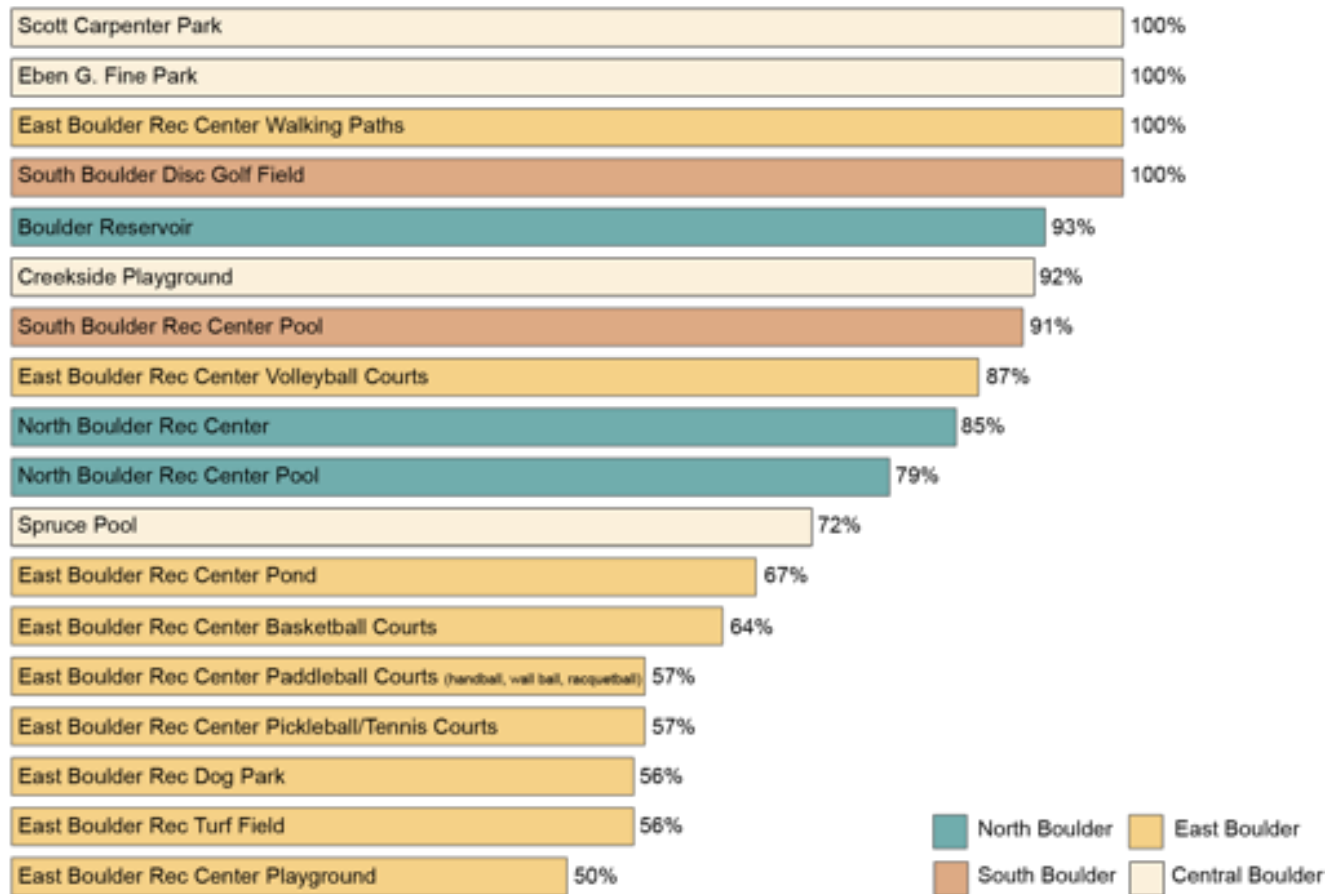
environments. The tables below represent the recommendations and themes most frequently voiced, and also the Parks and Rec facilities they felt were epic (great!):

Student Recommendations	Themes	Parks and Rec Master Plan Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More covered areas throughout parks and playgrounds (ie. shade, seating, eating areas) ● Upgrade pools with lights and taller water jets for older youth ● Add more play structures to the Creekside Playground ● Boulder Rec Centers emulate the Apex Center https://apexprd.org/facility/apex-center/ ● More turf fields ● Install more lights for evening use of parks and playgrounds ● More opportunities to view wildlife ● Improved dog parks (ie. poop bags, obstacle courses) ● Beautify Parks and Recreation grounds (ie. pick up after ducks --poop) ● Safety training classes to use rec center equipment ● East Boulder Rec Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ playground needs updated equipment for older users ○ paddleball courts need attention (litter, drinking) ○ reinstate the East Boulder Rec Center bus (that dropped off. Users are missing that) ○ basketball courts need new painted lines ○ Create a separate walking and biking paths ○ Need more dog poop bag dispensers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facility improvements in order to spend time outdoors comfortably (ie. shade coverings, separated walking/biking path, lights for night time use) ● Safety ● Pool enhancements and activities ● Playground equipment enhancements for all abilities and older ages ● Exercise, health and wellness ● Care for Parks and Rec grounds ● Care for animals (dogs) and wildlife ● East Boulder Rec Center improvements (basketball courts, walk/bike lane, clean up, enforce rules, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Equity ● Taking Care of What We Have ● Community Health and Wellness ● Building Community Relationships

“The staff from GUB were interested in what the participants had to say. I felt like they really cared and wanted their voices to be heard.”

---EXPAND staff

“EPIC” Preference Data



EXPAND participants give feedback to master plan



EXPAND participants review East Boulder Rec Center with EPIC/FAIL frames

EXPAND Parents

By the Numbers

- 20 parents
- 1 EXPAND Program Coordinator
- 2 GUB staff
- 1.5 hours engaging with adults

Engagement Description

March 2021

Virtual engagement

On March 10, 2021, GUB staff facilitated a 1.5 hour focus group for parents of EXPAND participants to introduce them to and collect their feedback for the Parks and Rec master plan. Parents were so engaged that the engagement lasted 30 minutes beyond the scheduled end time (and would have continued if the facilitators didn't need to leave).

Summary of Findings

When asked about the City's Parks and Recreation Department, parents and caregivers enthusiastically began by talking about the EXPAND program. One hundred percent of EXPAND parents were extremely grateful and supportive of EXPAND program services and its staff (see "The EXPAND Program is" table below). As one parent said, "EXPAND is not recreational--it's essential." For a complete list of EXPAND parent comments, go to this [link](#).

The EXPAND Program is:

- a lifeline to the community
- life changing
- a key community connection
- the most stable and consistent place for my child to go
- NOT recreation...it's essential
- an invaluable program
- main option for people with disabilities
- where our kids are accepted
- was invaluable during this year (COVID) because of our family's immune issues
- gives our daughter a place to fit in
- 1:1 support to participate
- even more important with adults with disabilities
- one of the only avenues to interact with the community in a meaningful way
- incredibly supportive
- serves the most vulnerable population in the community

During the focus group with parents, GUB staff used a “Values, Hopes, and Concerns” framework and parents had many hopes for expanding programs and services--from wanting to expand EXPAND program offerings to finding ways to create greater community awareness and financial support of EXPAND programs (see table below). While this discussion was open to Parks and Recreation sites and services beyond EXPAND, parents (understandably) chose to focus on EXPAND.

Values	Hopes	Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety • Belonging • Friendships • Connection making • Inclusive mindset-- a place for all kinds of peers • Learning new skills in a supportive setting • Knowledgeable, caring staff • Supportive environment • Program grows with our kids as they get older 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to make EXPAND a priority • More Camp Amico-like programs • More Friday Night Fun programs • More Special Olympics programs • Create increased awareness of EXPAND by meeting with Special Education teachers and therapists within Boulder • Include low-income and marginalized families in your outreach • Offer drop-in child care at Rec Centers with staff who are trained in developmental disabilities • Develop a peer mentorship program with high school students mentoring EXPAND participants (they could be there for gymnastics or child care) • Special Olympics have older EXPAND participants help run the program and make decisions. “Nothing about us without us.” (BVSD Transition students) • Like to understand how EXPAND program funding works (make it possible to fundraise directly for EXPAND) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very hard to get signed up for camps (“harder ticket than Hamilton tickets!”) • Need preschool-aged and early elementary program coverage • Need outdoor adventure camp for middle school participants • EXPAND needs to EXPAND! • We cannot lose the EXPAND staff--they are invaluable. Give them pay raises! Have the city honor their contribution to the community

Youth Services Initiative (YSI) Program: 2 Groups

By the Numbers

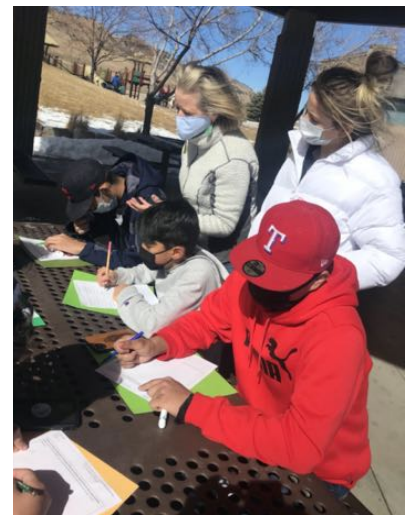
- 15 youths, mixed ages 10-17
- 3 YSI program leaders
- 3 hours engaging with youth

Engagement Description

February 2021

1 in-person engagement

1 virtual engagement



YSI youth draw their ideal park or recreation center

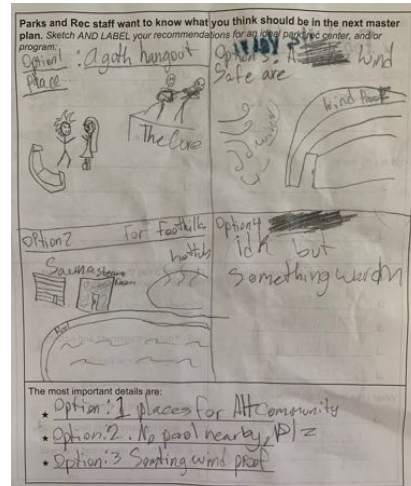
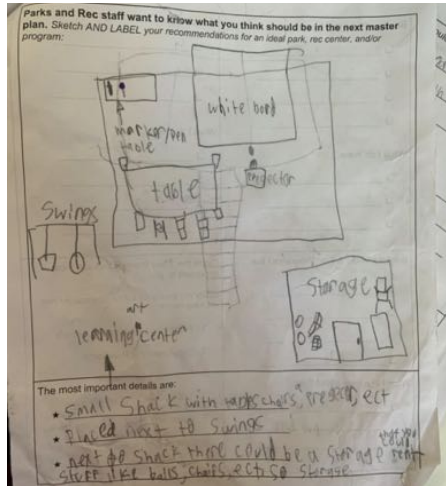
The Youth Services Initiative (YSI) inspires youth and families from underrepresented communities to make healthy, caring and responsible choices through recreation, health and well-being opportunities as well as life skill development. YSI students were divided into 2 middle and high school aged groups to make the engagements more personalized and covid-safe. Unfortunately, because of extremely high wind conditions at the time of the engagement, GUB shifted from the 'City as Play' (building a model) activity plan to a pencil and paper survey and drawing activity. After GUB staff introduced themselves and the Parks and Rec Master Plan Update, students completed the survey. Side one of the survey asked students questions related to what their favorite parks were and what they did there. On the backside, students sketched their ideal park, rec center, or program, and then labeled it. GUB staff explained what would happen with the students' ideas moving forward. Because of the adverse wind conditions, YSI students were not able to share their ideas with the whole group, and YSI staff postponed Group 2 and shifted them to an online platform the following week. Group 2 met during YSI's weekly Google Meet session. The same engagement plan as Group 1 was followed. Students completed their surveys and drawings and shared their recommendations with their peers.

Summary of Findings

Overall, YSI youth requested Parks and Rec facilities and programs that create opportunities for social interaction and physical activity. These teens like to spend their time at parks playing a variety of sports and hanging out with friends. Fun, active outdoor play that allows youth to get out of their homes was also frequently requested. Their recommendations included high-quality fields with lighting for night-time play, real uniforms for league-type play, and other facilities like a skating rink and an indoor multi-purpose space for learning or creating artwork. Having safe spaces to gather was important to these young people, as well as opportunities for novelty and adventure. Water-based activities were also requested often.

"It felt amazing to be asked my opinion. That doesn't happen very often."

--YSI youth participant



YSI youth drawing of their ideal park or recreation center

Student Recommendations	Themes	Parks and Rec Master Plan Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully-equipped team sports fields, especially soccer Pools and interactive pool equipment, activities, and facilities Improved lighting at parks and sport facilities Indoor multipurpose space for creating and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team sports Opportunities for social interaction, belonging, and community Fun, active outdoor play in the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Health and Wellness Building Community Relationships Youth Engagement and Activity Equity

GUB Staff's Engagement Reflections

After completing a project, GUB staff reflects upon the engagements in order to generate lessons learned. For the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update, these include:

Honoring individuals and each youth group: GUB staff values learning the unique group dynamics for each engagement group and then personalizing engagements accordingly to make them as meaningful and successful as possible. We plan with partners in a way that honors each group, and we regard children and youth as equals and experts of their own lived experience. This approach really works!

Adaptability: In virtual settings, teachers, students, and GUB staff were required to work remotely throughout engagements, except for 2 occasions when we could be masked and socially-distanced outdoors (with YSI and EXPAND students). Despite not being in person, virtual engagements were

meaningful and authentic throughout because activities were community-based and had an authentic audience. Teachers with whom we worked were very skilled.

With in-person settings, GUB worked closely with YSI and EXPAND program staff to create engagements that were tailored to participants' needs. With the EXPAND engagement, we engaged participants using a well known and liked by EXPAND youth: the "Epic-Fail" framework. By using this terminology for giving feedback for the Parks and Rec master plan, we immediately received buy-in from EXPAND participants. With YSI, we created smaller, more intimate groups to hear feedback. When severe wind interrupted our ability to meet outdoors, we huddled in a YSI van and facilitated an online meeting! Adapting and flexing is key to our work.

Partnering with traditionally underserved communities: English Language Learner (ELL) students thrived as fully as their English-speaking counterparts in their share-out presentations. We believe this success was due to a cohesive classroom culture cultivated by teachers, and also because of well developed relationships between BVSD and GUB staff and students. It takes courage to present your ideas to unfamiliar adults in your first language, no less a second language. The same was true for students in the EXPAND program. Students were able to provide feedback for the master plan update with the support of EXPAND staff who knew them so well.

Based upon these reflections, we continue to recommend the following principles for future projects, especially when home learning:

Build strong relationships: Share-out events were successful when the GUB team, students, and teachers developed a well-established learning community. GUB staff and interns met and talked with children repeatedly and were able to build positive rapport over time. Students felt respected and appreciated, leading to effective teaching, learning, and the creation of meaningful outcomes for everyone.

Offer community-embedded, project-based learning with voice: The authentic concept of students giving back to their community was especially impactful. That their voices would be heard, and their ideas would possibly come to fruition, was very powerful for them. They learned about what it means to give back to their community and work together as a team.

Employ a variety of learning methods--the power of choice: Teachers and students were given multiple ways to engage in the master plan project work in order to allow participants to choose what worked best for them. Methods offered included digital presentations, class discussions, small group lessons, whole group lessons, 3D models, drawing, planning, and painting activities, research and note taking sessions, persuasive writing, and the use of technology. GUB-created learning tools, such as research links, slideshows, family interview surveys, and tables provided a useful framework for the extended work and set students up for success.

Create extended classroom inquiry for more thorough recommendations: GUB staff noticed that the most well-thought out design solutions for the master plan update came from students and student groups who were provided time for deep classroom inquiry.

Conclusion

Children and youth alike eagerly engaged with the City of Boulder's Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update, as the Department's facilities and activities are already beloved by Boulder's young people. What emerges from GUB's engagements with 10 different groups is the capacity of our young people to offer meaningful, practical recommendations to the Master Plan which are as valuable as any adult contribution. In fact, due to the in-depth research, design thinking processes, and weeks of reflection completed by our students, their input is particularly well-informed and well-reasoned. The following are recommendation summaries by group and *teen-friendly requests are starred*:

- *Eisenhower Elementary, Ms. Parker*: Play opportunities which are inclusive of kids with disabilities and interactive nature play
- *Eisenhower Elementary, Ms. Novak*: More shade and more challenging equipment
- *Eisenhower Elementary, Ms. Ohlson*: Interaction with domesticated animals and more water play
- *****Watershed School**: teen-only activities, teen leadership opportunities, and more teen opportunities to gather to reduce isolation
- *Whittier ELD 3rd grade*: Classes and equipment for people with disabilities, it's important to take care of parks, and family activities
- *Whittier ELD 4th grade*: More exciting and interesting everything: playgrounds, water play, lights; take care of the environment and the parks; make them accessible for all
- *****EXPAND youth**: More shade, more play for older kids (taller water jets and playground equipment), light parks for evening use
- *EXPAND parents*: EXPAND is not a "nice-to-have" program; it is a lifeline to families, it is essential for respite, building community, and a place where children with disabilities are accepted and appreciated. Please offer more!
- *****YSI (2 groups)**: Active outdoor play, lighting for fields at night, indoor multi-use spaces for art and learning

The description below reflects the most frequently requested recommendations amongst ALL our young people:

- More challenging play equipment
- *****Play equipment and water play for teens**
- Accessible play spaces where all children may play together
- Lighting at parks and turf fields to extend the hours of use
- More water play
- Opportunities to interact with animals (petting zoos, dog parks, cat parks)
- More shade
- Hands-on interaction with nature
- *****Teen only social gatherings and leadership opportunities**

In summary, Boulder's young people love and appreciate what Parks and Recreation offers presently. They also offer many creative and feasible solutions for how to make our Parks and Recreation system more accessible, more challenging, and more impactful in the future.

Partners and Appreciation

GUB would like to thank the partners who gave their time and energy to make these engagements possible, including the teachers and students at Eisenhower, Whittier, and Watershed; EXPAND staff, participants and their parents and YSI staff and students. Tina Briggs, Parks and Rec planner, was an especially collaborative partner, as she made herself available to GUB staff for meetings and updates as needed. Many thanks to all!

- Boulder Valley School District, Leadership Team
 - Sam Messier, Northwest Area Assistant Superintendent
- City of Boulder Staff
 - Chris Ranglos, Master Planning Coordinator/Planner 1
 - Morgan Gardner, Parks and Rec Associate Planner
 - Regina Elsner, Project Manager, Parks and Rec Planner
 - Ryan Hanschen, Engagement Specialist
 - Sarah Huntley, Community Engagement Manager
 - Tina Briggs, Parks and Rec Planner
- Eisenhower Elementary School, Boulder Valley School District
 - Ashley Novak, 2nd Grade Teacher
 - Brady Stroup, Principal
 - Miriam Parker, 2nd Grade Teacher
 - Suzanne Ohlson, 2nd Grade Teacher
- EXPAND Program
 - Bri Colton, Intern EXPAND
 - Chelsea Cerny, Program Coordinator EXPAND
 - Chelsea Magyar, Program Leader EXPAND
 - Eileen Ford, Program Leader EXPAND
 - Yesica Briones, Program Leader EXPAND
- Growing Up Boulder Staff/Team
 - Cathy Hill, Education Director
 - Grace Kimes, CU School of Education Undergraduate GUB Intern
 - Mara Mintzer, Executive Director
 - Ryan Younan, UD Mercy GUB Intern
 - Savannah Terrell, CU ENVD Undergraduate GUB Intern
- The Watershed School
 - Pablo Stayton, Humanities Educator, 9 -12th grades
- Whittier Elementary School, Boulder Valley School District
 - Alsia Hayas, English Language Development teacher
 - Sarah Oswick, Principal
 - Tamar Van Vliet, English Language Development teacher
- Youth Services Initiative (YSI) Program
 - Derek Dorado, YSI Instructor
 - Maddie Gross, Youth & Families Recreation Leader
 - Misa Grenier, YSI Instructor

Appendix

There are many additional materials for each engagement group available via the links below. If you would like more detailed data, please email growingupboulder@gmail.com.

[Supplemental Learning Materials \(school groups\)](#)

[Supplemental Learning Materials \(non-school groups\)](#)

[Underground amusement park gives Syrian children a chance to play](#) (Article)