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A Sign of Continued Inclusivity at Essex Elementary School Playground *The Essex Foundation Awards Grant to Fund American Sign Language Board*

The Essex Foundation Board of Directors awarded a \$6000 grant to the Essex Elementary School Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) to fund the design, materials and installation of an American Sign Language (ASL) board for the playground at Essex Elementary School in Centerbrook. Production of the sign was completed in August before the start of the new school year. Essex Elementary serves a diverse student population, including deaf and hard of hearing children who are fully mainstreamed into the school community. While the classrooms strive to provide inclusive and accessible learning environments, the playground—an essential space for social interaction, creativity, and connection—was lacking the tools to support communication equity for all students.

The ASL communication board provides a visual and interactive way for students of all hearing abilities to communicate using basic signs, symbols, and shared language. It not only supports deaf and hard of hearing students in expressing themselves and engaging with peers, but also encourage hearing students to learn ASL, fostering empathy, inclusion, and meaningful social connections. "We are extremely grateful for The Essex Foundation's help in bringing this important initiative to life and fostering a more inclusive, supportive, and connected environment" stated Essex Elementary School PTO member Mikaela Zito.



The Essex Foundation President Strickland Hyde III added, "The Essex Elementary School playground has long been a recreational gathering spot for families throughout the year. The Foundation is always happy to support inclusivity for our young students as well as the greater community."

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PICTURED ABOVE: Members of The Essex Foundation Board of Directors join Essex Elementary School PTO members and children at the unveiling of the newly installed American Sign Language board at the school's playground, made possible by grant support from the Foundation.