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PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

James John Elementary School Principal Samantha Regaisis (left) and Parent volunteer Noelle Guest band together with other community members to raise funds for a new playground at their north Portland school. The old playground was deemed dangerous by the school district and torn down last year, but the district won't pay for a replacement, so they started a GoFundMe page.

# Recess on the Line

## Community rallies to rebuild playground

BY DANNY PETERSON  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Community members have created a GoFundMe page to help build a new playground at James John Elementary in north Portland because the district won't pay for a new one, organizers said.

Unsafe equipment was removed from

the school by the district last year, but Portland Public Schools doesn't have funds allocated specifically to rebuilding playgrounds, the school's principal Samantha Regaisis told the Portland Observer.

Located in the heart of the St. Johns neighborhood and serving a population in which 94 percent of its families are low

income, the school needs at least \$55,000 to refurbish the now mostly barren playground on the corner of North Kellogg Street and Leavitt Avenue.

Thanks in part to parent volunteer Noelle Guest's fundraising organizing, the school has received a generous grant from Nike and donations from the school's Parent Teacher Association, which combined got them \$35,000. Last month they started a GoFundMe page to raise the remaining \$20,000. They're now less than \$10,000 away from that goal.

That \$55,000 price tag would double in cost with a more wheelchair-accessible plan.

"If we added the best choice for ADA accessibility, and fall impact, and low maintenance and durability, it would add about another \$50,000 to that number," Guest said, acknowledging with a laugh that unless, "Manna from heaven, an angel from above drops 50K on us, and that would be so splendid...we expect that we'll be going with the 55K version."

The school has a second playground, but accommodating its 370 students with the

only one play area that has equipment has caused problems with crowding.

"We can't accommodate all those children," the principal said. "It's not safe. And it's a matter of being safe for our students and for parents to know, when their children go outside, that there's room for them to play and be active without bumping and hitting and knocking each other down."

As a former PE and health teacher, and coach, Regaisis knows how important it is to give children physical activity in order for their brains to function at peak performance.

Teachers have reported that students who end up at the playground without equipment have more pent up energy, frustration, discipline problems and competition. Instead of engaging in healthy play, they end up running around in circles or throwing bark chips at each other, Regaisis said.

The school has until the end of the month to collect all the funds they'll use

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