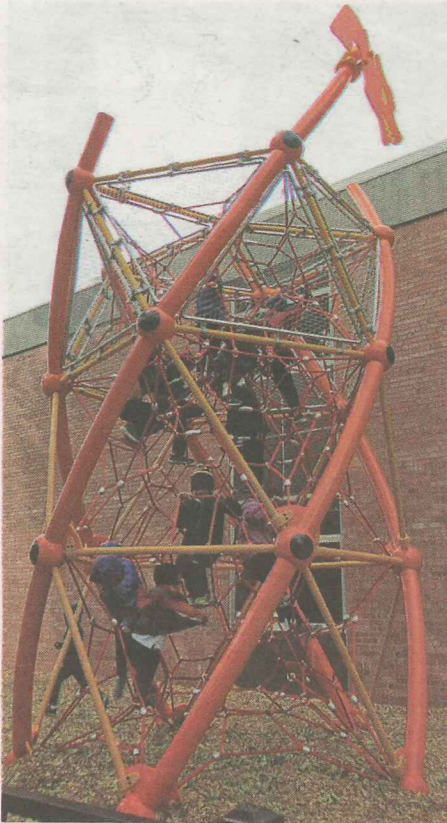


# Yinghua Academy installs new playground



by Cynthia Sowden

The door on the east side of Yinghua Academy opens and first-graders fly out of it, into a new playground lined with wood chips and equipped with bright red, yellow and orange contraptions that spin, swing and encourage climbing. Some students make a beeline to one piece in particular, a nearly 19-ft.-tall "DNA tower" that recently arrived from Germany. It's the crown jewel in a space the school built with an eye to the future.

Yinghua, the K-8 Chinese immersion charter school at 1616 Buchanan Street NE, sits next to Northeast Park, which has been undergoing extensive renovation the past couple of years. One of the last projects on the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's to-do list is to move one or both of the park playgrounds closer to the new recreation center. The school has used these playgrounds since it moved into the former Rufus A. Putnam Elementary School building in 2009. Parent and teachers at Yinghua felt the distance to the relocated playground might be too great for some of their younger students, so they decided to prepare for the future.

They held fundraisers and planned and got all the necessary governmental approvals to build a playground on school property and for the equipment they installed, including the \$86,000 DNA tower, which the kids call the Dragon because it's topped



with a dragon head, a reference to Yinghua's dragon mascot.

The manufacturer, Berliner Sielfabrik, calls them DNA towers because they look like the double helix of a DNA molecule chain. They're made of steel and stretchy rope netting that kids love to climb on. Yinghua CEO/Executive Director Sue Berg noted that, despite the tower's height, a child can fall no more than six feet because they're protected by the netting. She said the tower promotes gross motor skills and allows kids to figure out climbing strategies inside the tower. The bungee-like web of

ropes is fun to bounce on, too. The tower is able to accommodate children from the ages of 5-12, a good fit for the Yinghua school population.

Perhaps best of all, the DNA tower packs a lot of play into the playground's small footprint. While it stands 18 ft., 11 in., it's only 10 feet wide. Yinghua Academy is the first location in the United States to install one of these towers.

Berg said the fenced playground purposely has no gate. "We want to share it our neighbors, too."

The school officially opened the playground on October 15.

Left: The DNA tower, which Yinghua students call the Dragon, stands more than 18 ft. tall. Because of its unique design, a child can fall no further than six feet.

Center: The new Yinghua playground is carefully fitted into a narrow space next to the school. It's open to neighborhood kids as well. All of the equipment was installed by St. Croix Recreation.

Below: The Dragon's head.

(Photos by Cynthia Sowden)



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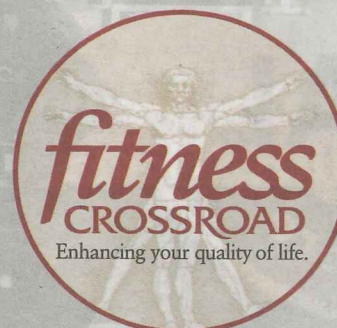
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