

When Calvin Christian School in Hamilton, Ont., hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony to open its new playground Sept. 13, they celebrated the realization of a vision for an inclusive playscape where all students could play safely, learn while playing, nurture belonging, and enjoy God's creation. The school was helped by the Grade 10 Venture class at Hamilton District Christian High School, which took the project from concept to reality in just one year. The playground has been designated as a PlayCore National Demonstration Site, the first Hamilton school playground to receive this designation.

"Our school mission is 'Equipping to Shine,' and we really want to equip students of all abilities with the opportunity to shine," said school principal Arn Boonstra. "This new playground offers that opportunity!"

The high school's Venture class is part of a three-year career exploration program that uses community projects as a way for students to develop a range of employable skills. The students worked with a playground planning team at Calvin, conducted a survey of the site, researched other playgrounds, and gathered input from Calvin staff and students. They consulted design professional Carissa Borowitz from Park N Play to learn about inclusion and accessibility in playground design.

"Some of these concepts are abstract, but the students were able to understand and catch the vision for this playground," said Richard Van Egmond, Venture teacher at Hamilton District Christian High. "I was impressed by the students' capacity for empathy in the needs and various abilities of the (Calvin) students, making sure it would be accessible."

The new playground was possible because of funds raised through the capital campaign, donations from corporate sponsorships, and the Re-Source Thrift Shop. Parent volunteers helped assemble the structure during the summer.

"The community really stepped up and rallied around the project. It was amazing to see the support," said Boonstra. "It was a big investment, but we are investing in the growth of our children."

"It's so fun to watch the students play," said Sandi Tigchelaar, a parent and paraeducator at Calvin. "Children play in different ways, and everything was designed for inclusion. There are hideaway places for those with sensory challenges, and there are really challenging aspects, like the rock wall, that students can work toward as they feel ready."

Second-grader Christian Josse, who uses a wheelchair, said his favorite part of the playground is the boat, called the Rock N Raft. His mother, Julie Josse, is thrilled about the new playground.

"It's incredible that the school talked about this and then made it happen," she said. "This makes it possible for Christian to play with everyone."

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