

Supporting Outdoor, Hands-On Learning During COVID-19



Why Move Outdoors?

There is a call from top-down officials, including **Dr. Anthony Fauci** and **The American Academy of Pediatrics**, saying that schools should **utilize the outdoors as much as possible** when returning to in-person learning. Not only does outdoor learning improve safety for students, teachers, and school communities, but outdoor instruction is proven to help close the learning gaps that COVID has exacerbated.

Teaching Outdoors Improves Safety

Spending time outdoors is proven to drastically decrease the potential for transmission, but few schools have the resources or bandwidth to spend all day outdoors. Fortunately, getting students outside for **even a portion of the day can help improve indoor conditions** by allowing indoor air more time to **ventilate**, and giving particles time to settle on **cleanable surfaces**, **reducing the overall indoor viral load**.

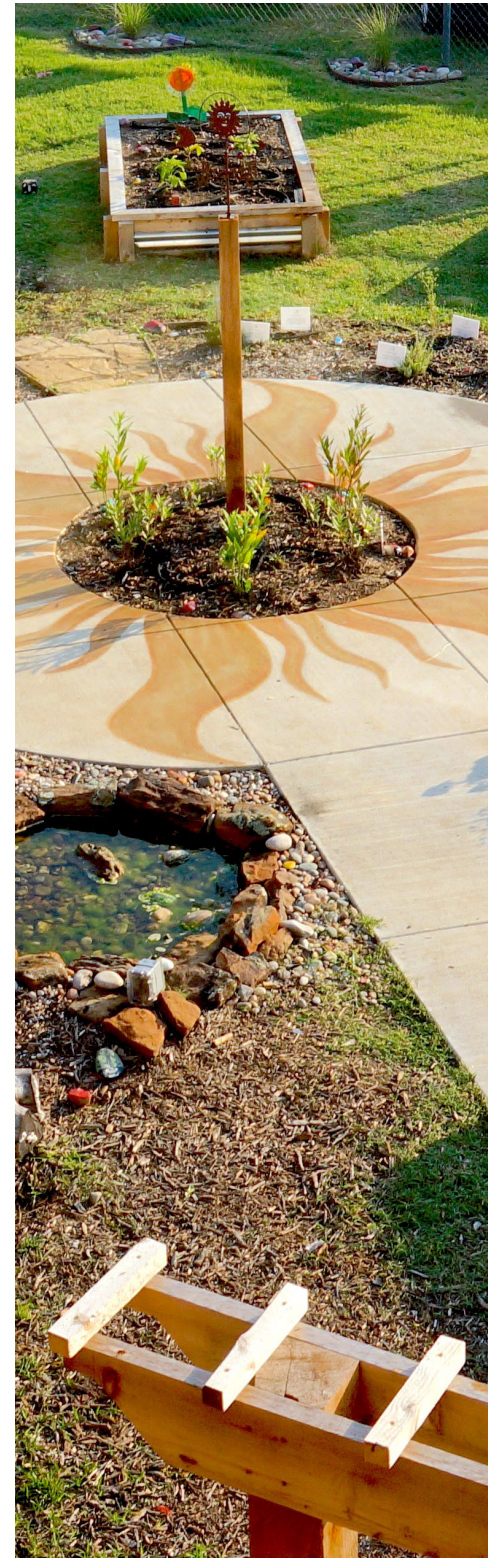
Using the Outdoors to Teach Improves Learning

Experts estimate that **students returning to school have lost 1/3 a year in reading and 1/2 in math** and **80% of teachers say their students are learning less during remote instruction**, making a return to in-person learning critically important for children, especially those in underserved communities. Not only can outdoor learning facilitate a return to in-person instruction, it supports hands-on experiential learning, and accelerates and deepens subject comprehension for all students. Outdoor learning experiences also improve STEM, SEL, and 21st Century skill development, making it an important resource schools can use to combat learning loss.

Getting Started Outdoors

Creating an outdoor learning program isn't an all-or-nothing proposition. Across the country, many **schools are working to implement a range of outdoor learning strategies** to improve both the safety and effectiveness of their in-person instructional plans. But even though most schools have access to usable outdoor spaces, introducing an outdoor learning program can be daunting. Challenges and questions range the gamut, from scheduling and weather concerns to lesson planning and effective instructional techniques.

To help schools make in-person learning safer and more effective, Out Teach has created a series of tools any school can use to help navigate the physical and logistical barriers to moving more learning outdoors. We've also identified resources from other experts in the field to help make it as easy as possible to plan and execute an effective outdoor learning program that produces health and academic benefits through COVID and beyond.



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Why teach outside?

- Experts agree that outdoor instruction is safer, and should be an important part of every school's in-person learning strategy. Outdoor time also makes indoor classrooms safer by allowing indoor air to ventilate and particulates to settle.
- Using the outdoors as an immersive experiential learning environment deepens learning across the curriculum, promotes inquiry-based thinking, and develops SEL and 21st century skills, making it a critical tool in counteracting the learning loss created by COVID.



What type of outdoor space does a school need for outdoor learning?

- Schools may use multiple outdoor spaces across a campus of any size for outdoor learning. Students and teachers may utilize existing grassy areas, with or without shade, courtyards, and even parking lots or basketball courts for effective instruction.



What about managing logistics?

- Students and teachers benefit from outdoor time even in increments, so create a schedule and rotation that allows classes to move outdoors regularly and integrate it into the master school schedule. The rotation may be similar to the recess, library, or specials schedules.
- Consider the age of students learning outdoors. Younger students may be engaged outdoors for 30-45 minutes at a time, while older students may be comfortable outdoors for up to 2 hours at a time.



What about the weather?

- Utilize the same school or district weather guidelines established for recess. If weather conditions are poor but manageable, shorten class rotations to still provide some time outside of the traditional classroom.
- Utilize existing community partnerships and local charitable organizations to provide cold-weather or rain gear for students in need.



What about safety?

- Apply existing medical emergency plans, shelter-in-place plans, and other safety protocols to outdoor learning. Adapt protocols used for other outdoor events such as arrival/dismissal, recess, and field days to outdoor learning.
- Implement a walkie-talkie system so teachers can keep in touch with the main office.



What supplies/equipment do teachers need to take a class outside?

- Teaching outdoors doesn't require special supplies. Students should use their existing journals or notebooks and a pencil, or alternatively a clipboard and lined paper.
- Schools can also invest in sets of five-gallon buckets for students to use as stools or writing surfaces.
- Teachers may also bring a small backpack or bucket with extra paper, pencils, a small first aid kit, tissues, and hand sanitizer.



How do teachers prepare for a lesson outside?

- Preparing for a lesson outside is similar to preparing for an indoor lesson. Teachers identify the standard they need to teach, how they're going to assess that skill, and then make a plan using the elements outdoors as helpful experiential learning tools.
- Provide guidance and collaborative time during grade-level planning sessions for teachers to collaborate on lesson planning using the outdoors.

For more information, please visit bit.ly/OutTeachResources, or email us at info@out-teach.org

Checklist for Campus



Decide on desired purpose and frequency of getting students outside

- ☐ Maximize total time outdoors/ frequency of outdoor sessions?
- ☐ Limit duration of time indoors?

Map your space

- ☐ A satellite view on Google Earth will show usable outdoor areas.
- ☐ Identify and name gathering locations.
- ☐ View attached sample maps for ideas.

Create a rotation schedule

- ☐ Should children be sent outside by grade, by subject, by classroom location?
- ☐ How does this coordinate with other outdoor time, like P.E.?
- ☐ Does this need to align with other COVID-related schedules such as cleaning?
- ☐ Sample schedules attached and available for download on bit.ly/OutTeachResources.

Gather supplies and resources

- ☐ 5-gallon buckets for mobile bucket classroom
- ☐ Whiteboards and dry-erase marker for teachers
- ☐ Clipboard/ Journals for students
- ☐ Pens/Sharpened pencils
- ☐ Hand Sanitizer
- ☐ Coats collected from clothing drive and assigned to students
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Paper towels

Plan the lessons

- ☐ Identify existing resources, such as those on bit.ly/OutTeachResources.
- ☐ Have grade-level teams gather to discuss how best to use outdoor spaces for hands-on instruction.

Recruit volunteers

- ☐ Even if volunteers aren't permitted to help during class, some may be helpful to create or maintain outdoor spaces off-hours.
- ☐ Visit bit.ly/OutTeachResources for sample volunteer form.