

PTA delivers on playground equipment

By Amy Kent Assistant Editor | Posted: Wednesday, July 22, 2015 6:00 am

CLINTON — Whittier Elementary School Principal Brian Kenney knows that an active student is an attentive student — which is why he strongly supports playtime at his school.

So when the Whittier Parent Teacher Association took on a project for the 2014-15 school year, new playground equipment quickly rose to the top.

PTA co-president Dana Albaghdadi said the school's kindergarten teachers initially suggested the idea, but it wasn't until the PTA learned the importance of physical activity is to a student's education retention, that it became clear the playground would be the focus of the project.

"Some equipment had been taken out that was not safe to play on anymore and we had another piece of equipment that kids weren't using, so that's when the kindergarten teachers suggested it," Albaghdadi said. "Playground equipment is really expensive, but we really wanted to think of a way to buy something that all grades would benefit from."

In order to purchase the equipment, which was installed during the summer and officially opened Monday, the PTA needed a funding option. That's when Albaghdadi said she and other members got wind of a grant opportunity through the Clinton County Development Association.

Albaghdadi, along with Bridget Fuller, co-president at the time, began the application process in the spring of 2014. By September, they had learned the CCDA would fund 75 percent of the project leaving about \$4,000 to be raised by the PTA.

That effort was covered with only one fundraising event — the Chip Shoppe.

"We do several fundraisers throughout the year, but the Chip Shoppe is the big one we do every year around Christmas time," Albaghdadi said. "We make about \$10,000 off of that in a year, so we used a portion of that to cover our portion of the costs."

Even though raising the money didn't pose much of a challenge to the PTA, Kenney believes even if it had, the organization still would have found a way to reach its goal.

"As a testament to the people who are a part of PTA, if you throw an idea at them, if it's good for kids, they're going to do it," Kenney said. "That's just the type of people they are."

After raising the \$20,000 needed for the equipment, through the grant program and the fundraising efforts of the PTA, the organization was called upon once again, this time to install the new additions.

Kenney said it would have taken an additional \$5,000, an amount of money that doesn't come easily to the public school district, to have the playground equipment installed by the company it was purchased from.

Again, the PTA came through.

"On the day of installation I called up about 10 different parents and the plant services people and in one day we got it all installed," Kenney said.

While he knows the new equipment will help support his motto that play makes for an active and healthy brain, what has truly stunned Kenney during the course of the past year and a half, is the dedication and commitment the PTA has for the students of Whittier.

But, the playground is for more than just the students, said Albaghdadi, and it wasn't a project done alone.

"This took a group effort for sure. Just to have the opportunity to apply for the funds, to actually get something awarded to us and to see something come to fruition is wonderful," Albaghdadi said. "It's really important to have a place that kids can go, to get off the couch and go to a playground that has decent equipment. This truly is a neighborhood playground and a neighborhood project."

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Amy Kent/Clinton Herald Kailey Hovey, 7, enjoys some playtime on Tuesday as she explores the new playground equipment at Whittier Elementary School in Clinton.