



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KNORR-BREMSE GLOBAL CARE NORTH AMERICA AND KNORR BRAKE COMPANY
CONTRIBUTE FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR A NEW
ACCESSIBLE PLAYGROUND IN HAMPSTEAD, MARYLAND

*Play Structure at Hampstead Elementary School Features Ramps, Solid Rubber Flooring,
Communication Boards, and Sensory Elements*

WESTMINSTER, Md. – Aug. 29, 2022 – The students and staff of Hampstead Elementary School in Hampstead, Maryland, once referred to their playground as “Big Red.” The large structure, which was replaced this month, featured traditional playground components like slides, monkey bars, and ladders over a large area of mulch.

But this August, there’s a new structure where Big Red once stood. It doesn’t have a nickname, but it does have vibrantly colored elements and slides over hard rubber flooring, welcoming children of all ability levels. Kids who use a wheelchair can make their way to the top on one of its ramps. Children who don’t speak can use the communication board to invite a friend to play.

It took support from local businesses and individuals to help the school realize its dream: installing the fully accessible playground for the enjoyment of its students and others in the community. Among those who supported the effort was the team of Westminster-based Knorr Brake Company (KBC) and its parent company’s North American foundation, Knorr-Bremse Global Care North America (KBGCNA). Together, the two organizations awarded \$70,000 in funds, almost half the cost of the \$158,000 project.

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The organizations also contributed cooperative assistance for the project, which was marked with a ribbon-cutting celebration and opening reception on August 26.

“We were thrilled to partner with Hampstead Elementary in acquiring and constructing an accessible playground for its students and for the greater community,” said Lindsey Franey, marketing and governmental affairs manager at KBC and KBGCNA’s project champion for the playground. “Extending this support for a project that is educational and fun, and that also eliminates barriers, is at the core of what our organizations strive to promote, and we’re happy to be a part of it.”

KBGCNA is the North American philanthropic organization for Knorr-Bremse of Munich, Germany, the global market leader for braking systems and a leading supplier of other safety-critical rail and commercial vehicle systems. And Knorr-Bremse subsidiary KBC is a leader in the supply and maintenance of braking systems for U.S. passenger rail cars.

KBGCNA centers its investments on initiatives that support youth, education, and underprivileged populations in the surrounding communities of Knorr-Bremse’s three largest North American companies, a group that includes KBC along with Bendix Commercial Vehicle Systems LLC, based in Avon, Ohio; and Watertown, New York-based New York Air Brake LLC. As does KBGCNA, KBC awards support on a corporate level for projects focused on youth and education in its communities.

Last summer, the school system pursued that support, applying for KBGCNA grant funding for the project. Earlier this year, Hampstead won a \$60,000 grant from KBGCNA for its effort and earned \$10,000 in corporate support from KBC.

Meeting the Diverse Needs of Students

Hampstead Elementary, located in Maryland’s northern Carroll County, serves about 425 students, from preschool up to fifth grade. While the majority of its students live in Hampstead, the school also serves about 60 students from surrounding areas who receive special education services there.

Through its large team of special education teachers and physical, occupational, and speech and language therapists, Hampstead serves the specialized educational and environmental needs of children with cognitive and medical disabilities.

“We have several classrooms dedicated to students with autism, and we have students with some medical conditions that warrant the use of a power wheelchair or a walker,” said Arlene Moore, principal of Hampstead Elementary.

Moore explained that the school strives to include all students in daily, grade-level-appropriate activities to foster and encourage a sense of community. And the new playground will help the school continue and enrich this effort. Besides its use during recess, she explained, the school's experts will also use the playground in their work with students.

"It was important to us to make sure that all students, no matter their disability, were able to play on the playground with their peers," Moore continued. "The many therapists we have in the building supporting our school will play a part in that, helping students who need assistance and using the playground in therapy with students."

An Inclusive and Accessible Play Structure

The new playground is a significant departure from the school's recently demolished play structure, which was built in the 1990s.

"Our old structure didn't have ramps, so some students were left to circle around the structure, whereas their non-disabled peers could climb and slide," said Joy Bell, reading specialist at Hampstead Elementary and Playground Committee chair. "That left many students reliant on their adult support if they wanted to use the playground. It was difficult for them to navigate on the playground on the mulch, and they also didn't have enough equipment that they could easily use."

School officials began planning for a new playground in 2019, beginning a three-year fundraising process that involved the school's parent-teacher organization and soliciting support throughout the community. In the spring of 2022, the school achieved its fundraising goal, in part due to support from KBGCNA and KBC. Another \$50,000 in funding came through a legislative bond bill in Maryland.

"The school approached us in August of 2021, applying for grant funding through KBGCNA," Franey explained. "We had already worked with the school by helping them set up a recycling program. And their mission to install a playground that would serve the diverse needs and interests of all children was a project that truly resonated both with KBGCNA and KBC."

Playground Features and Highlights

At a total area of about 61 feet by 45 feet, the new structure is slightly larger than the previous playground. It also features ramps, adaptive swings, balancing pods, and additional components that offer students more independence in play and more opportunities to interact with their peers, Bell said. The rubber foam surfacing beneath much of the structure is

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wheelchair- and walker-accessible, so students can easily navigate the ramps to other parts of the playground.

The structure also features sensory elements such as musical instruments and textured surfaces, which may be particularly engaging for those with unique sensory needs. Instead of being painted primarily one color, the playground features sections in a variety of vibrant colors, including bright yellow, green, blue, and orange. And it has three different types of slides, including one that is spiral-shaped, one that is smooth, and one that is textured with rollers.

Assistant Principal Addison Beck said the school's Playground Committee worked to strike a balance in including features with general education students in mind, such as climbing structures and bars. There's also a built-in hideout cove and a spinning pod, which are expected to be popular with many students.

Another unique highlight is the integration of stand-alone communication boards designed especially for students who communicate with the help of picture support or communication devices. The boards, constructed and donated by high school students at the nearby Career and Technology Center in Carroll County, feature an array of commonly used icons students associate with specific words, helping them to communicate with peers independently.

"The boards have symbols for common words like 'play' that students would probably need to use when they're outside," Bell said. "So, students won't always need to rely on their adult support."

As another benefit to the community, Beck pointed out that because the playground is situated next to county-run sports fields, it can also be enjoyed by children who aren't necessarily students at the school, such as those who participate in local sports and recreation programs.

To that end, Franey said the community aspect of the new playground is just one of the reasons it was so worthy of support both from KBGCNA and KBC.

"For us, this partnership has been amazing, and we're super excited to see how this impacts the community as a whole," Franey said. "Obviously, we're excited for Hampstead, but it goes beyond that. The whole community will benefit from this project."

Meanwhile, Moore said the support from KBC and KBGCNA was essential for allowing the project to happen.

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“The support they have provided to us is beyond anything we could have really dreamed,” Moore said, noting how Franey and her team cooperated in the fundraising process, even assisting the school in reaching out to the community for support.

Bell added, “It was definitely above and beyond just the monetary contribution, which was huge. They were an integral part of this experience.”

About Knorr-Bremse Global Care North America

Knorr-Bremse Global Care North America Inc. (KBGCNA) is an independent organization operating as the North American arm of a global nonprofit organization – Knorr-Bremse Global Care. With an aim to address local social challenges more effectively, KBGCNA investments are centered in the surrounding communities of Knorr-Bremse’s three largest North American companies: Avon, Ohio-based Bendix Commercial Vehicle Systems LLC; Westminster, Maryland-based Knorr Brake Company; and Watertown, New York-based New York Air Brake LLC. Funding activities are championed and supported by the employees of each of the three local companies. Follow us on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/company/knorr-bremse-global-care-north-america-inc](https://www.linkedin.com/company/knorr-bremse-global-care-north-america-inc).

About Knorr Brake Company

Since 1973, Knorr Brake Company has been the innovative leader in supplying North American rail market customers, including light rail vehicles, METRO, and high-speed trains. With its headquarters in Westminster, Maryland, the company operates sales and service facilities in Carmel, New York; and Union City, California. KBC’s subsidiaries – IFE North America LLC (passenger door systems) and Merak North America LLC (climate-control systems) – are co-located in Westminster. Knorr Brake Company is a member of the Munich, Germany-based Knorr-Bremse, the global market leader in braking systems and a leading supplier of other safety-critical rail and commercial vehicle systems. Contact Knorr Brake Company at [knorrbrakecorp.com](https://www.knorrbrakecorp.com) and follow us on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/company/knorr-brake-company](https://www.linkedin.com/company/knorr-brake-company). To learn more about career opportunities at KBC, please visit www.kbnajobs.com.

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