

# Bijou putting the community back in school



Proposed playground equipment for Bijou Community School.  
Photos/Provided

**By Kathryn Reed**

The “community” in Bijou Community School is real; it’s not just a name.

In part this has to do with how the South Lake Tahoe school site is used. It is the only park-like area with grass and a playground between Stateline and the city’s recreation center on Rufus Allen Boulevard.

And the community aspect is demonstrated with the support the school receives from people with children at the school and community members with no familial connection.

While it is a school, go around back and the park setting is evident. It has been a gradual transformation in the last few years. Gone is the dirt field where children would play. A large grassy area is now fenced off from the ball field. A fitness course has been installed. The blacktop has been repaved.



Children play on outdated equipment at Bijou Community School. Photo/Kathryn Reed

And it's not just kids playing here during school. People in the neighborhood use Bijou long after the last bell of the day and on weekends.

But what sticks out is the play equipment – some of which was first installed in the 1950s. It's old and doesn't meet today's safety standards.

A fundraising effort is under way to have all of that taken out and replaced with state-of-the-art play structures. It's estimated that \$100,000 will be needed to buy what parents groups want.

Next week is the annual walk-a-thon. It's usually a \$20,000 moneymaker. The goal is to double that amount this year and earmark all of it for playground equipment. Ideally, the equipment would be installed next spring.

Edgewood Companies has pledged \$5,000, \$20,000 in grants have

been secured, and two anonymous donors have each committed \$5,000 toward the project.

“It should be a community effort,” parent Kathy Haven said of the playground project. She has been spearheading this project and has a team of parents helping solicit donations.

The Bijou PTA is a nonprofit that has been able to rally parents and others to get a ton of work done that the school district doesn't have the funds to do. This includes the benches that are now around the school and some of the landscaping.

Now, even the front of the school looks inviting.

A dry lakebed that was put in this last year was tested in August during a deluge. There's a good chance had it not been there the rainwater would have reached classrooms. Last weekend volunteers were cleaning out the debris so it will be able to sustain the next downpour or spring runoff.

Bijou gets a substantive amount of volunteer time from parents. To have a child in the two-way immersion program one parent must spend 30 minutes a week in their child's classroom and 30 minutes on one of 14 committees. There are 260 students in the Spanish-English program.

The committees are designed to help the whole school, not just TWI kids. They range from reading in English or Spanish at the library to working during recess to doing landscaping.

TWI started just in kindergarten, so there were 20 volunteers. Now the program has multiple classrooms in grades K-6, which has grown the volunteer pool. There are 60 new volunteers starting each fall as kindergarten TWI parents come onboard.

Bijou has also benefitted from taxpayer funded Measure G, Lake Tahoe Educational Foundation, Rotary of South Lake Tahoe, and a slew of businesspeople who have donated supplies and work

hours to get things done.

Another example of Bijou being a community school is the number of after school clubs that nearly two-thirds of the students partake in. This year there are 18 clubs with 356 students participating.

Parents volunteer their time by sharing their expertise with groups of kids. Clubs range from cooking to cycling to ballet.

To donate to Bijou's playground fund, email [khaven@gmail.com](mailto:khaven@gmail.com).