



Inclusive Design Report

Los Altos Park Playground Albuquerque, NM

The following is a review of the inclusive play elements of the Los Altos Park Playground located in Albuquerque, NM presented and created by Exerplay, Inc. (#150517E). This playground is designed for children of all abilities to play, learn and grow together.

OVERALL PLAYGROUND SITE

It is important for ALL children to have a variety of sensory experiences for healthy development. These include experiences that involve movement (vestibular system), climbing (proprioceptive system), and a mix of tactile, visual, and auditory experiences.

The playground is part of a new community park area that was an old armory location in the city. It will have open areas and facilities that support visitors of all abilities. The playground area is surrounded by a unique seating wall that encloses the areas of play while providing seating options for those who want to take a break from play or just want to watch the action. This design feature allows children to play freely while parents and caregivers can sit back and monitor for safety. A feature that could be added to this seating wall would be inlaid mosaics that are created by local artisans and/or installed by community groups of assorted ages. The mosaics could be themed in different areas and would add a multi-sensory component to the play experience.

This playground design is very similar to one of the major features of Albuquerque, namely the "Big I" which is the major highway interchange in the city. This design allows children to play on their version of the "Big I". To create the "Big I" a variety of accessible surfacing materials were used that allow all children access to the full variety of sensory play experiences on the playground giving each child the "just right" play challenges. A main component of the design is concrete inclusive pathway that children can take from one side of the playground to the other. This acts as the main "highway" that children can use to get to the assorted off-ramps that lead into different play areas or "neighborhoods" of the playground. Like the seating wall, mosaics or art work could be added to the sides of this concrete ramp system. This would add visual and tactile elements to the playground and could really make this playground and park unique. Caution should be used to keep this wall from becoming visually overloaded so that it does not have a negative impact on those with autism.

The playground uses unitary surfacing at all key inclusive play areas of the playground with pathways that connect back to the surrounding sidewalk. This allows for an easy transitioning from the sidewalk to play areas by eliminating any drop-offs from surface to surface. ADA compliant engineered wood fiber is used in all other areas.



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Since this is a new park and playground, there is not a lot of natural shade present but the design includes artificial shade around the playground “neighborhood” areas where children are likely to gather during play. Shade is important for all who play so that they do not experience sun or heat exposure while at the park. For some children with disabilities this shade will make the difference between their being able to play or not play. Their medical condition or medications may limit how long they can be in direct sunlight or high heat. The strategically placed Cool Toppers provide shade for those children who might get too hot while playing, providing them with a fun playful way to stay cool while they hang out with their friends.

The playground area is surrounded by a walking path which helps to define the play area and provides a border for children who need to have their space defined. Often children with autism need their borders defined so that they do not wander or flee the environment. The Seating Wall around part of the playground helps define this border very clearly. The design would benefit from additional Seating Wall areas on the other side of the playground so that the whole playground has a very clear boundary from the sidewalk and the park beyond.

The playground includes one main structure for 5 – 12 year olds and a freestanding Tire Swing. All of these are designed to support children of all abilities as they play and explore with family and friends.

The Tire Swing is designed to encourage social play while swinging. A child can easily transfer from a mobility device onto this swing with the help of a friend or parent. The Tire Swing's larger size allows adults and children to swing together. Its larger size also allows a group of children of all abilities to play together. This swing allows children to experience a broad range of vestibular motion; they can swing linearly back and forth or side to side, they can swing in a rotational pattern around the center point or they can spin on it.



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MAIN STRUCTURE

This playground structure is the heart of the “Big I” playground area. Children can enter the structure at many points, but we will begin our tour at the main ramp with the “Start here” label on the illustration below. This extra wide concrete ramp provides roll on access for anyone using a wheeled mobility device as well as supporting large groups of children who would want to access the structure.



The first stop on the structure is **Deck 1** which brings children up to a variety of play panels. This includes the **OptiGear Panel (a)**, **Bongo Panel (b)**, and **Color Splash Panel (c)**. Each of these panels allows children to explore different types of sensory play. The OptiGear and Color Splash Panel have mechanisms that children can turn to make the assorted color components of the panel move. This provides opportunities for visual play. The Bongo Panel allows children to explore the rhythms of sound. The final panel (Zoo Panel) allows children to look out to the playground beyond.

Moving along the inclusive path children will come to **Deck 2**. This deck is where all the off ramps leave the main road and take children to at assorted “neighborhood” areas of the playground. There are also two climbers that allow children to exit and enter at this location on the playground. These are the **Vertical Ladder (d)** and the **Wiggle Ladder (e)**. The Vertical Ladder is a solid ladder that allows children to climb straight up



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and down. It allows children to work on basic climbing skills. The Wiggle Ladder is a bit more complex in that the rungs of the ladder are solid but they are mounted to a chain which can make the ladder wiggle. This added movement requires more motor planning and coordination to climb up and down during play.

Children have many directions they can go from this central deck, but we will start by heading down the ramp to **Deck 3** in the illustration above. Deck 3 provides children with several different ramps that they can take to other “neighborhoods”. They can also enter and exit the deck on two different climbers. They can take the **Mini Summit Climber(f)** which is a stable climber with many defined place for hands and feet. This helps build vertical climbing motor skills. They can also try the more difficult **Lollipop Climber(g)**. This climber requires more motor planning and coordination as children with start by climbing vertically and the have to adjust and move horizontally to reach the deck. It helps build balance skills while children climb.

Children can take the curved bridge out to **Deck 4**. This path provides access to all children to one of the farthest “neighborhoods” of the playground. This deck has a variety of activities for children to explore. They can pull up to the **Driver Panel(h)** and continue their pretend driving experience. They stop and play with a friend at the **Tic-Tac-Toe Panel(i)** which allows them to work on cognitive skills of problem solving and strategy.

Children can move on from this deck the **main structure** using the **O-Zone 3-Ring Climber(j)**. This unique looking climber provides children with movement while they climb. This requires them to work on motor planning skills and helps build core muscle strength and coordination. This will take them to a smaller deck which could be called home for some children. This **home deck** has a series of **Pod Climbers(k)** that allow them to step down to ground level and back up. These help children work on balance and motor planning and coordination while they play.

Many children will opt to leave this deck using the **Single Poly Slide(l)**. The Single Poly Slide allows children to slide back to the ground and really feel the vestibular pull of gravity. They can re-enter this “neighborhood” by using the **Transfer Module Stairs(m)**. The Transfer Module Stairs allows for easy transfer from a wheelchair onto the stairs for someone who has upper body strength and can hop themselves up the stairs to get to the deck above. Some children may also choose to play below this deck as it is tall enough to create **the perfect little house in the shade**. This **under deck area** allows children to take a little rest, step away from all the activity and enter the pretend world in their imagination.



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Let us move back to Deck 3 and look at what happens if we go a different direction. Heading the other way children have two options; take the ramp to Deck 5 or the RingTangle Climber to Deck 6. The RingTangle(n) provides a unique bridge to Deck 6. This climber requires children to really motor plan to cross to the other side. It works all major muscle groups as they step through the tangle to the deck beyond. This element provides challenge for those who are senior climbers on the playground. For those who are not quite up to the challenge they can get to Deck 6 using the provided ramp.

The second ramp takes children from Deck 3 to Deck 5. Children will have to roll up hill a bit to get to Deck 5 as it is one of the highest points on this side of the playground. Here children have assorted ways to get back down to ground level. They can use the Vertical Ascent(o) walls which are climbing walls that help children work on motor planning and muscle strength. If the Vertical Ascent is too difficult they can use the Cliff Climber(p) which provides a similar climbing experience but with an angled climb instead of a vertical climb. Finally, they can take a crack at the Logo Climber(q) which challenges them to climb vertically then laterally to reach the deck space. Again the area below this deck provides a quiet, hideaway space for children to rest, have some quiet time or enter the world of pretend play.

Children can move along from Deck 5 to Deck 6. Children will find two new ways to enter/exit the deck level. The Step Ladder(r) uses basic stepping patterns for those still working on their step skills. They can also use the Chain Ladder(s) which is similar to the Wiggle Ladder in design except that the rungs are offset within the chain structure. This requires more motor planning and coordination to climb up and down successfully.

Finally, children can take curving bridge ramp beyond to Deck 7. This Deck "Neighborhood" provides children with a unique sliding experience on the Roller Slide(t). The Roller Slide provides a tactile and auditory experience while children slide. It is wide enough for children to slide down together. The rollers eliminate any possible static electric build-up which allows children with cochlear implants to use the slide without fear of static electricity discharging into their hearing device. They can re-enter the structure using the Transfer Module Stairs or using the Conical Climber. The Transfer Module Stairs(m) allows for easy transfer from a wheelchair onto the stairs for someone who has upper body strength and can hop themselves up the stairs to get back to the Roller Slide. The Conical Climber(u) looks like an angled climbing wall but the membrane of the wall is flexible. This makes this climber a bit more challenging as children have to adjust their body position as they climb in response to the movement of the climbing wall. This helps build core muscles strength in the arms, legs and trunk. Children can also leave this deck using the Firepole(v) which gives them a vertical rush back to earth and supports pretend play. For those who want to hang out on the deck they can play Tic-Tac-Toe(j) with their friends working on strategy and cognition. The



area below this deck makes a little cozy area for children to play away from all the activity above. For those children who are drawn to vestibular play they can give themselves a spin on the Gyro Twister(w). This unique play element allows them to rotate and spin in space alone or with a friend.

Children can take the ramp back through Deck 6 to get back to the main concrete path. They will find themselves back at Deck 2. Now let us take the ramps that go the other direction off Deck 2 and see what that side of the "Big I" has to offer.

Deck 8 has some new play experiences for children to experience. It includes a little off shoot which children can take using the JigJag Climber(x). This climber challenges children to move laterally across it helping them work on motor planning and coordination as well as balance. They can step off onto a resting platform and then can continue onto the Horizontal Ladder(y). This element helps children work on upper body strength and coordination as they work their way across these "monkey bars".

Back on Deck 8 they can hang out and create some music at the Ring-A-Bell Panel(z) This allows them to explore sound while they wait to zip down the SlideWinder2 Slide(aa). This straight slide will provide them with a huge vestibular rush as the shoot back down to the ground. Re-entry to this deck is through the climbers at Deck 2 or by traversing the "monkey bar" circuit described above but in reverse.

From Deck 8 children can go to Deck 9 or Deck 10. Let us start with Deck 9. This deck has a series of step decks that take children to different activities. At the highest point they will find the Gemini Slide(bb). This is a double slide which takes children down two different sliding experiences. Both provide a vestibular input but in different ways based on which way the slide twists and turns. One branch is a bit simpler with just one turn while the other has a couple of turns that really challenge the child's vestibular system as they fly down to earth. While children are waiting to slide they can literally hang out in the Slant Window Panel(cc) which allows them to lean out over the ground below. This provides a fun place to step away and watch others play. They can also play at the Periscope Panel(dd) which allows them to explore the world way beyond the playground. To re-enter this deck they can use the Lollipop Ladder (see earlier description) and Crest Climber(ee). This unique climber provides children with many different ways to climb up and down from the deck challenging their body position in space, motor planning and overall muscle strength.

The final "Neighborhood" area is at Deck 10. Here children will find another SlideWinder2(aa) but this one has a bit of twist so they experience more vestibular input as they slide. They can also leave this deck using the Custom Portal Climber(ff). This is a net climber that will take them over to a set of Pod Climbers(k). This combination provides a challenging motor planning, coordination and balance circuit that can be



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use in multiple pretend play scenarios. To get back on the deck they can use the **Sky Rail Climber**(gg) and the **Croquet Climber**(hh). These are more advanced climbers that require children to shift their body position in space while they climb. These build upper level motor coordination and planning skills for those who consider themselves strong climbers.

The last stop on the playground is **Deck 11** which is back on the main concrete path. This acts as a pit stop on the ramp heading back to ground level. It includes a **Balcony Deck**(ii) where children can roll-in for a break and to chat with those across the playground. They can also stop and play at the **Marble Panel**(jj) which provides a great visual, tactile and auditory play experience for children. The two **Zoo Panels**(kk) allow children to see where they might go play on the playground beyond.

Overall, this main structure will keep children of all ages and abilities engaged in play for hours while it builds valuable motor, sensory, social and pretend play skills.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this playground has many opportunities for play for any child regardless of their medical diagnosis. Children will find their “just right” fit on this playground as it is designed to support their physical, sensory and cognitive needs while it provides them with a world of fun to acquire new skills in all these areas. It provides them with great space to work on their socialization and self-esteem as they walk, run, roll, slide, climb, swing and spin together at the Los Altos Park Playground!

Respectfully Submitted,

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