

Site Assessment



OUTDOOR LEARNING CONSULTATION SERVICES

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL
IN WASHINGTON, DC

For more information about how Out Teach can help you activate your outdoor spaces for learning, email info@out-teach.org

School Goals

Global Citizenship

Engage children where they are and grow outward to different cultures

Experiential Learning

Bring lessons to children while they engage with what interests them outside

Diversity and Inclusion

Learn to co-exist with people who are different from you

Safety

Facilitate outdoor learning to reduce viral transmission and enable social distancing

Pre-COVID Uses

Gardening

Active gardening and composting classes make use of raised beds and atrium garden areas

Local Partnerships

The Capital Area Food Bank delivers fresh veggies for families to take home

Parent Support

An active group of parents provide volunteer support and serve on the board

Off-Campus Outdoor Resources

The nearby Franciscan Monastery makes their grounds available for excursions

Post-COVID Uses

Tentative Interest in Outdoor Meals

Concerns regarding leaves and hand washing have prevented outdoor meals

Parent Gathering

Parents are not allowed in the building, so outdoor gathering for parents is important

Outdoor Equipment

Umbrellas have been procured for the outdoor atrium space to provide shade

Closed Play Equipment

The play equipment in the playground is roped off due to viral transmission concerns



Out Teach

Go Outside Expectations

out-teach.org



District of Columbia
Office of the State
Superintendent of Education



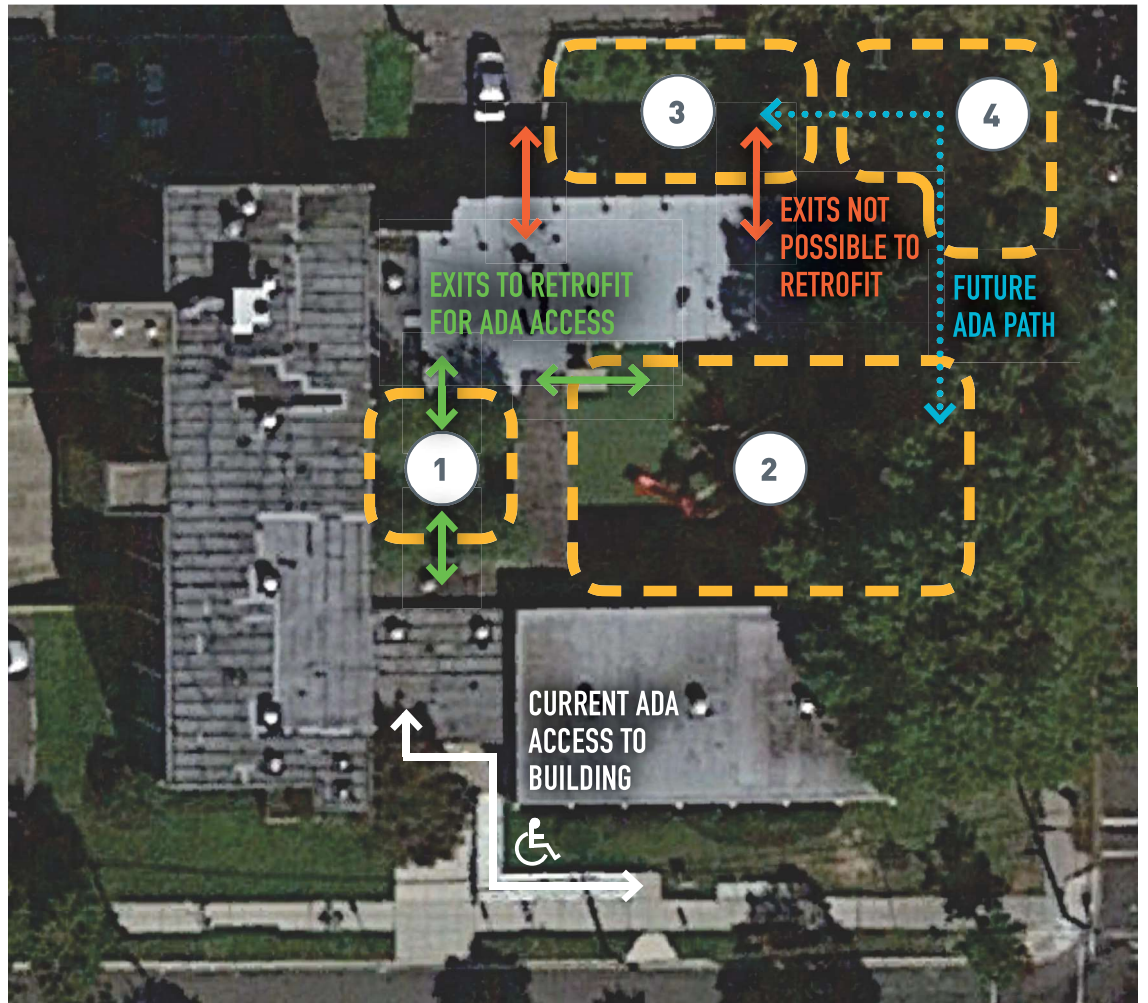
WE ARE WASHINGTON
GOVERNMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR



Campus Aerial Map

Map Key

- 1 ATRIUM**
Trees and umbrellas provide shade
- 2 PLAYGROUND**
Available open space to be re-imagined
- 3 GARDEN**
Active garden & potential to make a full learning lab
- 4 13TH STREET CORNER**
Flat, grassy space adjacent to the garden



ADDITIONAL SITE DATA

The site as a whole is tidy and well maintained. Four areas of the site were studied for existing and proposed outdoor learning uses. The Atrium and Playground both have aging artificial turf surfacing that needs updating. The play equipment is aging and lacks play surfacing. This presents an opportunity to re-imagine the area for integrated play and outdoor learning uses. If fenced, there would be an excellent opportunity to expand the garden and add outdoor classroom space at the 13th Street Corner. All of the outdoor learning and play spaces need ADA access retrofitting.

Existing Site Photos

1

ATRIUM

Add small scale features & movable seats



SMALL SPACE: ARTIFICIAL TURF SURFACING. NO ADA ACCESS. USES: GARDENING. RECOMMENDATION: RESURFACING. ADA ACCESS RETROFIT. ADDITION OF FEATURES.

2

PLAYGROUND

Re-imagine integrated play and learning space

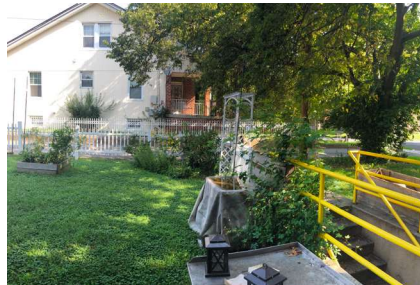


LARGE SPACE: ARTIFICIAL TURF SURFACING. NO ADA ACCESS. USES: RECESS. RECOMMENDATION: TOTAL RENOVATION. ADA ACCESS RETROFIT.

3

GARDEN

Update beds & add learning tool features

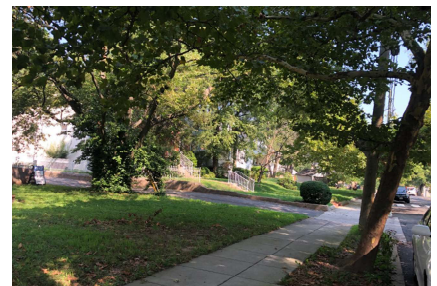
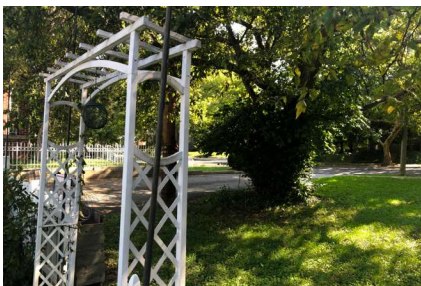


MEDIUM SPACE: LAWN TURF SURFACING. NO ADA ACCESS. USES: GARDENING. RECOMMENDATION: RETAIN OR RENOVATE EXISTING & ADD FEATURES. ADD ADA ACCESS.

4

13TH STREET CORNER

Expand garden & learning lab



MEDIUM SPACE: LAWN TURF SURFACING. NO ADA ACCESS. USES: NOT PROGRAMMED. RECOMMENDATION: NEW LEARNING SPACE & FEATURES. ADD NEW ADA ACCESS.

Site Plan

About the Project

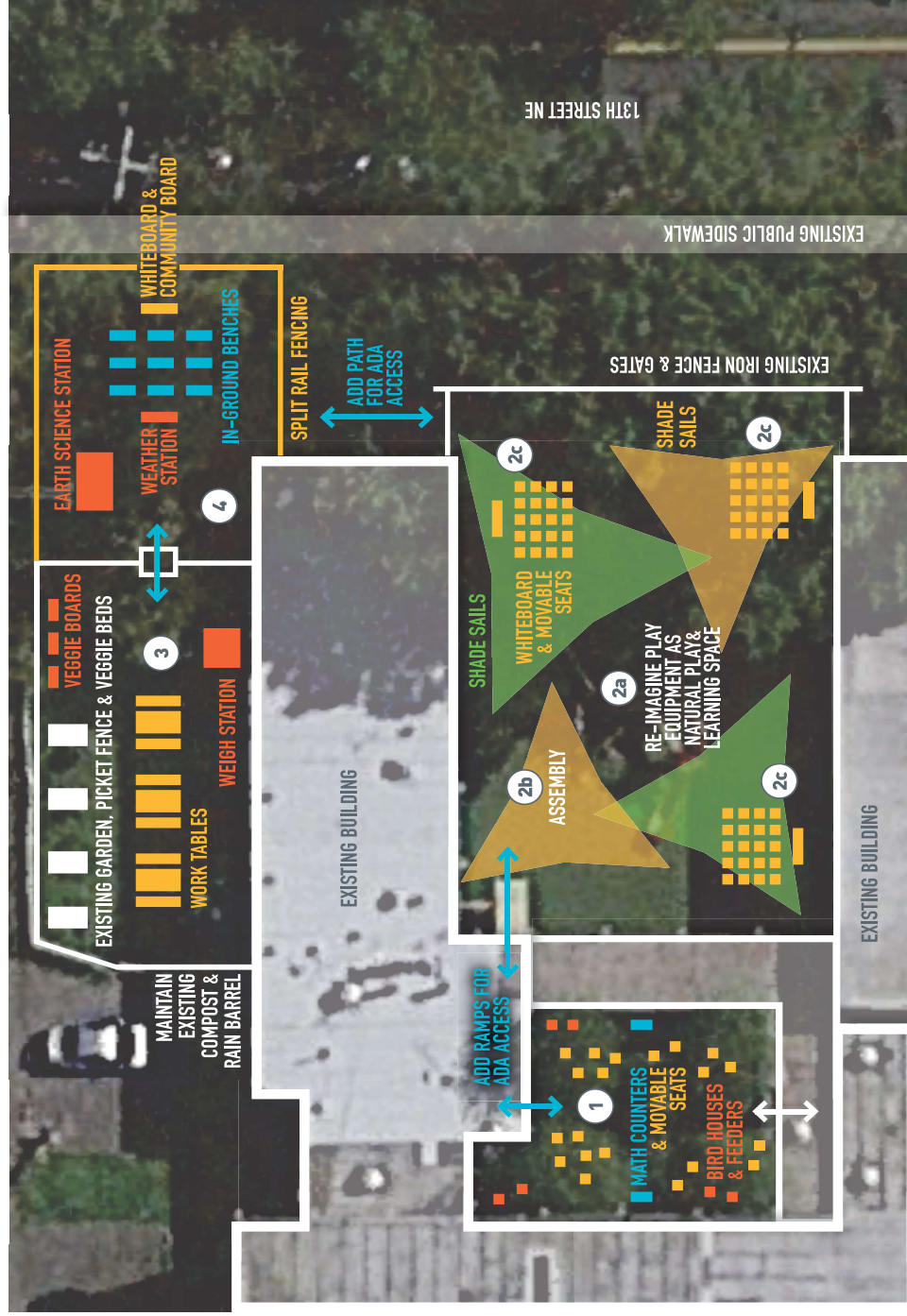
This institution is a Public Charter School located in Northeast DC. The philosophy of Montessori encourages outdoor and experiential learning. The school prefers neutral colors in the learning environment.

This site design is divided into four areas, which could each be built in phases, or at the same time. Short term recommendations include adding movable seating, work tables, and installing whiteboards. These improvements alone will activate the spaces for learning.

Long term recommendations include re-imagining the Playground with shade sails and integrated natural play and learning features. Another long term project is building out a full learning lab connected and integrated with the existing garden, including building new fencing around the 13th Street Corner.

Map Key

- 1** **ATRIUM** Add small features like math counters, movable seats, bird feeders & birdbhouse
- 2** **PLAYGROUND** 2a: Natural play area
2b: Assembly area
2c: Outdoor classrooms
- 3** **GARDEN** Add work tables, veggie board signage, and a veggie farm stand weigh station
- 4** **13TH STREET CORNER** Create a learning lab with split rail fencing, outdoor whiteboard, in-ground benches, earth science station, and weather station



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1 Atrium Site Features



\$ DIY MAKER SPACE BIN



\$ BIRDHOUSE STATION



\$ DIY BIRD FEEDER STATION



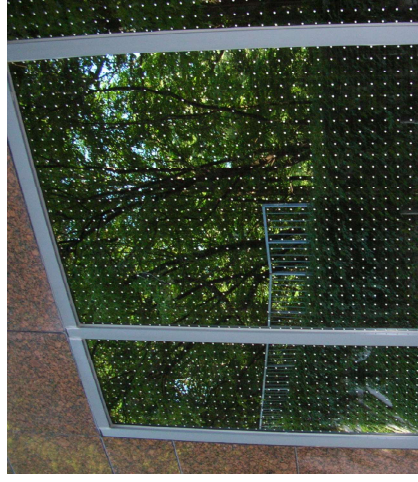
\$ MATH COUNTER – ABACUS STYLE



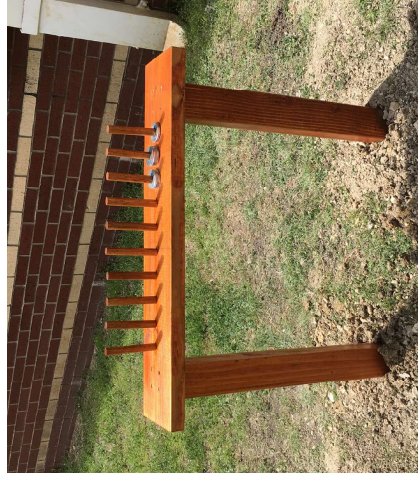
\$\$\$ BLOCKS & CRATES FOR MOVABLE SEATS



\$\$\$ BLOCKS & CRATES FOR MOVABLE SEATS



\$\$\$ BIRD SAFE WINDOW TREATMENT



\$ MATH COUNTER – UNITS STYLE

2 Playground Site Features



\$\$\$ SHADE SAILS



\$ TREE COOKIES (A.K.A. STUMP SEATING)



\$\$\$ NATURAL PLAY FEATURES



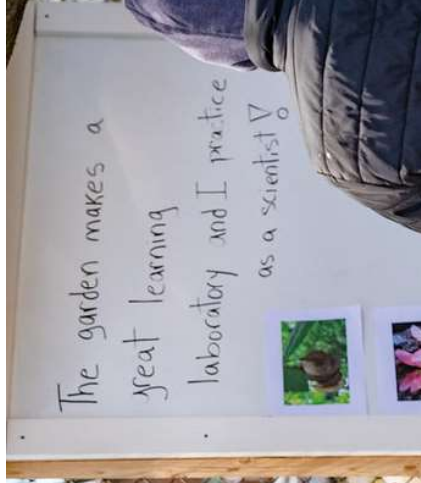
\$\$ CLASSROOMS WITH MOVABLE SEATS



\$\$ CLASSROOMS WITH MOVABLE SEATS



\$\$ OUTDOOR WHITEBOARDS



3 Garden Site Features



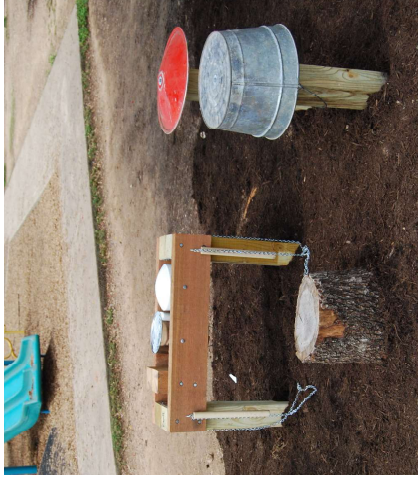
\$\$ UPDATED RAISED BEDS WITH SEAT TOPS



\$ INSECT HOTEL



\$\$\$ WORK TABLES / OUTDOOR MEAL TABLES



\$ DIY MUSIC STATION



\$\$ MIXED POLLINATOR BEDS WITH RAISED BEDS



\$ MATH PRIMARY BALANCE (WEIGH STATION)



\$\$ VEGGIE BOARDS & FARM STAND WEIGH STATION



4 13th St Corner Features



\$\$ IN-GROUND BENCHES & WHITEBOARD



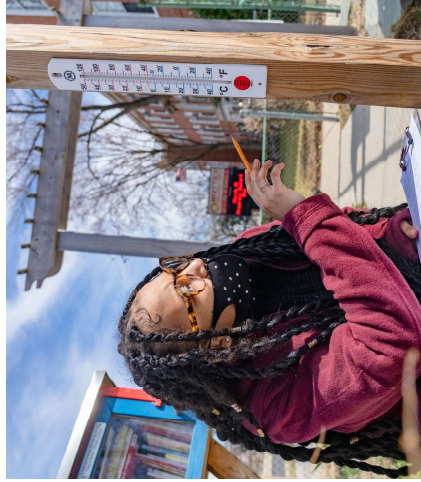
\$\$ EARTH SCIENCE STATION



\$\$ EARTH SCIENCE STATION IN ACTION



\$\$ WEATHER STATION ELEMENTS - WEATHER BOARD, THERMOMETER, WINDSOCK & MEASURING STATION



\$\$ COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD & FENCE



Guidance Document



Planning Outdoor Spaces

Develop goals.

What content areas will be taught? Which grade levels will use the space? Are there specific learning standards with clear connections to outdoor phenomena? How many classes should be able to access the space at one time? Will the school engage the broader community in the space and for what purposes?

Identify the best location(s).

Many schools have multiple spaces suitable for outdoor learning. An ideal location for an outdoor classroom is a safe space that is easily accessible. Ensure that all students, including those in wheelchairs, can access and navigate the site. Avoid locating outdoor learning features too close to areas that are frequently used for other purposes, such as P.E. and recess, and may interfere with learning. Are there both sunny and shady areas to promote outdoor learning year-round? Avoid areas that do not drain well after a heavy rain or are subject to strong winds. Consider the slope of the space. While it requires less expertise and funding to build out a flat space, with proper resources an area with a slope can also be very functional. Are there utilities to consider? Will the space need electricity? Ensure there is close water access if planning to maintain garden beds.

Create an implementation plan.

Schools often choose to build their outdoor classrooms in phases. Create a wishlist of learning features aligned with priority goals. Budget to build out the elements that support high level goals first then consider which features could be included in subsequent phases of implementation. Faculty and staff change from year to year at schools, so consider how to document the implementation plan for viability into the future. For example, is the outdoor classroom a part of a formal campus improvement plan or other initiative? Consider who will do the construction. Are there parents, guardians, or community partners who have the skill to construct basic features such as raised beds and mounted whiteboards? Schools can also choose to procure the services of approved district vendors to support installation.

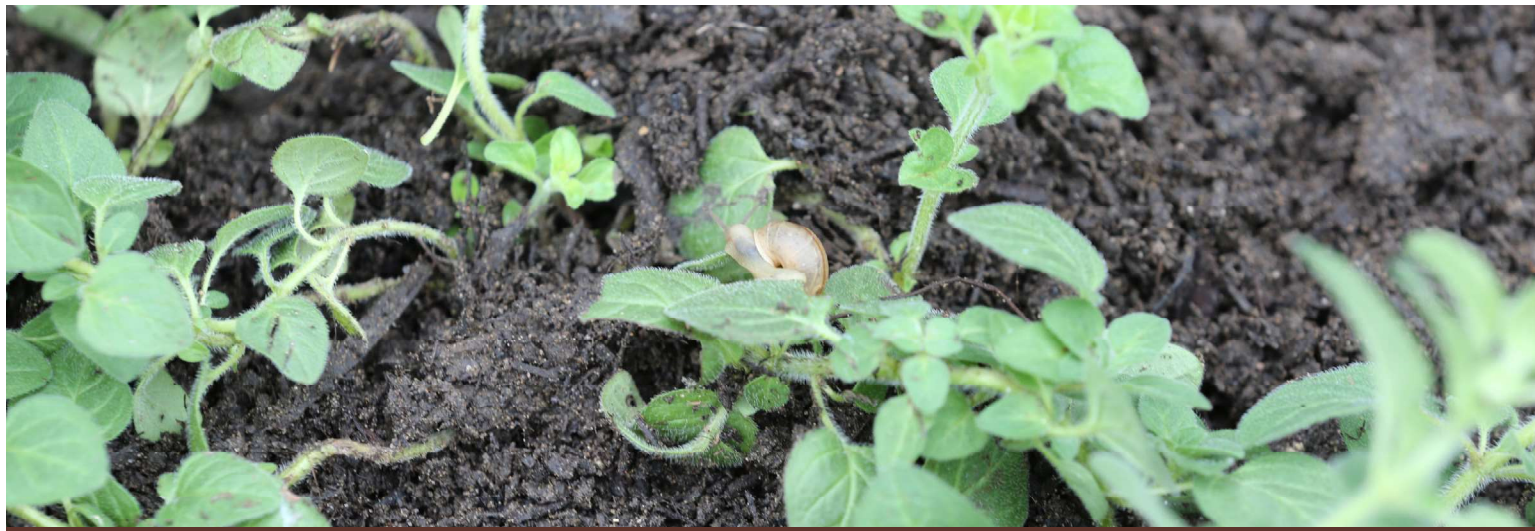
Additional Resources

[OSSE Outdoor Learning](#)

[OSSE School Garden Guide](#)

[Out Teach Moving Learning Outdoors](#)

[Green School Yards America Augmented Reality Tool](#)



Serving Meals Outdoors

Choose a location that is safe, comfortable, and easily accessible.

Will meals be delivered to students from the cafeteria, or will students pick up their meals and carry them to the outdoor space? Use a location that is close enough to the cafeteria for either approach to be feasible. If students pick up their meals in the cafeteria, consider bagged lunches rather than trays to avoid spills. If there are no benches and/or picnic tables to accommodate a large group, students may also sit on a lawn or other comfortable, safe surface. Ensure that students have a hand washing station or hand sanitizer available near the eating area(s).

Plan for clean-up and waste management.

Work with facilities and custodial staff to plan for waste management. Encourage the use of reusable items and provide clearly visible recycling, compost, and trash containers. Engage students in developing procedures for ensuring that the space is cleaner at the end of meal time than it was to begin with. Take the opportunity to foster students' care for their environment.

Use mealtime to extend learning.

Provide opportunities for students to make connections between their meals and the outdoor classroom. For example, meals may be supplemented with freshly harvested and cleaned herbs or produce from a school garden. Additionally, teach students to identify which plant parts they are eating. For example, we eat "root" vegetables like potatoes and carrots, leafy vegetables like lettuce, and the fruits of many plants such as apples. Wheat is a grass and used in most common baked goods, such as bread. Sometimes, we even eat the flowers, like broccoli.

Additional Resources

[Outdoor Learning Training Series](#)

[OSSE Recommendations for Outdoor Meal Service](#)



Outdoor Classroom Group Management

Set clear expectations.

To foster a safe, effective teaching environment, students must understand that the outdoor classroom is a place for learning, just like the indoor classroom. In most cases, the same rules that apply indoors will apply outdoors with a few additional expectations established especially for the outdoors. For example, students should have clear physical boundaries to stay within. Unless you have a fenced in area or a courtyard, specify the area students should occupy and should not go beyond. Additionally, students are expected to respect all living things, including each other. Allow students to help define what respect for all living things looks like in the classroom.

Establish procedures.

Determine if bathroom breaks are appropriate before, during, or after outdoor lessons and establish a routine. Depending on the size and noise level of the outdoor classroom space, consider the use of a special tool for getting students' attention and calling them to order. Harmonicas, whistles, shakers, or other noise makers that can fit into a pocket or backpack are all good tools. If students gather in an open space (not in a seating area), arrange them in a circle. This will ensure that no one is in front or back and allow students to see whomever is speaking. The teacher can move through the inside of the circle to facilitate discussion, get proximity to specific students as needed, more easily monitor conversation, and minimize off-task behavior.

Ensure students have necessary supplies.

At a minimum, make certain that students have a journal and writing utensil for outdoor lessons, so they can document observations and questions, gather data, sketch, or diagram phenomena, and generate written reflections or responses. If pencils are required, keep a container of sharpened pencils on hand for backup. Consider putting together a teacher backpack or bin for outdoor lessons that includes backup pencils and other basic tools such as rulers, hand lenses, and thermometers.

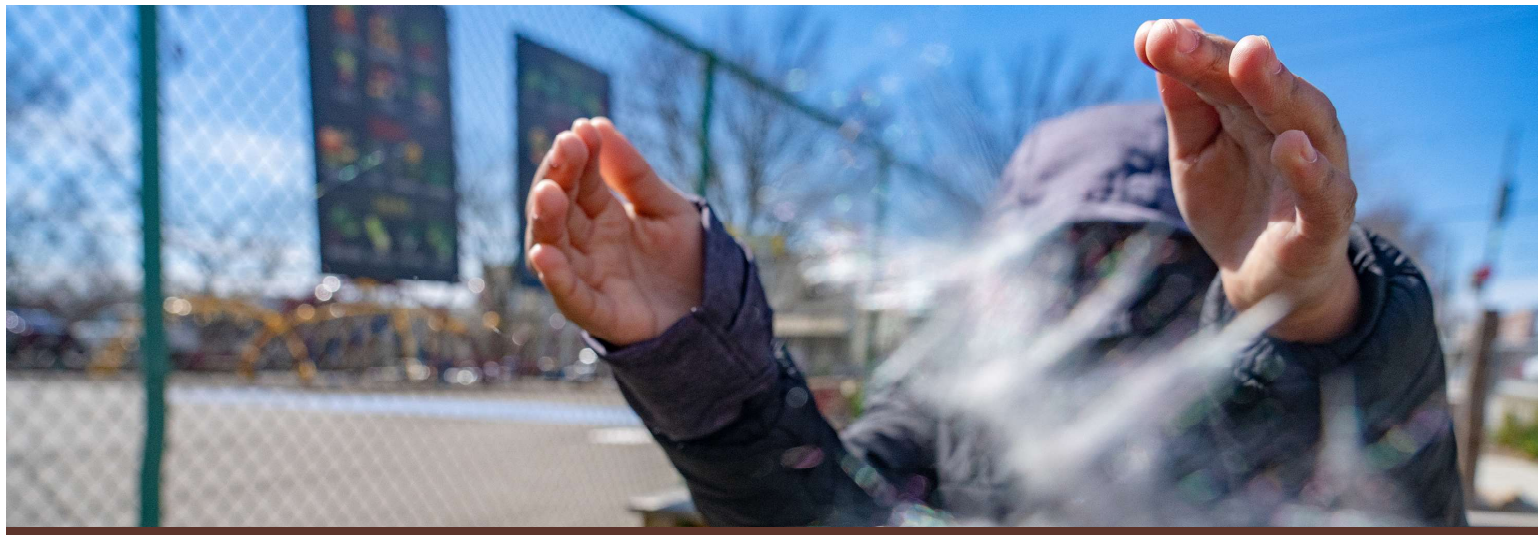
Maximize exploration time.

The more time students spend actively exploring outdoor phenomena, the less time spent re-directing off-task behaviors. Minimize the amount of time spent "in front" of the class and maximize the amount of time the class spends engaging with each other and the phenomenon under investigation. Consider how to group students for exploration. Cooperative groups of two or three students often result in the most time on-task, whereas groups of four or more students can be difficult to manage outdoors. As students explore, circulate through the space, and listen to their ideas and misconceptions. Prompt them with probing questions and informally assess their understanding of the concepts being studied.

Additional Resources

[Outdoor Learning Training Series](#)

[Sample lessons for elementary students](#)



Teaching Strategies

Connect outdoor lessons to specific learning standards.

Make certain that the standard being taught is clearly connected to observable phenomena in the outdoor classroom. For example, using a natural object to stimulate descriptive writing or collecting weather data over time to generate graphs and identify patterns.

Clarify learning outcomes.

Students may take a skill they are learning and apply it in a real-world context. For example, applying measurement skills to determine the area or perimeter of a garden bed. Or students may use the space to engage in new content, such as introducing cycles and systems through observations of clouds (water cycle) or insects (life cycles). Have a clear idea of what students should know and be able to do and how the outdoor lesson moves them closer to mastery.

Facilitate student self-directed learning.

Give students a clear task that enables them to make decisions about their learning. An example of a problem-based task is to measure the area of a vegetable bed to determine how many tomato plants to grow. Students can make choices about which measurement tools to use (meter tape, ruler, etc.) and which unit to take the measurement in (inches, centimeters, non-standard units). Students generate a lot of questions as they explore the outdoor classroom. Develop a process for collecting their questions to use as prompts for future explorations.

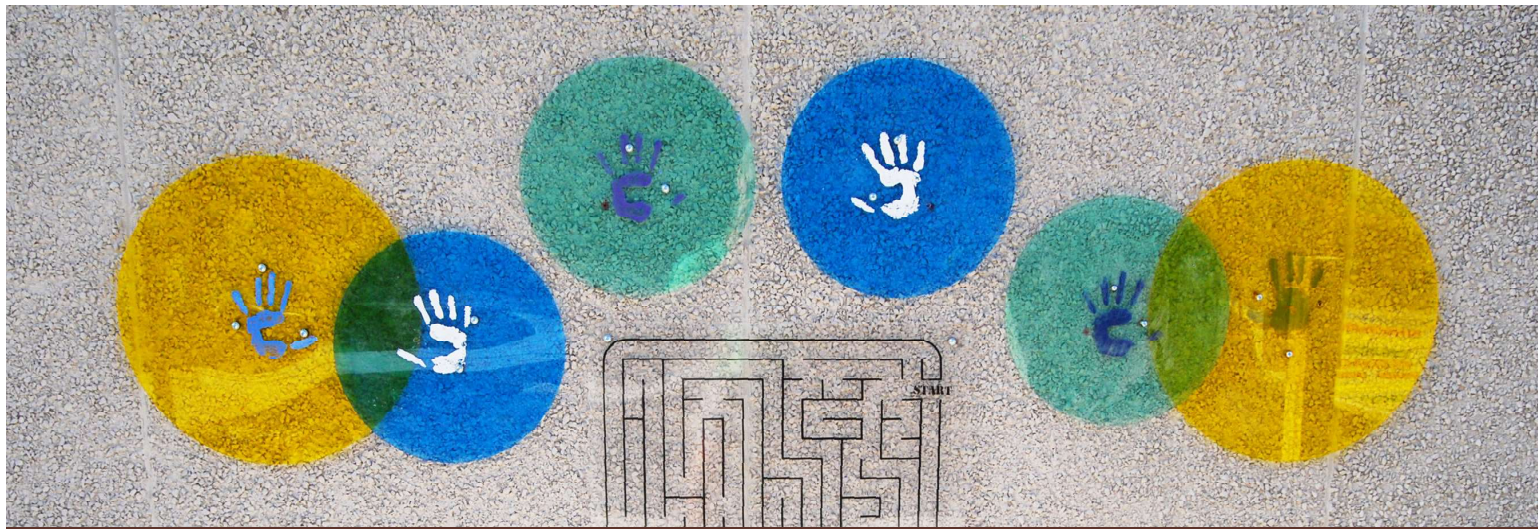
Explore, then explain.

When teaching science outdoors, fight the temptation to introduce new concepts by explaining them first. Rather, begin by facilitating a student exploration that allows students to experience the content first-hand, then encourage them to make meaning out of their experience. For example, if teaching plant parts, structure, and function, ask students to pull two different types of weeds and compare their parts. Why do they have different parts? How do their parts help them to survive? Allow students to generate their own ideas and explanations prior to providing direct instruction.

Additional Resources

[Sample lessons for elementary students](#)

[Outdoor Learning Training Series](#)



Creating Buy-In

Form a diverse team.

The long-term sustainability of a space starts at the very beginning when developing goals. Input in the earliest stages of planning gives participants a voice and ownership. Consider recruiting teachers from different grade levels, school leadership, parents, volunteers, or community organizations who can support the construction, use, and maintenance of the space(s). Establishing a team early on sets a precedent for future years and helps establish a culture of care and thoughtfulness regarding outdoor classrooms. Consider rotating new teachers and community members through this team each year and recruit members in the same manner as for other committee assignments.

Ensure that teachers receive professional learning.

Outdoor classrooms that are used frequently for teaching and learning are sustainable long-term. Ownership grows as teachers and students begin to reap the benefits of outdoor instruction. Therefore, it is critical that teachers receive professional learning to support outdoor, experiential pedagogy.

Foster a culture of collaboration amongst teachers.

Most schools have systems for encouraging teachers to collaborate, such as grade level planning sessions, professional learning communities, time during staff meetings, etc. Schedule time each month for teachers to work together to integrate the outdoor classroom into their lesson plans and to share successes and resources.

Form a student club.

Becoming a caretaker can be a transformative experience for students. Many schools have before and after school clubs to enrich students and to support what is taught in the classroom. A student club can meet weekly or monthly to perform basic maintenance tasks such as planting, watering, and pulling weeds for garden beds of herbs, vegetables, perennials, etc. Forming a club also firmly establishes the outdoor classroom as an important part of school identity and culture and builds pride of place.

Communicate the benefits.

There are many studies that outline the benefits of outdoor experiential education for students. Knowing these benefits, experiencing them first-hand and communicating them to all stakeholders can establish buy-in and pave the way for long-term sustainability.

Additional Resources

[Explore professional learning options](#)

[Research explaining benefits of outdoor learning](#)

[Outdoor Learning Training Series](#)