

# Schuylkill Intermediate Unit seeking funds for new playground

By Christine Lee Staff Writer Apr 15, 2021



**DAVID MCKEOWN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER** Levi Lesser, left, and Jonathan Tabby swing on the monkey bars at the Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29 during recess on Tuesday, April 13, 2021. The IU 29 is seeking financial assistance from the public to purchase and construct a playground and outdoor education trail for students at the Maple Avenue Campus.

MAR LIN — Officials at Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29 are seeking financial assistance from the public to construct a playground and outdoor education trail for students at the Maple Avenue campus.

The expanded playground, behind the building at 17 Maple Ave., will consist of a new basketball court, swing sets that include a “friendship swing,” or one where occupants

face each other, regular swings and ones with harnesses; a climbing area; sensory area with musical and mobile devices; and a “sway fun” see-saw-like device that includes space for wheelchairs.

Two trails will be behind it, a 220-foot flat one with equipment such as balance beams, and a 1-mile trail made of rougher materials with elliptical equipment. Around the trail there will be birdhouses, trail cameras to record wildlife and signs identifying plants, along with a nine-hole disc golf course.

The path will be made, in part, by students attending the Schuylkill Technology Center.

Science teacher Matt Slonicker and his students have been providing input on the types of trees and wildlife for the trail area. Bill Kimber, the campus’ supervisor of special education, emphasized the playground will be about more than recreation for students.

“We’d like to have more gym and science classes out there,” he said.

The current playground consists of two sets of monkey bars, a basketball court and plastic playground set in an enclosed fence. Arnold said it once had swings and metal climbing equipment, but they were removed several years ago over safety concerns. Students who attend the campus use it to play basketball and other games, draw with chalk or play on the existing equipment.

Debra Arnold, the IU’s director of special education, said the plans were designed with staff input. The equipment itself costs about \$150,000 and an additional \$100,000 to install. Officials are working with General Recreation Inc., Newtown Square, to develop it and the trail. Arnold said it will take a year for the equipment and trails to be built, but she hopes the trails and disc golf will be ready for next school year. She expects STC students to begin that work at the start of the next school year.

“Those won’t take long to complete,” she said.

A fundraising drive started in January. In March, \$1,500 was raised through the sale of 260 flowers from Bella Floral in Schuylkill Haven. The campus is selling tickets for takeout meals at the Washington Hotel in Minersville through next week.

Arnold said Tuesday that \$7,000 has been raised through the fundraisers and individual contributions. Those interested in donating can contact Arnold at 570-544-9131, Ext. 1211, or mail them to Schuylkill Area Community Foundation, 216 S. Centre St. Pottsville, PA 17901.

Three companies have already each contributed \$1,000 and many individuals have contributed between \$20 and \$250.

The campus serves 175 students ages 3 to 21. But Arnold said the equipment will serve students from across the county.

“Classes (from county school districts) can come here to do things, and we can take some of our kids out and they’ll be able to do things together,” she said.

Arnold said the equipment and trail addresses the physical, health and communication needs of students. With different elements, it also gives them different opportunities for playing and learning. Kimber said he hopes officials in county school districts will see the playground and trails and feel inspired to bring students from those districts to the campus.

“These are things all kids have the opportunity to participate in and we’re going to make that available here,” she said.

Kimber added that it gives students the ability to learn how to interact with their peers and students they don’t know. With the coronavirus pandemic going on, it also gives them a chance to get outside.

“There’s not too many nature trails and to have it in school and that opportunity is great,” he said.

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Read the article on The Republican Herald’s website:

[https://www.republicanherald.com/news/education/schuylkill-intermediate-unit-seeking-funds-for-new-playground/article\\_bf8cb83c-31d8-55f0-938c-895ebb3066a8.html](https://www.republicanherald.com/news/education/schuylkill-intermediate-unit-seeking-funds-for-new-playground/article_bf8cb83c-31d8-55f0-938c-895ebb3066a8.html)