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*City of Rochester  
Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park  
Playground Renovation  
Survey # 1 Analysis*

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March 2024

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## **Project Overview**

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The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park Playground, located at 353 Court St across from The Strong, was last improved in 2004. The playground is nearing the end of its useful life and is in need of significant renovation. The water play features are no longer functional and the control equipment is outdated and incompatible with current City standards. Multiple pieces of play equipment have been vandalized, damaged, or broken with use. The safety surfacing and other surface finishes are failing and pose accessibility, safety, and aesthetic issues. Physical access and visibility into and out of the play area is limited by the surrounding concrete walls, landforms, and plantings, posing safety issues and limiting connectivity to the larger park and neighborhood. The deteriorating condition of the playground stands in stark contrast to all of the recent improvements to the park, the heightened level of programming and use, as well as the adjacent Inner Loop East development including The Strong expansion and the rising Neighborhood of Play.

## **Purpose of the Survey**

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A 14-question Playground Questionnaire gathered community input to directly inform playground renovation decisions on inclusive design, layout, equipment, accessibility, aesthetics, and safety. Distributed online in English and Spanish, the survey asked about demographics, existing playground use, improving inclusivity and access, perspectives from caregivers, children's preferences, and suggested additions like sensory play. Interactive design workshops also generated renewal ideas. Open from January 31 through February 14, the questionnaire aimed to incorporate inclusive community guidance into the renewed play space.

The survey asked the following fourteen questions:

1. What is your zip code?
2. What is your age?
3. Would you be using the playground or accompanying children?
4. What are the ages of children you would bring to the playground? (Check all that apply)
5. How often do you visit the MLK Playground?
6. What are your top two reasons for visiting the MLK Playground (Check all that apply)

7. How important is it to you that MLK Park Playground be more inclusive to individuals regardless of age or ability?
8. What features do you feel a park/playground should have to support a child or adult with physical limitations?
9. What features should a park/playground have to support a child or adult with autism or other sensory processing issues?
10. What features do you feel a park/playground should have to support a child or adult with cognitive challenges?

The following questions are to be completed by parents/caregivers:

11. What do you as a parent/caregiver like about the MLK Park Playground?
12. What features would you change about the existing MLK Park Playground?
13. What features do your children like about the existing MLK Park Playground?
14. What would you like to include for the renovation to ensure safety on the playground?

## **Summary of MLK Playground Renovation Survey Results**

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The community survey garnered robust engagement with over 90 responses, predominantly from neighborhoods surrounding the park.

Inclusivity rises to the top as a priority, with over 90% conveying accessible, multigenerational playground features enabling all to play together are important. Open feedback emphasized wheelchair access, developmental stages, and caregiver amenities to make the space usable for people of all abilities.

Renewing outdated play equipment is also crucial. Favorite existing features to expand include climbers, slides, sensory elements, and musical play integrating accessibility. Safety and visibility improvements would also reassure caregivers.

Beyond physical infrastructure, flexibility for community events and proximity to attractions like the Strong Museum of Play and public art maintain park vitality. Enhancing the playground while preserving gathering space and key connectivity can increase family visitation and uplift an underserved neighborhood area.

The survey responses highlights opportunities to fulfill the community's vision for an inclusive, inspiring playground promoting developmental skills and relationships. Keeping accessibility, safety, sensory-based learning, and creative social play central in planning decisions, materials

selection, and programming will ensure that the renewed space meets local families' needs for generations.

### Question 1: What is your zip code?

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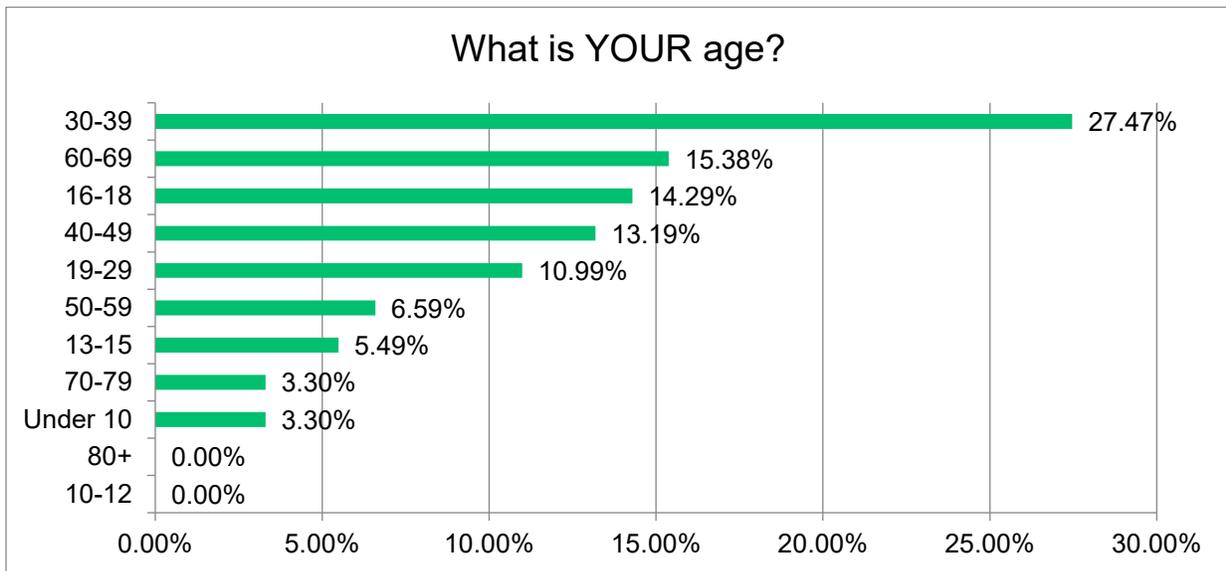
Most respondents—over 75%—listed zip codes corresponding to the Southeast area of Rochester proper. This includes the South Wedge (zip codes 14620, 14621), Beechwood/Browncroft (14618), Highland Park (14620), Swillburg (14610), and South Marketview Heights (14609) neighborhoods.

This concentration from the Southeast Rochester population conveys very locally engaged community stakeholders surrounding MLK Jr. Park, located in zip code 14607. Residents from the 14616, 14608, and 14611 zip codes encompassing areas just to the North and West of the Park also shared input. This proximity illustrates that planning an inclusive neighborhood space for families remains vital.

Additionally, 10-12% provided suburban zip codes outside Rochester, potentially representing Museum district visitors from Brighton (14618) and Pittsford (14534) or those interested in downtown attractions. A couple of respondents listed the Buffalo suburb of 14580 and a Virginia zip code of 26501, showing some willingness to engage remotely.

Understanding the very local neighborhood demographic benefiting from and stewarding MLK Park daily alongside the extended community utilizing its amenities can help balance the playground renewal with inclusive gathering features serving all visitors when they arrive.

## Question 2: What is your age?



The largest share of survey respondents, at 27.47%, were aged 30-39 years old. This indicates that many young parents provide key perspectives on playground use with elementary school-aged children.

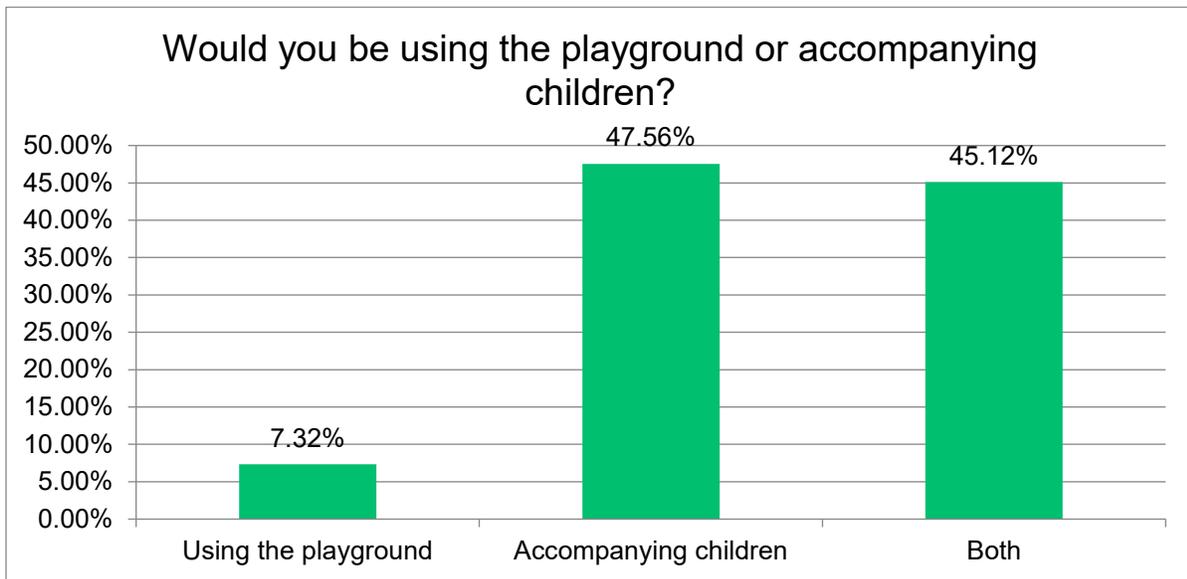
However, the survey garnered diverse age representation overall. 15.38% of responses came from seniors aged 60-69, showing older community members value sharing input on an intergenerational public space.

Notably, 14.29% of respondents were high school students aged 16-18. Engaging youth voice helps ensure the renewed playground appeals to and actively engages teenagers and younger kids.

Additional parent insights came from 13.19% of respondents aged 40-49. Younger adults aged 19-29 comprised 10.99%, granting an additional youth outlook.

In summary, the community survey achieved participation across a spectrum from students to retirees. This helps highlight playground priorities spanning developmental stages - from playground components supporting toddler gross motor play to gathering spaces for seniors. It also conveys aspirations for genuinely inclusive, welcoming play infrastructure accessible to all. Reaching diverse community stakeholders throughout the design process is recommended to realize this vision.

### Question 3: Would you be using the playground or accompanying children?



The strong majority of respondents - 92.68% - anticipate either accompanying children to the playground or using it themselves and supervising them.

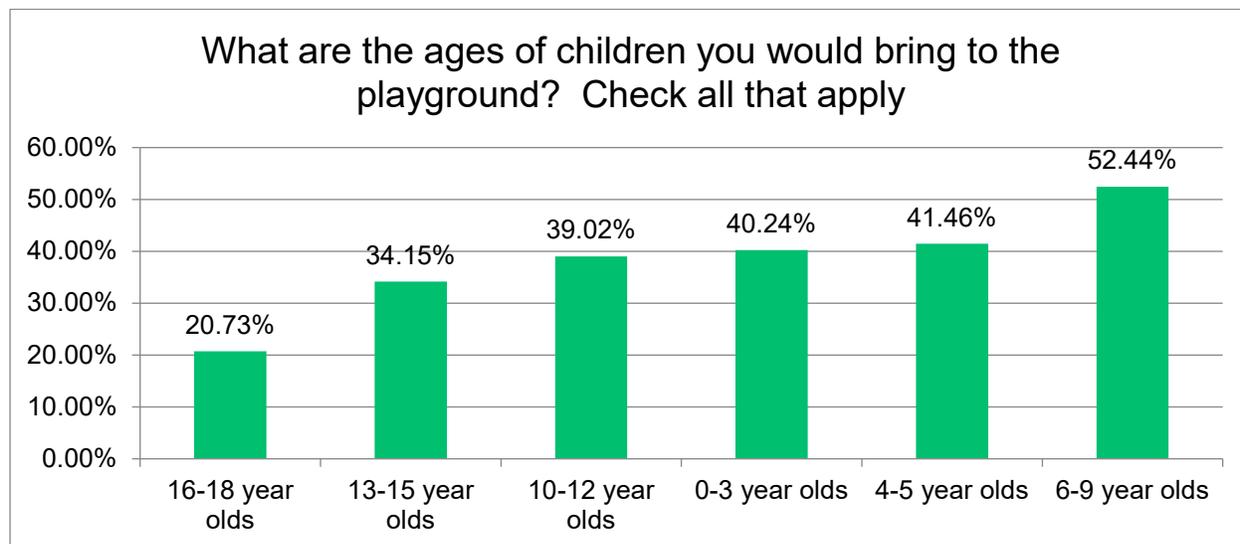
45.12% foresee utilizing the playground space for their use and supervising kids, representing almost half of the responses. 47.56% envision solely accompanying children there. Combined, over 90% are parents/caretakers who will access the playground while monitoring young visitors.

Only 7.32% see themselves using the playground but not necessarily supervising children. However, with nearly half expecting to play while supervising jointly, there is a desire to enjoy playground experiences as an intergenerational community space for all.

This conveys aspirations for a rich, dynamic playground environment integrating equipment, sensory features, and amenities that appeal to adult caretakers and the children they accompany. Realizing this vision requires balancing developmental play with opportunities to facilitate social connection. Open spaces and seating integrated alongside key equipment areas can enable joint use for recreation, supervision, and gathering.

Question 4: What are the ages of children you would bring to the playground? (Check all that apply)

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Question 4 received 82 responses on what ages of children community members would bring to the renewed MLK Playground. The broad age range interest highlights the need for inclusive, multigenerational play opportunities in the redesign.

The age range selected most frequently that respondents would bring to the renewed MLK Playground was 6–9-year-olds, chosen by 52.44%. This indicates a key demographic for playground equipment and activities catering to early elementary school-aged children. However, all ages received substantial interest of at least 20%, signaling the desire for inclusive, multigenerational play spaces. 41.46% would bring 4–5-year-olds, and 40.24% selected 0-3-year-olds. Over a third would also bring toddlers through teens aged 10-15.

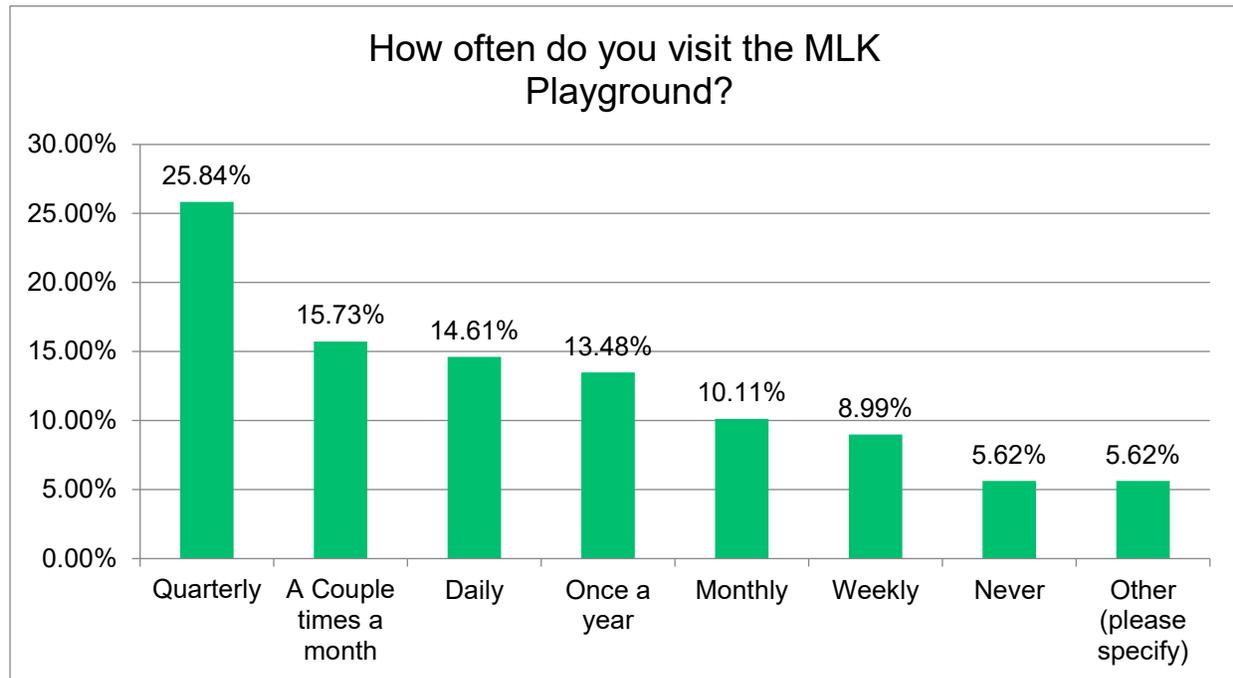
Only 20.73% anticipate bringing older high school teenagers 16-18 to the playground. While still substantial, this lower response relative to other age brackets presents an opportunity to incorporate unique design elements attracting youth and fostering continued community connection through the teenage years.

The community survey conveys aspirations for a playground serving the entire developmental spectrum - from toddlers to adolescents. Realizing this vision will require planning various accessible features supporting different sensory, motor, and social needs. Clustering some

equipment by developmental stage may help achieve balance. Creative programming can also sustain diverse age engagement.

### Question 5: How often do you visit the MLK Playground?

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The most common response was visiting the MLK Playground quarterly, selected by 25.84% of respondents. However, visit frequency varies widely overall.

14.61% visit daily, showing for some community members, the playground at MLK Park is part of their routine. An almost equal percentage (13.48%) visit only annually, potentially just attending special events.

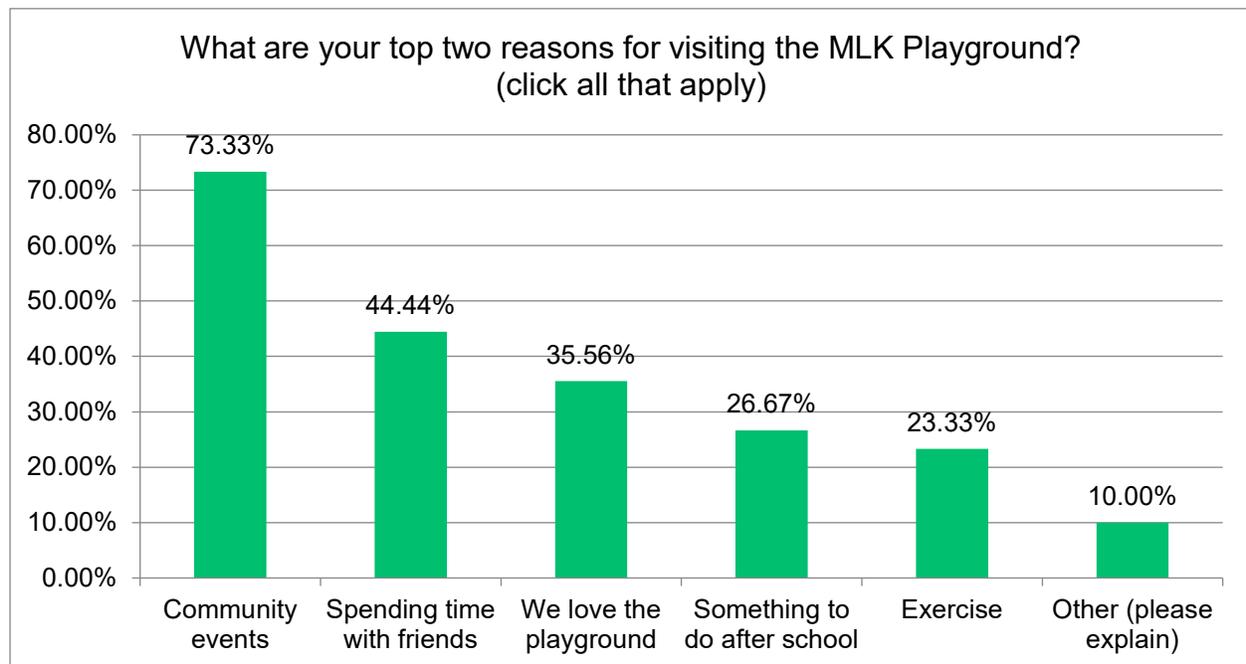
Occasional playground users comprise a segment as well - 15.73% come a couple of times a month, while 10.11% visit monthly. A smaller percentage (8.99%) frequent the space weekly.

This spread of playground visit frequency, from regular to rare, illustrates the need for renovation to better serve those already utilizing the space regularly while also potentially increasing broader community attraction through equipment updates and improved park connectivity.

Open-ended answers reinforce that visit motivation ties firmly to the playground's current condition. Some indicated they would visit more if the infrastructure was updated, and the park was cleaner and safer. Facility quality improvements could draw more consistent visitors.

In summary, there is untapped potential to grow consistent visitorship through an inspiring playground and park renewal catering to current park fans while welcoming new neighborhood users. Ongoing inclusive programming would also serve users across the frequency spectrum.

**Question 6: What are your top two reasons for visiting the MLK Playground (Check all that apply)**



The top reason for visiting MLK Playground is to attend community events, selected by 73.33% of respondents. This demonstrates that the space is a valued neighborhood gathering hub, event venue, and playground. Integrating flexibility for public functions should be kept in mind.

Nearly half (44.44%) also visit to spend time with friends, underscoring the playground's role as a space for social connection. Enabling group interactions through design further supports this objective.

One-third (35.56%) visit because they love the playground itself. However, this indicates that for many respondents, factors besides the play equipment attract them to the space. There is significant room to increase the playground's appeal through renovating outdated components.

Proximity also emerged as a theme - several open responses reference stopping by when near other attractions like the ice rink, Museum of Play, and fountain. Maintaining seamless neighborhood connectivity with the playground at the nexus allows it to thrive as a crossroads.

In summary, while upgrading playground equipment is crucial, preserving the flexible community space for events and continuing walkability linkages are also important to sustain vitality. Enhancing both social amenities and play offerings can increase park visitation.

### **Question 7: How important is it to you that MLK Park Playground be more inclusive to individuals regardless of age or ability?**

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The overwhelming majority of respondents feel it is important for the renewed Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park playground to be inclusive to all individuals regardless of age or ability.

67.03% indicated it is "very important" to them that the playground space becomes more inclusive. Another 25.27% felt inclusivity is "somewhat important." Over 92% of community members surveyed view playground inclusivity for all ages and abilities as at least somewhat important, if not very important, signaling this is a top priority.

Only 3.3% rated inclusivity as "not very important," and no respondents selected inclusivity as "not important at all." The weighted average score was 4.53 out of 5, further highlighting the community's desire for the playground renewal to focus intently on inclusive design and welcoming all users.

This aligns with the robust feedback received across survey questions on specific accessible and sensory design elements. The community sees the playground renovation as a key opportunity to transform the space into an inclusive destination catering to diverse needs. Realizing this inclusive vision will require universal design considerations shaping critical layout, equipment, and surface decisions throughout the process.

### Question 8: What features do you feel a park/playground should have to support a child or adult with physical limitations?



The top playground feature respondents felt would support people with physical limitations was playground components that can be used while staying in a wheelchair, selected by 77.78% of respondents. This indicates a strong desire for the renewed playground to enable wheelchair users to participate actively in play experiences alongside others.

Seamless transitions between sidewalks and playground surfacing and easy roll playground safety surfacing were also top priorities, selected by over 70% of respondents. This suggests accessibility for people with mobility devices is a high concern for them to access and navigate the play space comfortably.

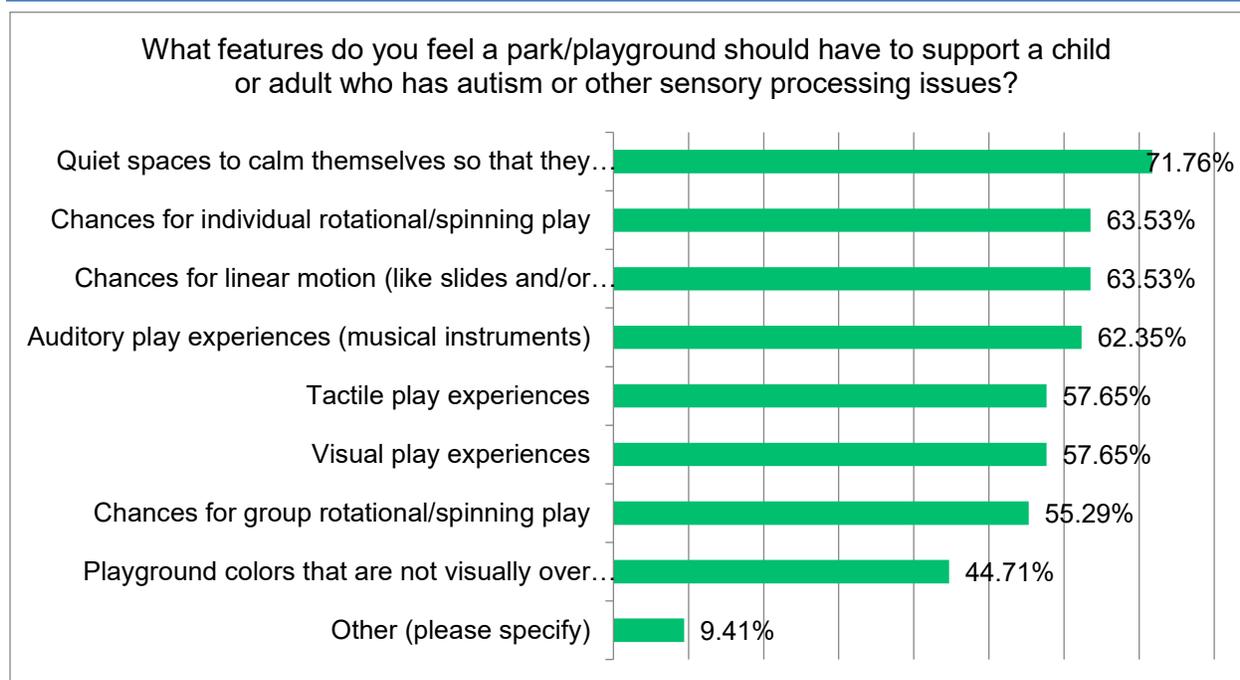
Over 60% of respondents want to see benches with space to park mobility devices beside them. Benches with back support and armrests were also desirable to over half of the respondents. This points to a need for rest areas for people with disabilities throughout the playground.

In open responses, key themes included focusing on inclusive features that enable all users to interact and play together rather than in separate spaces and accommodating caregivers by providing adult changing stations. Multiple comments emphasized equal, shared experiences

between children of all abilities. Hostile architecture, such as dividing benches and turning off power to rest areas, was called out as problematic. Unique ideas like accessible swings and wheelchair-accessible playground components were also proposed.

Overall, there is a strong desire for intentional playground features catering to diverse needs and abilities while promoting interaction and togetherness for an equal, shared play experience by all users. Accessibility considerations are critical, especially flexible use alongside friends and caregivers. In addition to physical access, the social understanding of fun, friendship, imagination, and community should be fostered through an inclusive design.

### **Question 9: What features do you feel a park/playground should have to support a child or adult with autism or other sensory processing issues?**



Quiet spaces emerged as the top priority, with over 70% of respondents wanting designated areas within the playground to calm sensory-overwhelmed children before re-entering play. This suggests that integrating breakout sensory spaces into the design could enable better regulation and more sustained, positive play experiences.

Almost two-thirds of respondents want playground components that provide chances for linear (slides, swings) and rotational/spinning motion, critical movement input for many neurodiverse children. Neurodiversity typically covers autism, ADD/ADHD, specific learning disabilities,

Tourette's syndrome, and other tic disorders. Individual and group spinning options were important to address varying needs.

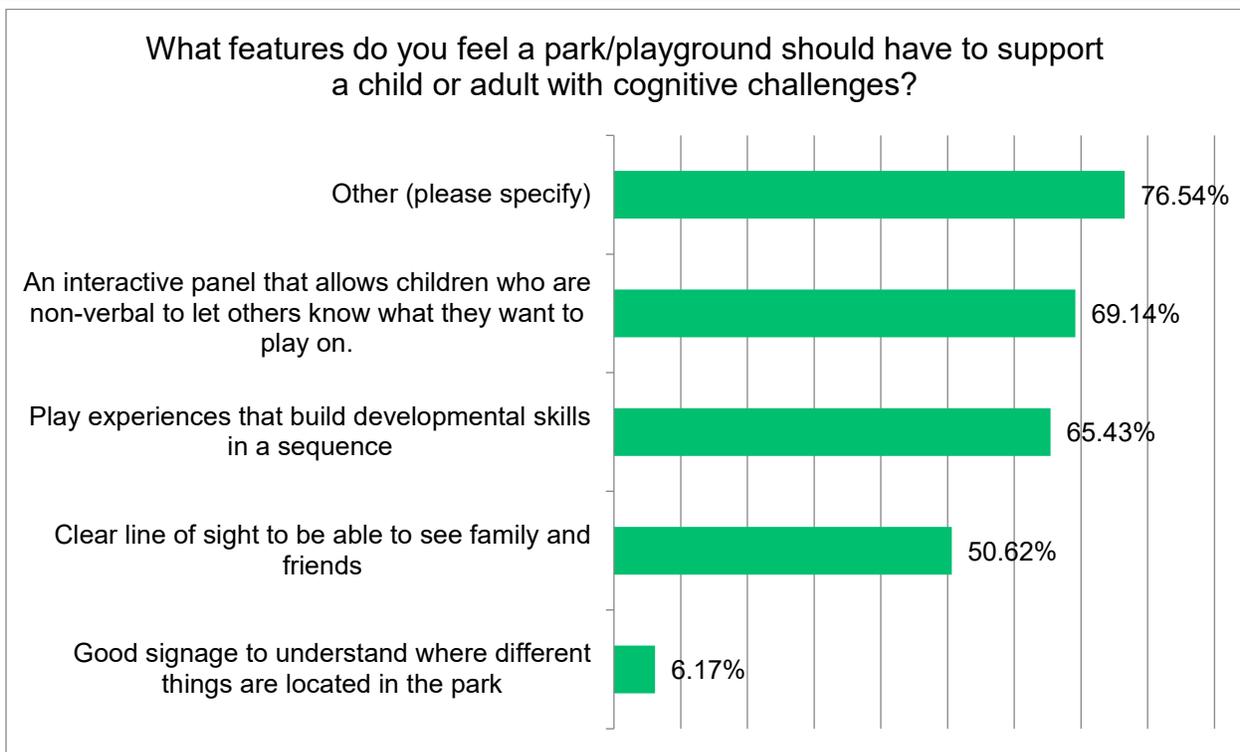
Just under 60% felt visual, auditory, and tactile play elements would be valuable, supporting multisensory engagement. Multiple comments emphasized various immersive sensory materials - textures, sounds, hands-on components - for users who are neurodiverse. Signage depicting an area for diverse users was also suggested.

Regarding aesthetics, keeping colors visually calming was moderately important (45% of respondents). However, the focus on sensory-based play and quiet spaces implies accommodating sensory processing differences takes priority over appearance.

Unique ideas included separating potentially noisy components from quiet areas and play elements and enabling a space for strength exercises. One insightful comment suggested improved inclusion of neurodiverse users through inclusive signage.

Overall, sensory design considerations focusing on modulation, sensory-motor experiences, and independent regulation are vital to supporting autistic and neurodiverse park visitors. Integrated quiet spaces and rich sensory play features can differentiate between overstimulation and positive, sustained play. The playground renewal should focus on sensory/regulation support infrastructure before aesthetic concerns.

Question 10: What features do you feel a park/playground should have to support a child or adult with cognitive challenges?



Having a clear line of sight to see family and friends was the most desired feature, selected by over 75% of respondents. This indicates visibility and the ability to locate/connect with caregivers is vital for playground users with cognitive differences.

Good signage was also important to 69% of respondents to understand where different components are located. Straightforward navigation assistance enables better spatial orientation and park utilization.

An interactive communication panel for nonverbal children to indicate play interests was valued by 65% of respondents. Enabling expression and exchange for users with communication challenges promotes engagement and relationship-building through play.

Unique ideas included providing communication devices within the park for user borrowing and easily navigable spaces. Speed bumps around the park for traffic calming were suggested twice.

Open comments deferred to experts on appropriate cognitive accessibility features, indicating an opportunity to educate and involve disability advocates throughout the design process.

Overall, spatial orientation supports like clear sightlines, navigational assistance, and communication aids facilitate playground access and social connections for children with cognitive and developmental challenges. Fostering interpersonal interactions through design promotes an inclusive, welcoming play experience.

### **Question 11. The following questions were to be completed by parents/caregivers: What do you as a parent/caregiver like about the MLK Park Playground?**

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Question 11 received 53 open-ended responses from parents and caregivers on what they like about the MLK Park Playground. This robust qualitative feedback provides valuable insights to inform the design process. Here are some key themes heard from parents and caregivers.

#### **Location**

By far, the most common theme was appreciation of the convenient, central location of the MLK Park playground. Many respondents like the proximity to other local attractions and destinations like the Strong National Museum of Play, Roc Holiday Village events, and downtown. Some called out the peaceful community feel and proximity to home.

#### **Unique Features**

The unique design and play experiences were commonly enjoyed - the large climbing structures, long slides embedded into the landscape, and musical elements like the echo spot and splash pad. Parents feel it offers diverse, interactive play not found at a typical playground. However, multiple comments indicated these features also need updating.

#### **Safety and Security**

Several responses focused on wanting clear lines of sight, security cameras, on-site staff presence, and other safety enhancements for peace of mind. Cleanliness was also raised.

## **Inclusivity**

A few parents/caregivers specified liking the open space and room for all to play. Some suggested improvements like wheelchair accessibility. Comments demonstrate the opportunity to make the playground more welcoming and usable for all.

While parents appreciate the central location and unique playground design, the space needs renewal to update unsafe areas and better serve the community's play needs. Safety, cleanliness, accessibility, and security rise to the top as areas for improvement in playground redesign.

## **Question 12: What features would you change about the existing MLK Park Playground?**

Question 12 received 59 open-ended responses on desired changes to the existing MLK Park Playground. This intense engagement highlights areas the community sees as top priorities for improving the valued public space.

### **Safety and Maintenance**

The most common theme was addressing safety issues and poor maintenance. Many responses called out broken equipment, unsafe surfaces, steep areas, and visibility concerns needing improvement for child safety. Cleanliness, litter/needles/glass removal, and better patrolling were suggested.

### **Accessibility and Inclusiveness**

Numerous comments asked for expanded accessibility and inclusiveness for all ages and abilities to play together. Ideas included wheelchair access, developmental skill-building play, and more swings. Some wanted separate areas catering to specific ages.

### **Play Equipment and Features**

Many people desire updated equipment and play experiences to replace outdated components. Unique playground features were valued to maintain the diversity of play. Water play integration, especially splash pads, was commonly suggested. More seating for caregivers was also raised.

### **Amenities and Landscaping**

Additional amenities like public art, motivational quotes, music elements, and imaginative themes were added. More trees/plants and interesting walkways could enhance the space. A few suggested changing or expanding the footprint.

In summary, renewal focusing on safety, inclusive access, and new, creative play experiences are the top priorities for redesign. Maintaining the playground to serve community needs over time is critical. The outdated, hazardous equipment and surfaces require urgent replacement.

### Question 13: What features do your children like about the existing MLK Park Playground?

The question “What features do your children like about the existing MLK Park Playground?” received 46 open-ended responses on which current playground elements are most enjoyed. Identifying these favorites provides critical insights on what to expand and enhance in the redesign.

The playground's climbing structures and slides are the favorites children enjoy most often, referenced multiple times in responses. The large tower dome climber and its long, winding slides are especially popular play experiences kids return to repeatedly.

Beyond climbing and sliding elements, the open spaces to run and existing water features enable active play that kids seek out at this park. Unique features like the musical instruments, mirror wall, and rubber tire wall notably stand out as interactive elements that add novelty.

However, many parents indicated there is a need for more equipment or experiences to engage their children's interests. Several specified their children do not enjoy the playground in its present state, highlighting the need for an inspiring, welcoming renewal catering to diverse ages and abilities.

The key opportunity emerges for the redesign to expand the boundless climbing, sliding, and running possibilities while integrating new imaginative, sensory, and musical experiences that made this playground special initially. Accessible, developmentally appropriate play features facilitating interaction between all children should anchor the playground's revival.

Overall, the design should focus first on safely expanding and updating the signature equipment - the climbers, spinners, and slides - rather than introducing new components. Enhancing favorites by increasing accessibility, sensory qualities, and play value can bring inclusive, dynamic family play back to this valued neighborhood space.

## Question 14: What would you like to include for the renovation to ensure safety on the playground?

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Question 14 received 42 open-ended responses on desired safety enhancements. Integrating these community perspectives can help guide the development of an engaging yet secure play space.

### Visibility

The most common safety need was clear lines of sight throughout the playground, enabling caregiver supervision. Removing barriers, opening sightlines, and planning an accessible layout allow for monitoring children's play. Integrating safety elements like lighting, cameras, and emergency phones improves visibility.

### Layout and Boundaries

Suggestions included playground perimeters/fencing to prevent kids from wandering and clear boundaries of climbing areas. Access control, like limited entry/exit points, was raised, but some cautioned against over-structuring. Visible trash cans could deter litter and other hazards.

### Surfaces

Soft, padded surfacing across the playground can prevent injuries from falls. Seamless transitions and grab bars promote accessibility and stability. Prioritizing a safe surface design and maintenance helps ensure safety.

### Inclusiveness

A few responses focused on developmental skill-building through educational "safety town" structures. Making experiences welcoming and safe for children of all abilities, not just physical safety, also emerged.

An overarching theme was balancing safety with opportunities for age-appropriate challenges and independence. Making the space too restrictive limits the park's ability to promote appropriate risk-taking during natural play and exploration. The design should enable caretaker monitoring while allowing children freedom.

## Conclusion

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The community survey on the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park Playground renovation highlighted the playground's importance as a neighborhood gathering space and identified key opportunities to create a more inclusive, inspiring, and safe play area. Respondents overwhelmingly prioritized accessibility for all ages and abilities, emphasizing the need for wheelchair access, sensory elements, and caregiver amenities. Renewing outdated equipment while enhancing favorite features like climbers and slides, along with adding musical components and imaginative themes, can provide the diverse challenges and experiences an inclusive playground needs.

Layout and amenities promoting a secure play environment are also vital, including but not limited to clear sightlines, seamless surfacing, and fencing for caregivers' peace of mind. However, balancing safety with age-appropriate risks and independent exploration is key to facilitate children's growth and social connection. By keeping inclusivity, engagement, and safety at the forefront of design decisions, the redesigned playground can fulfill the community's aspirations for an inspiring, welcoming space that meets local families' needs for generations to come.