





CHIEFTAIN PHOTOS/BRYAN KELSEN

Minnequa Elementary School second-grade student Kyla Pewitt, 7, stretches and eventually breaks the tape to be the first to play on the newly installed playground equipment at the school Monday morning. The new equipment was provided by student fundraising as well as the generosity of local community members.

EDUCATION

Work hard, play hard

BY JON POMPIA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Thanks to a grassroots fundraising effort, Minnequa Elementary School students no longer have to “play in rocks and in the dusty old field.”

On Monday, a yearlong drive to erect \$34,000 in new playground equipment at the Bessemer school culminated with a high-spirited pep rally and, naturally, a few equally joyous, and high-pitched, go-rounds on the shiny new climbing and sliding apparatuses.

After a year’s absence, playground returns to Minnequa

“We know that play is vital to human development,” said Principal Melissa Patterson before the student body, faculty and guests assembled in the school gymnasium. “It teaches social skills, provides physical activity and provides for a positive release of energy.”

Formerly home to dilapidated and unsafe equipment surrounded by dirt and rocks, the new space hosts a play house, slide, monkey bars and giant-sized jacks ideal for youthful cavorting — all painted blue and yellow and



If it wasn't for you, we would have to play in rocks and (a) dusty old field. The playground will only make our school better and help us reach our goals set around innovation.

KYLA PEWITT
MINNEQUA ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL STUDENT

surrounded by a soft bed of wood chips to cushion those occasional falls.

The successful result of a student-led fundraising effort — boxes and boxes of chocolate bars sold — coupled with generous donations from a cadre of private and business sponsors, including El Pomar Foundation.

“Thank you for helping us celebrate this valuable new playground, because if we didn’t have play time to help us learn, our teacher would have to deal with talking and squirming scholars throughout the day,” said second-grader Kyla Pewitt to the day’s guests and fellow students.

“If it wasn’t for you, we would have to play in rocks and (a) dusty old field. The playground will only make our school better and help us reach our goals set around innovation.”

In addition to giddy students, Monday’s celebration was attended by Minnequa



Minnequa students enjoy their first chance to play on newly installed playground equipment. The school’s student body took part in a candy bar fundraising effort to raise much of the money for the equipment.

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staff, parents, community members and donors. Notably absent was new mother Katie Harshman, an innovation coach at the school who took the reins in ensuring that the playground became a soul-lifting reality.

“If it weren’t for our Minnequa scholars,” Patterson continued, “we would not

have this great playground in front of us. These children are incredibly special. They worked hard and sold many candy bars. So thank you scholars, for your hard work.”

And, as the old adage goes, work hard and play hard.

“It’s pretty fun,” said Jennavieve Gehlhoff, one of an army of energetic kindergartners letting loose on the new equipment. “I like the monkey bars because I like to climb. And we had rocks in there before so it hurt when you fell.

“Now, it’s a lot softer.”
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