Gramon Family of Schools (GFS), the oldest private special education program in New Jersey, kicked off a year of anniversary events with the grand opening of its new playground on Tuesday, September 19, 2017.

“This has been a labor of love for the past two years for our staff and our parents,” said Amy Goldberg, marketing coordinator for GFS. “Our Parents and Professionals Organization (PPO) provided direct financial support so our students could enjoy a state of the art facility. We also used the expertise of our staff to make sure it was functional and fun.”

“We really started talking about this in 2014,” explained David Nankivel, occupational therapist, standing on the new playground as children arrived for an afternoon session. “Our old playground was outdated. There was one piece of equipment and one set of swings. It wasn’t really engaging for the students and we said we can do better.” Nankivel met with staff, and the committee discussed wanting a space that could be used both as a playground and for therapy.

“This truly was a collaborative effort,” he said, noting staff, administrators and parents were enthusiastic and determined as they moved forward with the plan. Nankivel also stated, “Executive Director, Candace Galvez, was working on the administrative end trying to figure out how we could fund it. That is when the parents stepped in and made a commitment that the PPO would raise the
funds. Umbrellas provide shade because some of the students are sensitive to heat. Equipment is coated so it doesn’t get too hot to the touch. There is a slide with rollers, a rock-climbing wall, a zip line, oversized swings, and many ways for students to work on balance and strengthening their bodies. Children can stretch out on a set of rollers with curved bars over the top and work on upper body strength as they pull themselves across it. They can practice balance by moving across a set of hanging stepping platforms of various heights. Every piece of equipment is an opportunity to climb, slide, hang, and have fun.”

The playground grand opening was the first event in a year of celebration at Gramon Family of Schools which is celebrating the marking a total of 78 years of educational excellence supporting special education students.

Gramon School, the oldest of the three schools, was started in 1939 by Ruth K. Newman, an educator and parent of a neurologically impaired child. Glenview Academy was opened in 1984 and New Beginnings was established in 1997, and is celebrating their 20th Anniversary. Newman believed that only by single-mindedly pursuing an individualized program based on each child’s strengths and weaknesses, could she truly help them achieve the best of their potential. Gramon Family of Schools has been carrying on that legacy ever since.

Photo:
(Left to Right)
Brandon A. - New Beginnings Student Council President
Robin Alampi - PPO President
Candace Galvez - Executive Director GFS
Raimonda Rrapo - Chief Financial Officer GFS