

## 2011 Best Practices in Play | GoPlay Initiative Starkville, Mississippi

### Overview

The GoPlay Initiative integrates community-wide resources to create playful living and inspire a spirit of discovery. GoPlay volunteers have partnered with the Starkville School District to complete projects that include a new playground, outdoor classroom, and learning garden. GoPlay projects will expand in the fall of 2011 to include partnerships with the Starkville Parks Commission and encourage play for all residents.

### Program Initiation

In the August of 2009, Starkville School District parent volunteer, Heather Carson recognized the need for a playground at Henderson Ward Stewart Elementary. Ms. Carson quickly found many who shared her interest and by September a team consisting of District administrators, building principals, teachers, and community volunteers launched the GoPlay Initiative campaign with a goal of designing playspaces that would encourage physical activity and provide opportunity for integrated curriculum in an outdoor setting.

The playground campaign was successful. In August of 2010, over 1,000 third, fourth, and fifth graders started the school year on the new equipment. Soon after, the GoPlay team began new projects based on teacher surveys to create outdoor space for exploration, discovery, and fun. While the original playground was district funded, additional GoPlay projects rely on volunteers, grants, business donations, and PTA fundraising. To date GoPlay projects have raised \$32,400 in donations, utilized \$3,000 in matching professional services, and logged over two hundred volunteer hours.

### Systemic Change & Community Impact

GoPlay continues to receive support from educators, parents, students, and the community at large.

*Partnership with faculty and students from Mississippi State University, Starkville High School Horticulture Department, and MSU Soils Science garden intern has yielded:*

- Portable Garden Station and Activities
- Rain Barrel Station and Curriculum
- Playground Integrated Math Curriculum

*GoPlay Teacher Team members have:*

- Designed a Five Station Confidence Course
- Participated in National Service Learning Day with students
- Completed a student created art mural for the outdoor classroom

*Resources built by GoPlay Teams will be used for:*

- Summer Feeding program's GoPlay & Garden on the Hill Camp
- MSU hosted Elementary Science Club activities
- City of Starkville's Play Day Event, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011



### Contact Information

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## **Sustainability & Growth**

The GoPlay Initiative was initially created out of a need to provide more opportunities for play in the Starkville public schools. The team's growth can be attributed to successfully matching specific project needs with existing community resources. Lasting relationships have been formed with school, community, university, business, and civic organization leaders which in turn have opened new doors for collaboration and progress. GoPlay has partnered with the Starkville Foundation for Public Education to fund an annual \$250 GoPlay Teacher Grant to inspire more play in schools. Projects have funded innovative educators at Sudduth Elementary and include a special needs playground in 2010 and a play break activities project to help ADHD students during the day in 2011.

Based in part from the Kaboom! Playful City USA process, the GoPlay Initiative is expanding into a city-wide campaign that includes service projects and play advocacy for not only public school children but all Starkville residents. GoPlay will continue to celebrate play champions on our website but will now include more highlights and resources to meet the diverse needs of our entire city. Planning is underway for fall 2011 GoPlay activities that will benefit the Starkville School District and Starkville Parks Commission.

## **Replication**

The GoPlay Initiative is proof that community collaboration truly can start with a playground. While GoPlay continues to evolve the lessons learned over the last two years have enabled the initiative to gather momentum and make a difference for play.

Lessons learned include:

### **Go to the Source**

*GoPlay started with a teacher survey and interviewed students in order to design playspaces worthy of those who would be experiencing it the most.*

### **Connect the Best**

*GoPlay team of volunteers worked to match needs with resources.*

### **Share Your Gratitude**

*GoPlay built a website, created an overview sheet, and invited the local media to share in the accomplishments of the Starkville School District educators and community volunteers.*



Starkville Mayor, Parker Wiseman and friends celebrate the new playground at Henderson Ward Stewart Elementary.