

We wish to request the Senate Committee to consider the extremely negative impact that this massive spending program is having on the provision of outdoor play for children in schools nationwide, given that in most cases outdoor play areas are being built on with no consideration whatsoever to the play needs of children who need to be able to play outdoors before, during and after the school day.

Who is PRAV

PRAV is a national association whose membership comprises professionals, groups and individuals committed to promoting the value of play. We collect, disseminate and exchange information about play and play environments; encourage consultation with organizations and individuals on issues relating to play; facilitate research into the use of playgrounds and their value; promote better design of playgrounds; and encourage the better planning, design, safety, development and maintenance of play spaces. This organization has been in operation for 95 years.

The importance of play in schools

Play has an important role in human development and thus the provision of quality play opportunities is an integral part of a good learning environment in schools.

Through play, students interact socially; engage in dramatic play, role play and fantasy; extend their creativity and imagination; test themselves physically, developing skills and mastery over physical challenges; develop ball handling and other skills; observe the natural environment, and engage in a range of self directed activities which aid each individual to develop towards independent adulthood.

Consequently, play should be an important complement to the 'formal' curriculum of all schools.

School grounds that provide a satisfying range of settings for play for students of different ages and interests are likely to reduce the number of conflicts. Students are likely to be easier to manage; vandalism is likely to be reduced and the positive spin-offs include benefits to the student's self image and to the image of the school in general. A quality range of outdoor settings often also provides opportunities for staff to transfer some activities out of doors.

Students have a variety of interests and will want to play in different ways at different times. Consequently schools should provide a range of types of play spaces. Students tend to utilize all of the grounds for their play (excluding the areas, which are out of bounds). Schools therefore need to consider the 'package' offered by all of the outdoor spaces when planning play areas.

Play spaces will typically involve combinations of large areas of hard surfaces (for a range of ball games, rebound walls, etc.); smaller hard surfaced areas for hop-scotch, elastics and other small group games; large grassed area for running, ball games, athletics and other activities; play equipment for different aged students, catering for potentially large groups of students at any one time and providing a range of types of activities; small spaces with seating for individuals and small groups; smaller grassed areas for a variety of activities requiring intimate spaces; sand play areas, dirt, water and planting for creative activities; areas suitable for marbles, small cars and toys, digging, and play with loose materials and surfaces; areas for dramatic /role play which might include decks, cubbies and planting; shade and shelter, drinking water and other utilities; shrubs and trees for hiding, shelter, imaginative games; tables and seats for a range of group activities; gathering spaces for assemblies, performances and community activities, and quiet spaces as well as busy spaces.

Areas around buildings such as steps and stairs, doorways, and garden beds are valued play areas and will be appropriated by students for a range of activities. They should be considered when assessing the range of activities available.

Because schools have limited space, most areas need to be as multi-functional as possible to enable the best value to be obtained out of each part of the grounds. Schools need to consider all spaces within the grounds which are utilized by students, taking into account both safety and the play activities which they provide.

Schools from across the country are concerned that their often already inadequate outdoor playspaces are disappearing due to the spending program underway.

Whilst there is significant community concern being expressed around the country with the role out of this program, it is only our intention to comment on the impact on the outdoor play requirements in schools, which appear to have been totally ignored by both Commonwealth and State/Territory governments in the implementation of this program.

We ask that the Senate Standing Committee take steps to address our concerns as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely
Barbara Champion
Executive Director
The Playgrounds & Recreation Association of Victoria
Email prav@netspace.net.au
Web www.prav.asn.au