



The stone "tree root planter" helps separate stimuli and create lots of "edge" conditions. / Image: Aaron Lietz

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ISSUE

Seattle's Salmon Bay K-8 school has an autism inclusion program, and 20–30% of the school's students have ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). The existing playground with its focus on blacktop games and one compound play structure was a hostile environment for these and other kids who are easily overstimulated, distressed by direct contact, or just don't feel like playing games. The goal was to create spaces that feel safe and provide fun, engagement, and respite for all kids within the community, while also meeting the requirements of a high-volume public school playground—all on a limited budget. This project is an example of equitable distribution of resources to all.

## ENGAGEMENT

The Salmon Bay School Playground design is a result of effective meetings and workshops with engaged families as well as inclusive activities with kids and interviews with parents, teachers, and school principal. The design team engaged autism experts to develop design principles and answer the question—which characteristics make a playground autism-accessible?

## OUTCOME

Community goals and principles of design—such as separation of stimuli, access to natural materials and textures, and things to count—led to a highly effective design. Post-occupancy evaluation showed much improved engagement among kids with ASD, while parents, kids, and playground supervisors gave rave reviews.

## RESOURCES

In Seattle, there is a Department of Neighborhoods Matching Grant program for community-led projects. This grant program—along with a youth sports grant from King County and community donations—was the main source of funding for the project.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Working alongside the community as a full project partner, the project results reflect community priorities. But the project's success was also due to working with experts in the field of autism. In this public-school setting, access to teacher/experts was limited, so bringing in outside experts proved valuable.

### Salmon Bay K-8 Autism-Inclusive Playground

Location: Seattle, Washington

Project team: Johnson+Southerland