

Community Use of School Property in Missouri



A Remedy for Play Deserts



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This resource was created by KC Healthy Kids with assistance from Missouri Association of Councils of Government and Missouri School Boards' Association.

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About KC Healthy Kids

KC Healthy Kids rallies the people in our communities to improve access to affordable fresh food and safe places to walk and play. When our neighborhoods support healthy habits, we are less likely to suffer from obesity, which is linked to Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and poor mental health. To make a lasting impact, we shape policies that improve our food system and physical surroundings, and ultimately, the places where we live, work, learn and play.



A Remedy for Play Deserts

You may have already heard of a food desert, but what about a play desert? A **play desert** is a neighborhood that lacks convenient access to safe places to play, like public parks. Convenient access means kids can walk or bike to a park within a half-mile of where they live. People who have parks and recreation facilities in their neighborhoods are more likely to be physically active and have lower chances of being overweight (*Pediatrics* 2006).

Low-income neighborhoods often have fewer parks and recreational facilities, and families in these neighborhoods may not have the resources to access private recreation facilities. A city's plan, zoning laws or budget may not allow for building a new park. In this case, the problem needs a collaborative solution.



Community use of school property can improve access to safe places to play for kids living in play deserts. Community use of school property agreements allow the public to use school recreational amenities like playgrounds and ball fields.

Over 500 elementary and secondary school districts in Missouri allow community use of some kind. However, scheduling, liability risks and funding often limit community use of school property.

KC Healthy Kids offers policy resources and best practices to empower communities and schools to partner through community use agreements. This guide will help you identify play deserts and show you how to improve playability using community use of school property. There are three main steps:

- 1. Create a Map**
- 2. School Assessment**
- 3. Write a Report**

If you need any assistance during the process, please contact KC Healthy Kids. Our staff can talk with you about our resources or help with any problems that come up.

Find Community Use of School Property Resources:

KC Healthy Kids
(816) 523-5353
kchealthykids.org

Public Health Law Center
(651) 290-7506
publichealthlawcenter.org

1. Create a Map

A play desert map allows you to identify neighborhoods that do not have access to parks but do have schools nearby. A sample play desert map can be found in Appendix A. Here is how you can create your own play desert map.

Contact Your Planning or GIS Department

You will need to work with your local or regional planning department or GIS department to create a play desert map. Share this guide with them so they can locate and assemble the data you need.

Find Your Regional Planning Commission:

Missouri Association of Councils of Government
(573) 634-5337
macogonline.org

Find GIS Services:

Missouri Geographical Information Services Advisory Council
(573) 526-7746
mgisac.org

Collect the Data

Ask your local or regional planning department or GIS department to follow these steps to create your play desert map.

1. Locate Parks and Schools. Identify the location of parks and schools on the play desert map. This data may be available at the local level through the parks department or school district or at the regional level through a regional planning commission. Data from local sources is more likely to be accurate than state or national level data.

Find Data Sources:

Missouri Park and Recreation Association
(573) 636-3828
mopark.org

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
(573) 751-4212
dese.mo.gov

Missouri Spatial Data Information Services
(573) 882-2149
msdis.missouri.edu

U.S. Census Bureau
census.gov

2. Clean Up the Data. The park location data will likely need to be cleaned up. For example, cemeteries, golf courses and boulevards might be listed as park subtypes. These are not safe places for kids to play and should not be included as park locations.

3. Make a Buffer. Highlight areas of the city that are **not** located within a half-mile of a park. Any area that is highlighted is a potential play desert.

4. Add Demographic Data. Create a snapshot of the community by including variables such as population density, the percentage of population under 18 years of age and household poverty.

Identify Play Deserts

Now that you have your play desert map, locate play deserts with schools in or near the neighborhood. As you move through this guide, you will evaluate play deserts based on the following factors to identify opportunities for community use of school property.

1. Demographic Data. Does the neighborhood have a high percentage of kids? Is the neighborhood low-income?

2. School Proximity. Is there a school within convenient walking or biking distance?

3. School Assessment. What amenities does the school have to offer? Do school policies allow community use of school property?

4. Neighborhood Partnerships. Are there neighborhood associations or local organizations to partner with?

If you find a play desert but there are no schools with recreational amenities nearby, community use of school property will not be a useful option. Look to organizations like the YMCA provide off-site programming. Contact your local YMCA for more information.

Find Your YMCA

Missouri State Alliance of YMCAs
(573) 230-7811
missouriymcas.org

2. School Assessment

Playability Checklist

Once you have found a school within or near a play desert, use the playability checklist template in Appendix B to identify and rate recreational amenities that could provide safe places for kids to play. Make notes about your observations and take photos to go along with the checklist.

Here are a few things to consider:

- Elementary, middle and high schools will have different kinds of recreational amenities. For example, an elementary school may have a playground while a high school has a track.
- If recreational amenities are indoors, they may not be accessible outside of school hours. This includes gymnasiums as well as restrooms and water fountains.
- Outdoor recreational amenities are often fenced in and may be locked. While this is for students safety, it does not allow kids to access the amenities outside of school hours.

Review School Policies

Review school district policies and procedures to determine if changes need to be made to allow community use of school property. Identify the policy template the school district follows. School policies typically follow the Missouri School Boards' Association or the Missouri Consultants for Education templates. If community use policies exist, make sure they are up to date according to current best practices.

Find Your School District and Model Policies

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
(573) 751-4212
dese.mo.gov

Missouri Consultants for Education
(314) 878-5600 or (816) 322-0870
moconed.com

Missouri School Board Association
(573) 445-9920
msbanet.org

These resources provide best practices for reviewing and revising school district policies and procedures:

- [A Checklist](#)
- [Best Practices: School Policy for Community Use in Missouri](#)
- [Working with School Districts](#)
- [Community Use Contact List by District](#)

3. Write a Report

Identify Stakeholders

You have done great work! Now it is time to put together a report to share your findings. Make a list of stakeholders you could partner with to create a community use of school property agreement. Stakeholders could include:

- Schools
- Neighborhood associations
- Community organizations
- Churches
- Community centers

Assemble the Report

Use the playability report template in Appendix C to bring all the pieces together. You can find a sample playability report in Appendix D. Include the following materials with your report:

- Play desert map
- Demographic data
- Playability checklist
- Photos
- Policy review

Make the Case

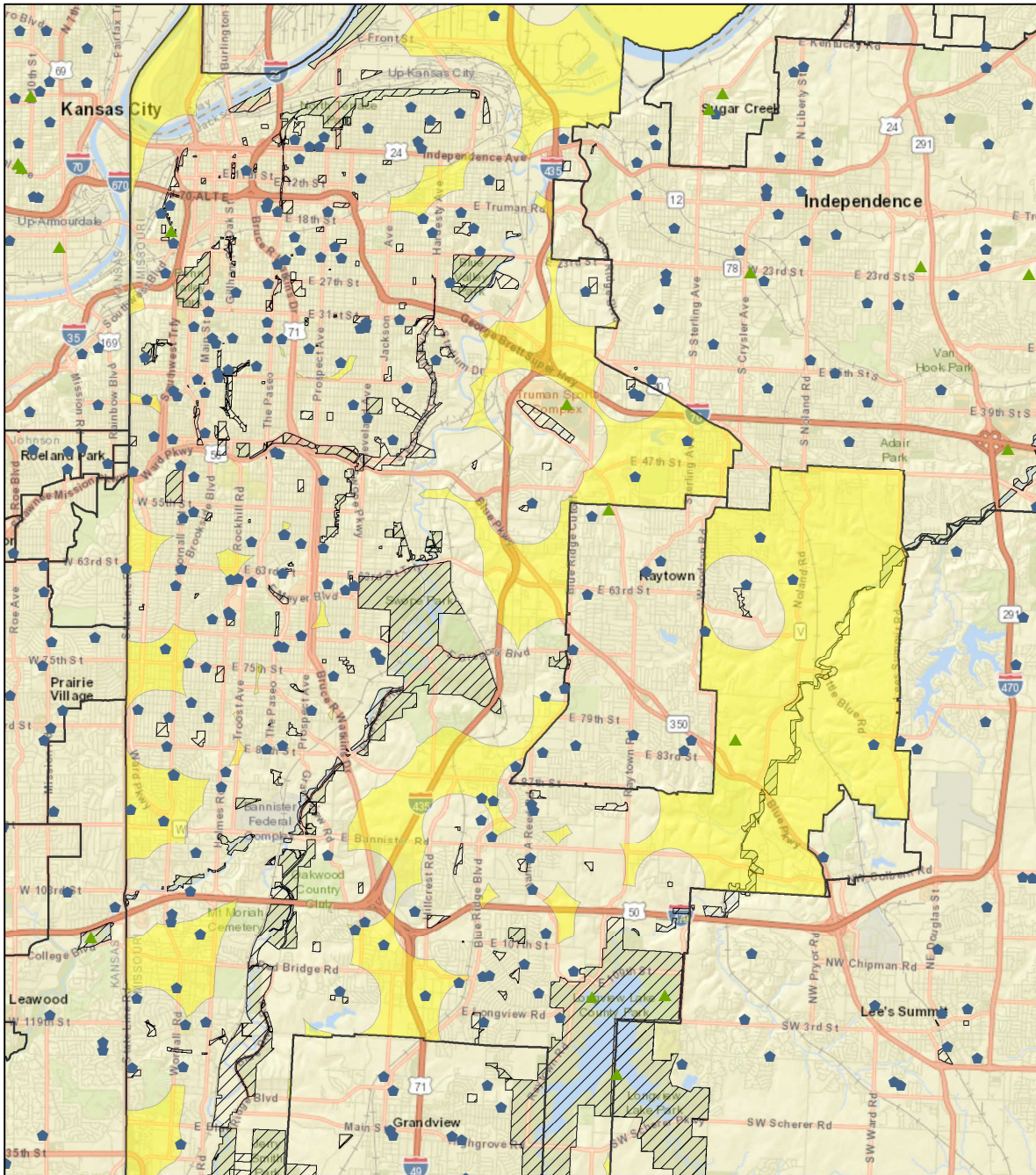
Present your playability report to stakeholders along with resources from KC Healthy Kids and Public Health Law Center on community use of school property. The following resources cover everything from insurance to funding to scheduling:

- [A Guide to Implementation](#)
- [Demystifying Missouri Liability and Insurance](#)
- [Paying for Community Use](#)
- [Best Practices for Scheduling](#)

Learn what school administrators and end users say about community use and read their success stories:

- [School Administrator and End User Survey Report](#)
- [Success Stories](#)

Appendix A: Sample Play Desert Map



- Play Desert Map
 Kansas City, Missouri
- ▲ Park Facilities
 - Schools
 - Not within 0.5 mi. of park
 - Parks

Appendix B: Playability Checklist Template

Neighborhood:

School:

Describe the school grounds and surrounding neighborhood:

Use this checklist to identify and rate the condition of recreational amenities at the nearby school. If the school does not have one of these amenities, leave it blank. Include additional information in the notes section, like “restrooms are not accessible on weekends” or “benches and picnic tables for seating.”

Amenities:	Condition:			Notes:
ADA Accessibility	1	2	3	
Ball Field	1	2	3	
Basketball Court	1	2	3	
Bike Rack	1	2	3	
Lighting	1	2	3	
Outdoor Fitness Equipment	1	2	3	
Parking	1	2	3	
Pedestrian Access	1	2	3	
Picnic Tables	1	2	3	
Playground	1	2	3	
Restroom	1	2	3	
Running Track	1	2	3	
Seating	1	2	3	
Shade Trees	1	2	3	
Shelter	1	2	3	
Signage	1	2	3	
Tennis Court	1	2	3	
Trash Cans	1	2	3	
Walking Path	1	2	3	
Water Fountain	1	2	3	

Condition:

1 - poor condition, unsafe for use, serious improvements needed

2 - average condition, safe for use, some improvements needed

3 - good condition, safe for use, little wear and tear

Appendix C: Playability Report Template

(Insert neighborhood name.)

People who have parks and recreation facilities in their neighborhoods are more likely to be physically active and have lower chances of being overweight (*Pediatrics* 2006). But some kids live in a play desert, neighborhoods that lack convenient access to safe places to play. Convenient access means kids can walk or bike to a park within a half-mile of where they live. Community use of school property, like playgrounds and ball fields, can improve access to safe places to play for kids living in play deserts.

This report gives an overview of the neighborhood, identifies a play desert and a nearby school, and provides resources to establish a community use of school property agreement to provide a safe place for kids to play.

Neighborhood Boundaries

(Identify neighborhood boundaries and include a map.)

Demographic Data

(List and describe demographic data, like age of population and household poverty.)

School Proximity

(Locate play desert and nearby school. Include a map or photo.)

School Assessment

(Describe school surroundings and list recreational amenities. Include photos and the playability checklist. Summarize school district policies and procedures.)

These resources provide best practices for reviewing and revising school district policies and procedures:

- [A Checklist](#)
- [Best Practices: School Policy for Community Use in Missouri](#)
- [Working with School Districts](#)
- [Community Use Contact List by District](#)

Neighborhood Partnerships

(Identify potential partners like churches, neighborhood associations, community organizations as well as public and private amenities.)

The following resources will guide you through the process of implementing a community use agreement and cover everything from insurance to funding to scheduling:

- [A Guide to Implementation](#)
- [Demystifying Missouri Liability and Insurance](#)
- [Paying for Community Use](#)
- [Best Practices for Scheduling](#)

Learn what school administrators and end users say about community use and read their success stories:

- [School Administrator and End User Survey Report](#)
- [Success Stories](#)

If you need assistance in implementing these resources or would like to share your success story, please contact KC Healthy Kids.

Additional Resources

KC Healthy Kids
(816) 523-5353
kchealthykids.org

Appendix D: Sample Playability Report

Foxtown West Neighborhood

People who have parks and recreation facilities in their neighborhoods are more likely to be physically active and have lower chances of being overweight (*Pediatrics* 2006). But some kids live in a play desert, neighborhoods that lack convenient access to safe places to play. Convenient access means kids can walk or bike to a park within a half-mile of where they live. Community use of school property, like playgrounds and ball fields, can improve access to safe places to play for kids living in play deserts.

This report gives an overview of the neighborhood, identifies a play desert and a nearby school, and provides resources to establish a community use of school property agreement to provide a safe place for kids to play.

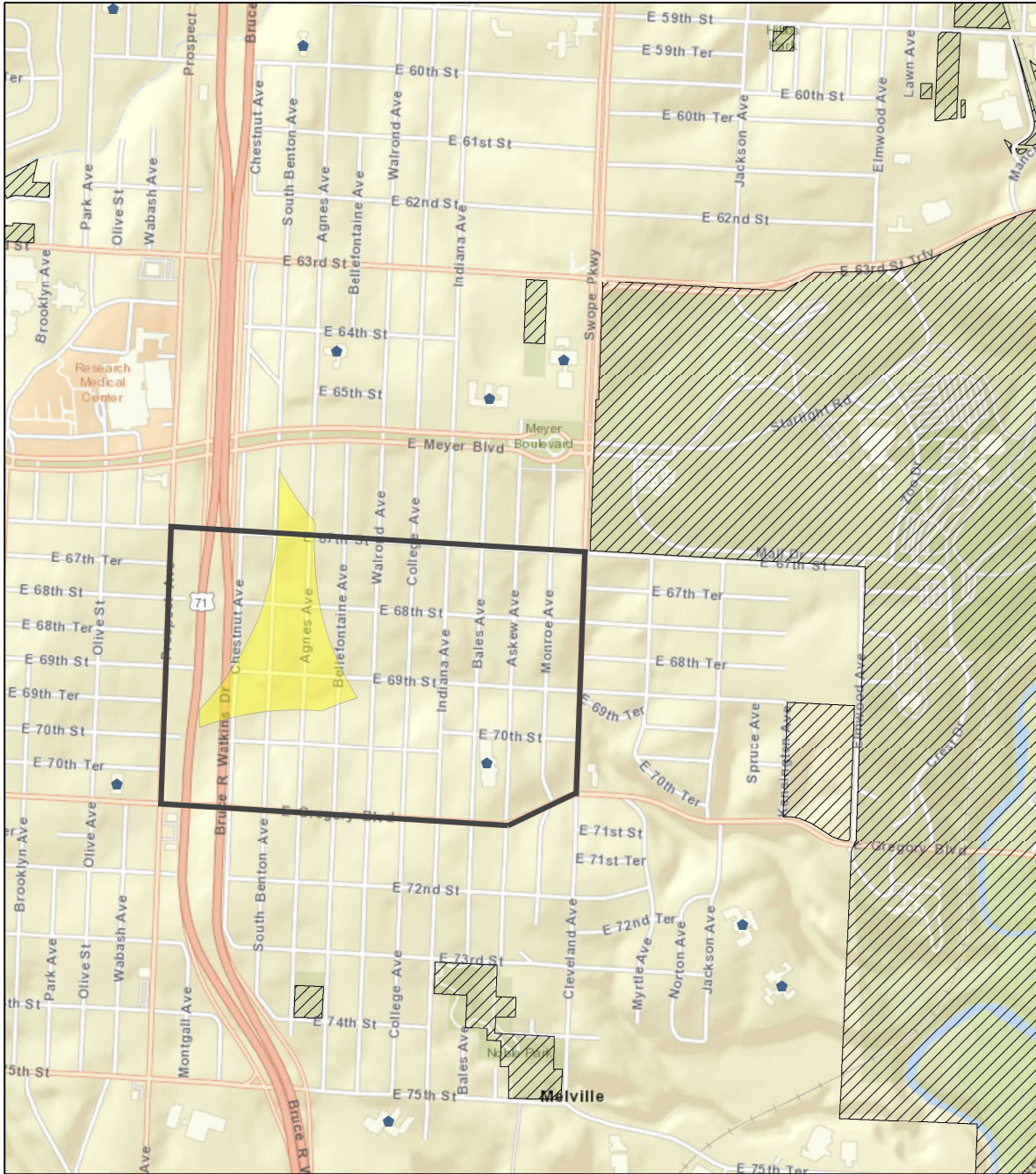
Neighborhood Boundaries

The Foxtown West Neighborhood Association is located between E 67th Street and E Gregory Boulevard, north to south, and Cleveland Avenue and Prospect Avenue, east to west. Bruce R. Watkins Drive/Highway 71 runs along the western edge of the neighborhood. There is a play desert in the northwest part of the neighborhood. The play desert map is on the following page.

Demographic Data

- Depending on the area, up to 6-12 people per acre
- Up to 25% and up to 50% of the population is under the age of 18, depending on area
- 26-50% of households live below the poverty line

The neighborhood has a dense population, compared to Kansas City overall. Up to one-half of the neighborhood population is under the age of 18, so there are kids who would benefit from having access to a safe place to play. The neighborhood qualifies as low-income, so there may be a disparity in access to parks and recreation facilities. Based on this information, the neighborhood is an area of opportunity for community use of school property.



Play Desert Map
Foxtown West Neighborhood

- ▲ Park Facilities
- ◆ Schools
- Not within 0.5 mi. of park
- ▨ Parks

School Proximity

As seen on the neighborhood map, a play desert is roughly located between E 67th Street and E 70th Street, north to south, and Bellefontaine Avenue and Chestnut Avenue, east to west. The closest school is Benjamin Banneker Elementary located at 7050 Askew Avenue. The school is accessible to all of the neighborhood, except the small strip on the west side of Bruce R. Watkins Drive/Highway 71. Because of the amount and speed of traffic, it is unsafe for kids to cross this road without adult supervision.



Bruce R. Watkins Drive/Highway 71 at Gregory Boulevard

School Assessment

Benjamin Banneker Elementary is a neighborhood school in the south zone of the Kansas City Public Schools district. The school is surrounded by single family homes. The streets are residential and have sidewalks. Gregory Boulevard runs along the southern edge of school property. Gregory Boulevard is a busy street, but there is a crossing signal at Bales Avenue. Kids were observed using the crossing signal to walk home from school one afternoon.

Benjamin Banneker Elementary has several recreational amenities. There is a playground with climbing features and slides next to an asphalt court with basketball goals. There is a large ball field with a soccer goal and a baseball backstop. There is a set of swings across the ball field.



Playground at Benjamin Banneker Elementary School

There are no benches, lights, restrooms or water fountains outside. While the recreational area is ADA accessible, there is no ADA playground equipment. The recreational area is fenced in and there are shade trees along the fence. The gates are locked prohibiting public access during and after school hours. The complete playability checklist is at the end of this report.



Playground at Benjamin Banneker Elementary School

Kansas City Public Schools models district policies and procedures off of Missouri School Boards' Association recommendations. The association updated their policies and procedures in 2017 to be more conducive to community use of school property. School district policies regarding community use of district facilities were last revised in 2015 and need to be updated.

These resources provide best practices for reviewing and revising school district policies and procedures:

- [A Checklist](#)
- [Best Practices: School Policy for Community Use in Missouri](#)
- [Working with School Districts](#)
- [Community Use Contact List by District](#)

Neighborhood Partnerships

There are churches and community groups in the neighborhood and public and private amenities nearby. Potential stakeholders are:

- Al Haqq Islamic Center
- Benjamin Banneker Elementary School Advisory Committee
- Clever Family YMCA
- Foxtown West Neighborhood Association
- Kansas City Community Gardens
- Kansas City Public Library Southeast Branch
- Lakeside Nature Center
- Local Investment Commission
- Memorial Christian Outreach
- New Day Tabernacle Ministry
- New Life Church of Christ
- Southeast Community Center
- Unity Southeast in Kansas City

Partnerships between Benjamin Banneker Elementary School, the neighborhood association, local churches and organizations will bring together the people and resources necessary to create a community use agreement.

The following resources will guide you through the process of implementing a community use agreement and cover everything from insurance to funding to scheduling:

- [A Guide to Implementation](#)
- [Demystifying Missouri Liability and Insurance](#)
- [Paying for Community Use](#)
- [Best Practices for Scheduling](#)

Learn what school administrators and end users say about community use and read their success stories:

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Additional Resources

KC Healthy Kids
(816) 523-5353
Kchealthykids.org

Foxtown West Playability Checklist

Neighborhood: Foxtown West

School: Benjamin Banneker Elementary

Address: 7050 Askew Ave. off of Gregory Blvd.

Description of the school and surrounding neighborhood:

- Neighborhood school
- Single family homes in neighborhood
- Playground fenced in and locked
- Gregory Blvd. - busy street, sidewalks on both sides of street, crossing signal
- Askew Ave. - sidestreet, sidewalks on one side of street
- 70th Street - sidestreet, sidewalks on one side of street
- Bales Ave. - sidestreet, sidewalks on one side of street

Amenities:	Condition:			Notes:
ADA Accessibility	1	2	3	access, but no play equipment
Ball Field	1	2	3	soccer goal, baseball backstop
Basketball Court	1	2	3	asphalt court with goals
Bike Rack	1	2	3	
Lighting	1	2	3	
Outdoor Fitness Equipment	1	2	3	
Parking	1	2	3	school parking lot, street parking
Pedestrian Access	1	2	3	no pedestrian signs
Picnic Tables	1	2	3	
Playground	1	2	3	climbing features, slides, swings
Restroom	1	2	3	
Running Track	1	2	3	
Seating	1	2	3	
Shade Trees	1	2	3	shade trees along fence
Shelter	1	2	3	
Signage	1	2	3	
Tennis Court	1	2	3	
Trash Cans	1	2	3	
Walking Path	1	2	3	
Water Fountain	1	2	3	

Condition:

1 - poor condition, unsafe for use, serious improvements needed

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3 - good condition, safe for use, little wear and tear