



Contact: Kathleen Ownby  
832-393-0911 or [kathleen@sparkpark.org](mailto:kathleen@sparkpark.org)

## **SPARK receives \$5 million from Houston Endowment and Kinder Foundation to build and improve parks at 30 Houston-area schools**

*Grant will fund Phase II of non-profit's initiative to increase park equity throughout Houston*

HOUSTON – MARCH 9, 2020 – SPARK, a Houston-based non-profit organization that helps public schools develop their playgrounds into community parks, today announced its commitment to 30 additional park projects, supported by grants of \$2.5 million each from Houston Endowment and Kinder Foundation. Phase II of SPARK's efforts to mitigate 'park deserts' throughout Greater Houston will create 15 new parks and update, or 're-SPARK,' 15 more over the next four years.

This follow-up investment from Houston Endowment and Kinder Foundation underscores the success of Phase I, which, by the end of 2020, will have brought 25 new parks and five re-SPARKS to campuses across 12 independent school districts and three charter schools.

As with Phase I, the Phase II parks will each be designed to reflect the character of the school and surrounding neighborhood, incorporate feedback from the community and include a unique public art component. SPARK continues to raise support to fully fund Phase II of the project.

"We are grateful to Houston Endowment and Kinder Foundation for again entrusting us with the resources needed to impact neighborhoods across greater Houston," said Kathleen Ownby, SPARK executive director. "Their support allows us to reach many more communities with new parks while also updating some of our well-loved parks."

"Parks are powerful," said Mark Lee, SPARK board president. "They foster community, improve health, and provide an oasis for all of us. We are honored to continue bringing these green open areas to greater Houston, many outside Loop 610."

"SPARK's mission to improve the lives of Houstonians by increasing park equity is in lockstep with ours, and we enthusiastically offer our continued support to help them accomplish this goal," said Ann Stern, president and CEO of Houston Endowment.

Added Kinder Foundation President Nancy Kinder, "Kathleen's team shares our vision that a world-class city must afford equal access to greenspace for all. We are impressed by the progress SPARK has made thus far, and eager to see their impact multiply in Phase II."

Houston Endowment and Kinder Foundation have each previously committed \$2.5 million to SPARK toward Phase I, bringing their total contributions to SPARK to \$5 million each. Both foundations are

committed to increasing high-quality greenspace across Houston; their previous investments include Memorial Park, Bayou Greenways 2020, Discovery Green, Buffalo Bayou Park and Emancipation Park, among others.

Ten schools have already been identified as part of Phase II, including: Arabic Immersion Magnet School (Houston ISD), Braeburn Elementary (Houston ISD), Blue Ridge Elementary (Fort Bend ISD), Carrillo Elementary\* (Houston ISD), Collins Elementary\* (Alief ISD), JP Henderson Elementary\* (Houston ISD), Lakeshore Elementary (Humble ISD), Landis Elementary\* (Alief ISD), Royalwood Elementary (Sheldon ISD) and Terrace Elementary\* (Spring Branch ISD). Additional schools will be vetted and selected in the coming months. To learn more about the selection progress, visit [www.sparkpark.org](http://www.sparkpark.org).

*\*Indicates re-SPARK projects*

Download high resolution images: [Phase I SPARK park photos and testimonials](#); [list and map of phase I parks](#); [list and map of selected schools to date in phase II](#).

###

#### About SPARK

SPARK was founded by then Council Member Eleanor Tinsley in 1983. The organization has more than 150 active community parks in 17 different school districts throughout Houston plus three charter schools. Visit [sparkpark.org](http://sparkpark.org).

#### About Houston Endowment

Houston Endowment is a private foundation that works to enhance the vibrancy of greater Houston and advance equity of opportunity for the people who live here. Jesse H. and Mary Gibbs Jones established Houston Endowment in 1937 to help create a community where the opportunity to thrive is available to all. Visit [houstonendowment.org](http://houstonendowment.org).

#### About Kinder Foundation

The Kinder Foundation, a family foundation established in 1997 by Rich and Nancy Kinder, has distributed nearly \$444 million in gifts to transformational projects in the areas of urban green space, education, and quality of life. Visit [kinderfoundation.org](http://kinderfoundation.org).



## What Leaders Are Saying About SPARK

### **Michele H. Dahlquist, Principal, Walnut Bend Elementary School**

"The SPARK project has completely transformed our playground and restored a sense of community in our area. As soon as the park opens in the afternoons, there are children of all ages playing. Soccer games, basketball scrimmages, and challenges on the obstacle course are commonplace, and many neighborhood families stop by to watch the kids and enjoy the park. We feel so lucky to have partnered with SPARK, and we are forever grateful to all the donors for providing this incredible oasis for everyone's enjoyment."

### **Dr. King R. Davis, Superintendent, Sheldon ISD**

"Sheldon ISD is incredibly grateful for the work SPARK Park has done in our district and community. The impact SPARK Park has had in the Sheldon community is evident every weekend and after school by just going to the park and witnessing the number of children, students and parents enjoying the wonderful park. This park has given our neighborhood a place for kids to play, parents to come together and local athletes to exercise. We are thrilled and honored SPARK Park has chosen our district to build another park at one of our schools (Royalwood Elementary) that was deeply impacted by Hurricane Harvey. We can not wait to unveil the new SPARK Park to our community."

### **Cheryl Lawson, Superintendent, The Lawson Academy**

"The SPARK Park has given our community a rich asset that allows parents and grandparents to have a space where they can be with the children they love. The Lawson Academy is proud of our SPARK Park because it enhances our Physical Education program while providing a walking trail for our staff and volunteers."

### **Terese C. Pollard, Principal, A. A. Milne Elementary School**

"AA Milne, located in Southwest Houston's Northfield I & II neighborhood, is home to two SPARK Parks! Our SPARK Parks help bridge the gap between our school community, and our geographic community. Those who have yet to venture onto our campus are welcomed with open arms, beautiful, vibrant playscapes and an ART=FUN sculpture that includes students' artwork! Our SPARK Parks give all community members an opportunity to spend time on campus and connect with our school community. The SPARK Parks have fostered an environment of togetherness and play, and will continue to do so for years to come. Our SPARK Parks had made our community into a family, and for that we are forever thankful."

### **Carmen Posey, RA, RLA, CPSI, ENVIRONMENTS&co.**

"SPARK Parks provide the local schools and communities a means to take ownership of the parks where they relax, play and celebrate together. Ownership encourages the communities to care for their parks

and keep them active and beautiful. I have had the pleasure of working with SPARK for over twenty years. Together we have developed more than 75 parks. It brings me joy when I see the children and adults engaging and enjoying their park.”

**Rose Toro, Artist, Rose Art Works**

“Spark Parks brings together students, staff and parents, to work hand in hand in art projects, aimed at improving their school’s green areas, while creating a sense of pride and ownership of the end result, acknowledging the efforts they are making, will remain for many generations to come. Spark Parks supports Civic and Public Art with interactive educational art workshops, that enrich the community with permanent art installations.”