

The Del Ray Montessori School in Alexandria, Virginia was established in 2011 with solely one primary classroom. Since its inception, the school has grown to house one toddler program, serving children 18 months to 3, three primary programs, serving children 3 to 6 years, and one elementary program, serving children 6-12. With the expansion of the school, we created a garden space with the help of Love & Carrots, a local organization in the Washington DC area that focuses on creating garden spaces in urban environments. This space would allow students a continuation of exploration from the classroom to the outdoors. This space allowed children not only the physical aspect such as planting seeds, watering the flowers, and tending to the raised beds, but also seeking out educational opportunities like taking flowers inside for plant dissection, collecting pine cones for different art projects, or doing research on the various types of plants that would thrive in this climate. This concept of nature-based play was crucial when creating our new playground.

We partnered once again with Love & Carrots about the design and installation of the play space. The design created an extension of the classroom environment that encourages curiosity, exploration, and independence of the child. The space created included a mud kitchen with a sink, canopy shades for the grueling summer sun, a little red house with a weather vane for the children to escape to, a sandbox, and a climbing tunnel fit with footholds for the children to help scale the tunnel. The design was given the thumbs up in August and then the installation process began in December. The excitement of the children was joyful to watch! The toddler community and the primary classrooms were able to begin using the play space in December. The children love to use the excavators and dump trucks in the sandbox, to create a home in the little red house and park their cars in the "driveway" outside, and to cook in the mud kitchen and proudly share their culinary masterpiece with other classmates and teachers! The playground has allowed the children a space to grow physically and educationally thanks to the intentional design by DRMS and Love & Carrots.