

Playground parity: Can Bronx children be trusted with sand?

“I have asked the Parks Department why there are no sandboxes in my neighborhood in the Bronx, or as far as I can tell anywhere outside of Manhattan, and the response I got was troubling. I was told that residents in the outer boroughs do not treat the sand boxes with respect” <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/07/26/a-newfangled-sandbox-arrives-check-out-the-canals/>

My children and I go to the Fort Independence Park playground almost every day. We love our home playground and feel very comfortable there. But we are an itinerant group. As a homeschooling family, we get all around the city, and I have probably been in every playground in Manhattan in the last few years. And guess what?

The playgrounds in Manhattan are really nice. They are *much, much nicer* than the playgrounds in the Bronx.

Almost every Manhattan playground seems to have recently undergone a multi-million dollar renovation. They all have innovative, soft cushiony surfaces that feel like felt; paid “play facilitators” who seem to be majoring in early childhood education; and burbling water features rather than the spray-in-your-face variety most children actually abhor.

At Fort Independence Park playground, I have to be careful to keep my toddler out of the swing area when the big kids are there. The gate has been broken since we moved in, and he’s likely get seriously beamed in the head. And of course, there is no sandbox. Come to think of it, I have never seen a sandbox in the Bronx.

And although the city has supposedly *already* spent \$200 million on Bronx Parks as “mitigation” for the \$3 Billion Croton Water Filtration Plant (money we all suspected was simply replacing the money that should have been spent on upkeep anyway), I have never personally seen any evidence of it.

Actually, that is not true. I have been to Sachkerah Woods, which underwent a \$2.9 million renovation in 2007, and it’s pretty nice. (No sandbox.) But how does it compare to a \$3 million playground renovation in Manhattan—a borough which incidentally did not have to submit to a 9-story hole dug in its largest park to get its playgrounds fixed?



Sachkerah Woods in Van Cortlandt Park-- \$2.9 million in 2007. No sand. Bronx children cannot be trusted with sand, just as Bronx adults cannot be trusted near the Jerome Park Reservoir.



Ancient Playground at 85th and 5th-- \$3 million in 2009. Big sandbox not in picture. The yellow surface in the foreground is soft and felt-like and pretty mind-boggling.

Here are a few other recent Manhattan renovations:



Imagination Playground at South Street Seaport-- \$4.3 million in 2010, plus \$3 million to move a water main. That's all sand in the foreground. "Staff is on site at all times to facilitate play."



.Evelyn's Playground at the north end of Union Square Park-- \$3.8 million in 2009. It features a giant metal dome, tube slides, and of course an enormous sand box.

Here, for comparison, are some recent Bronx renovations, completed with the Water Filtration money. They look pretty nice, but it seems to me they are not as innovative as the Manhattan playgrounds on which similar money was spent.

I plan to visit each "completed" project, let my kids play, and take pictures of my own.



Mullaly Park-- \$6 million in 2009, which included ball fields and picnic areas



Devoe Playground, Story Playground, Soundview Park and Aqueduct Lands were all reopened in August 2008 and cost \$14 million collectively. This is Devoe Playground.



Edenwald Playground, \$2.2 million, reopened in 2010. Not a speck of sand in sight.