

green schoolyards

ACTION AGENDA

Increasing equitable access to nature's benefits in schoolyards across the U.S.



our vision

All U.S. communities offer access to green schoolyards by 2050 to enhance children's healthy development, community wellbeing and positive environmental impacts.

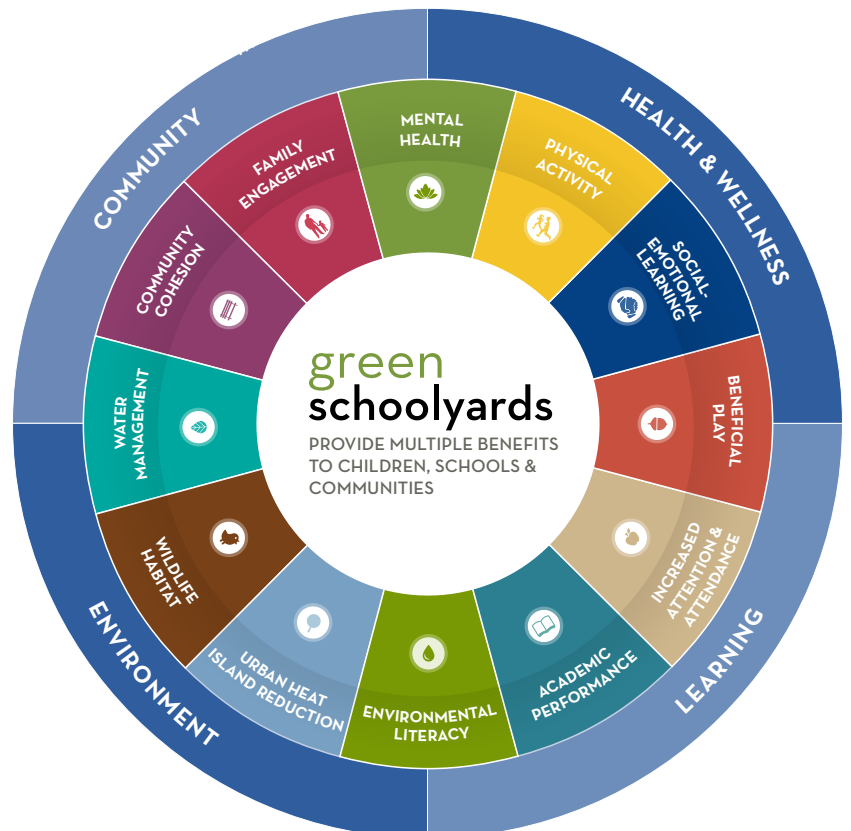
A growing body of evidence shows that time spent learning and playing in nature helps children reach their full academic and social-emotional potential. Regular access to high quality green space improves mental and physical health—and inspires strong connections to the natural world.

While only a small percentage of U.S. schools currently offer nature-filled outdoor spaces, many communities are exploring green schoolyards as a strategy for increasing educational and health equity, and enhancing quality of life. The number of green schoolyards is growing as communities mobilize to transform asphalt and turf grass into enriching outdoor areas where children and families can learn, play and grow both during and outside of school time.

“Imagine...

how our communities would look and feel if all schoolyards were green schoolyards, where children and families learn and grow with nature in their daily lives.”

Teresa Weatherall Neal,
Superintendent of Schools,
Grand Rapids Public Schools





what are green schoolyards?

The Children & Nature Network defines green schoolyards as multi-functional school grounds, designed by and for the entire school community, that include places for students, teachers, parents and community members to play, learn, explore and grow. During out of school time, these schoolyards are ideally for community use.

Green schoolyards can include:

- outdoor classrooms
- native and pollinator gardens
- stormwater capture
- traditional play equipment
- nature play areas
- edible gardens
- trails
- trees and shrubs

building on community strengths

Safe, nature-filled green spaces are not equally accessible to low-income communities and communities of color. The combination of limited access to green space, economic stress and other community challenges can inhibit healthy development for children.

Green schoolyards build on community strengths and when equitably distributed, can help all children thrive. Creating access to nature in schoolyards in every community would have a lasting impact on children's health and well-being, and particularly, for the most vulnerable children.

green schoolyards | ACTION AGENDA GOALS



Cross-sector leaders and partners support green schoolyards for the benefit of children, families and communities.



Communities value and promote green schoolyards as essential assets and infrastructure.



A robust evidence base demonstrates the many benefits of green schoolyards.



Sustainable funding supports development, stewardship and maintenance of green schoolyards.



Federal, state, local and school district policies support the equitable distribution, implementation and use of green schoolyards.

Goals are not listed in sequential order but identify what partners believe is necessary to advance our vision. Actions may advance simultaneously.



Cross-sector leaders and partners support green schoolyards for the benefit of children, families and communities.

ACTIONS:

1. Increase awareness of green schoolyard components and benefits with elected officials, decision makers, and advocates across sectors and within communities.
2. Distribute green schoolyard materials and information widely via cross-sector and community partners, at conferences, convenings, and other dissemination venues.
3. Perform an assessment of cross-sector partner organizations' goals in order to identify the connections to and opportunities for green schoolyards, as well as a relational assessment of organizations already in this space.
4. Identify new partners who have a stake in green space access and can accomplish their goals through green schoolyards, and target outreach efforts with those partners.



Communities value and promote green schoolyards as essential assets and infrastructure.

ACTIONS:

1. Develop and adopt government and school district policies to promote shared use, liability and risk assessment, and open community access to schoolyards.
2. Include green schoolyards in comprehensive municipal and community plans as spaces that can achieve outcomes in health, sustainability, the environment, community cohesion, and park access.
3. Establish planning processes where children, community members, parents, school staff and organizations are valued as leaders and decision-makers in order to achieve culturally appropriate design, use, programming and stewardship of green schoolyards. Provide trainings to support facilitators, planners and designers to do this.
4. Formal and informal educators are trained and feel comfortable to use their entire schoolyard as an outdoor classroom during and out-of-school time.



A robust evidence base demonstrates the many benefits of green schoolyards.

ACTIONS:

1. In order to advance the field, synthesize and disseminate published research on the benefits of green schoolyards; share ongoing and future research and evaluation; conduct vigorous, collaborative, multidisciplinary research; and, create a reporting platform to monitor progress of new and existing green schoolyard initiatives on a variety of indicators in order to aggregate data that can impact understanding of potential outcomes.
 2. Assess the economic benefit, value and return on investment of green schoolyards for municipalities, school districts, communities and society.
 3. Create case-making toolkits demonstrating the evidence and success stories for key audiences such as local and national policymakers, educators, community members and funders.
 4. Collect baseline evidence to demonstrate the equity landscape of green schoolyards to create urgency and focus on low income communities and communities of color.
 5. Establish a multidisciplinary research agenda for green schoolyards based on an analysis of current knowledge and gaps in the literature.
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Sustainable funding supports development, stewardship and maintenance of green schoolyards.

ACTIONS:

1. Advocate for changes in federal, state and local public investment in green schoolyards by supporting school facilities and education funding, grants and reimbursements.
2. Promote the use of private investments such as accelerator grants, innovation grants, social impact bonds and CRAs (Community Reinvestment Act) to serve as catalysts for program capacity, movement building and long-term stewardship and maintenance of green schoolyards.
3. Advocate for decision-makers to prioritize funding distribution to low-income communities and communities of color for greatest equity impact.
4. Use and further develop successful public funding models and mechanisms to support green schoolyards, such as local and state capital funds; urban utility agencies; community benefits programs; allocation of school infrastructure bonds and capital improvement funds.
5. Work with municipal and state government advocates to identify new dynamic funding sources for green schoolyards, such as taxes on soda, marijuana, and development.



Federal, state, local and school district policies support the equitable distribution, implementation and use of green schoolyards.

ACTIONS | General Policy:

1. Advocate for the use of green schoolyards as sites for targeted health interventions.
2. Work with national organizations to integrate green schoolyards in to existing or emerging equity-focused policy agendas, such as those addressing social justice, racial equity, sustainability, social/emotional learning, play, and violence prevention.
3. Create policy case-making documents for decision makers at local, state and national levels.
4. Engage with existing networks to advance the green schoolyards agenda.

ACTIONS | State or Local/District Level Policy:

1. Integrate outdoor learning requirements into state and local school district Environmental Literacy Plans.
2. Expand existing state, municipal or district shared use and open use policies to include green schoolyard spaces, and leverage those policies to reduce school district liability for green schoolyards.
3. Advocate for including equity assessments of school ground environments as part of district capital planning.
4. Expand School Health & Wellness policies to include use of green schoolyards for outdoor play and learning as part of the school day.
5. Create policy to implement green schoolyard design guidelines at state or school district levels, integrating these into overall school design guidelines.
6. Work with hospitals to integrate green schoolyards into their Community Health Needs Assessments in order to increase individual or group funding for schoolyard programs.
7. Include green schoolyards in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) report cards and implementation.

ACTIONS | National Policy:

1. Include green schoolyards in the next federal assessment of school facilities.
2. Add Green Schoolyards to the Collaborative for High Performing Schools, U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools, USGBC Green Schools, and LEED for Schools criteria.
3. Create a menu of green schoolyard elements that can aid municipalities in meeting Clean Water Act permitting requirements for stormwater and combined sewer systems run by the States and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
4. Expand use of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to include green schoolyards for green space development.
5. Include quality and quantity of green schoolyards in the Office of Civil Rights (Department of Education) school report card in order to collect accurate data on inequities in green schoolyard distribution.
6. Align green schoolyards with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and ASDC “Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child” model.
7. Broaden definition at Internal Revenue Service of “community benefit” for addressing Community Health Needs Assessments.
8. Pilot a Health Impact Project where green schoolyards have been identified as an intervention and included in a Health Impact Assessment.
9. Advocate for new language for technical specifications that address ADA compliance in outdoor learning and play environments on school grounds.

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growing a movement

This Action Agenda was created from the **2015 National Green Schoolyards Summit**, **2017 Health Equity Roundtable to Advance Green Schoolyards**, conversations with experts and community leaders, as well as the following reports: *Building a National Movement For Green Schoolyards in Every Community*, published by Children & Nature Network, and *Green Schoolyards: A Growing Movement Supporting Health, Education and Connection with Nature*, published by Healthy Schools Campaign and Openlands.

to achieve our vision for green schoolyards, we, the undersigned, commit to working together to increase equitable access to nature's benefits in schoolyards across the U.S.