

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate  
The Capitol, S-230  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Capitol, H-232  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate  
The Capitol, S-221  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Capitol, H-204  
Washington, DC 20515

July 22, 2020

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer & Madame Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

As you evaluate funding for the resources our nation's schools will need to reopen in person this Fall and next year, the undersigned organizations urge you to give special consideration to the role outdoor spaces can play in enhancing the safety, well-being, and academic success of students and teachers. Supporting school ground improvements and programs for effective outdoor classrooms, safe play, and project-based learning could make a significant difference in the back-to-school efforts of public K-12 school districts nationwide. We urge you to consider school ground improvements in any shorter term funding for schools and in funding support for longer term renovations and new school construction.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines for reopening schools during the pandemic emphasize the importance of getting children of all ages back to school for a range of reasons, including support for sustained academic achievement, stress reduction, food security, and more. Among the recommendations provided by the AAP for every age group—use outdoor spaces as much as possible.

The average primary school sits on five or more acres, while the average secondary school occupies 15 to 20 acres. And yet very few of the 100,000 public K-12 school in the U.S. fully utilize outdoor space for learning. Effective use of outdoor spaces may ultimately permit more students to attend school more days per week. Moreover, research increasingly shows significant benefits of outdoor learning on mental and physical health, stress reduction, student engagement and academic success.

The North American Association for Environmental Education recently developed [guidance](#) to help schools think about creative and more nature-based use of schoolyards and outdoor spaces as they plan for safe reopening during the coming school year. Opportunities to use outdoor spaces will vary in different parts of the country, for different age groups, and during different parts of the year. Green Schoolyards America has outlined several [site planning considerations and scenarios](#). With proper resources, some of the steps that schools can take include:

- Taking a full inventory of outdoor locations where chairs, tables, benches etc. can be assembled in coherent learning spaces.
- Using vegetated areas, such as under trees, next to gardens and clustered landscaping to create reduced-stress environments, shade and modest screening and separation between classes.
- Erecting low cost open-sided tents to create additional weather appropriate classroom spaces in schoolyards.
- Providing outdoor opportunities for hands-on natural science investigations, community service projects, and authentic project-based STEM education.

- Partnering with community-based environmental education and other nonformal program providers who can increase a school's capacity to engage students in outdoor learning and serve as advisors for effective use of the schoolgrounds for learning.

Funding that supports the well-planned and effective use of outdoor school spaces for learning and disease prevention and management would provide major assistance to parents and educators as they rise to meet the many challenges presented by the pandemic. This will be particularly important, in the shorter run, for addressing inequities in lower income schools where cramped indoor conditions are often not very good for appropriate social distancing and could bring disproportionate harm to families and communities those schools serve.

We recognize that state and local education agencies face enormous challenges and differing timelines, based on available public health data and local guidelines, as they plan for the 2020-2021 school year and beyond. Investments in creative approaches to using the outdoors can help to address some of those challenges and potentially pave the way for an eventual return to school that is not only safer, but contributes to a vastly more healthy and meaningful education.

Sincerely,

### **National Organizations**

America Walks

Earth Day Network

American Camp Association

Earth Force

American Public Gardens Association

EcoRise

Association for Experiential Education

FoodCorps

Association for the Advancement of Sustainability  
in Higher Education

George B. Storer Foundation

Green Schools Alliance

Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies - Project  
WILD

Green Schools National Network, Inc.

Association of Nature Center Administrators

Green Schoolyards America

Association of Science and Technology Centers

Institute for Learning Innovation

Association of Zoos and Aquariums

Life Lab

Blue Sky Funders Forum

National Project for Excellence in Environmental  
Education

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

National Association for Interpretation

Campaign for Environmental Literacy

National Science Teaching Association

Children & Nature Network

National Wildlife Federation

Climate Generation: A Will Steger Legacy

Natural Learning Initiative

Sierra Club

North American Association for Environmental Education

The Acorn Group

Outdoors Empowered Network

The Cloud Institute

Seed Your Future

### **State and Regional Organizations**

A Child's Inspiration: Wildlife Discovery Garden

Avid4 Adventure

Agape Center for Environmental Education

Belchertown School Garden

Aldo Leopold Nature Center

Bennu LLC

Alicecostello.com

Big Island Invasive Species Committee

Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education

Blandford Nature Center

Alpine Ranch Creative Health and Ecological Solutions

Blooming Grove Montessori

American YouthWorks

Blue Sky Fund

Annabel C. Perry PreK-8

Bluff Lake Nature Center

Antioch University

Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT)

Appomattox 4-H

Broward County Public Schools

ARCHES

Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon College

Arizona Association for Environmental Education

Caesar Rodney School District

Arizona Center for Nature Conservation/Phoenix Zoo

California Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education

Arkansas Environmental Education Association

California Outdoor Engagement Coalition

Arkansas Forestry Association Education Foundation

Camp Chrysalis

Audubon at Riverlands

Camp Fire

Austin Chapter Texas Association for the Education of Young Children

Camp Fire Central Puget Sound

Austin Parks Foundation

Camp Fire Central Texas

Camp Ocean Pines

Camp Oty'Okwa/Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio

Camp Sealth

Canyonlands Field Institute

Carpenter St Croix Valley Nature Center

Carthage R9 School District

Cassel Landscape Architects

Catamount Institute

Cave of the Mounds National Natural Landmark

Center for Getting Things Started

Central Park School for Children

Chaparral Elementary School

Chaparral Hawks Health Garden

Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools

Chicopee Public Schools

Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center & Botanical Gardens

Christ the King School

Christoffel Conservation

Cincinnati Nature Center

Circulate San Diego

Citizens' Environmental Coalition

City Growers

City of Austin - Parks & Recreation Department

City of Raleigh Parks

City of Watsonville Public Works Conservation Academy

Clay County Soil & Water Conservation District

Clemson Extension School & Community Gardening

Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education

Colorado Mountain Club

Colorado Springs Utilities

Columbia MO Outdoor Classroom

Columbia Public Schools

Conrad Weiser Middle School

Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park

Cope Environmental Center

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

County of San Diego Master Gardeners, School Garden Committee

Covenant Harbor Bible Camp

Cultivating Community

Curry Watersheds Partnership

D3 Green Schools Group

Daggett Montessori

DC Environmental Education Consortium (DCEEC)

Deerfield Beach High School

Denali Education Center

Dickerson Park Zoo

Dillard High

Discovery Woods School

District 14 Green Alliance, Brooklyn, NY

Dodge Nature Center and Preschool

Donald Danforth Plant Science Center

Douglas-Hart Nature Center

DPS Hub Farm

Driftwood Elementary School

Duke University, Nicholas School of the Environment	Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools
Duluth Forest Kinderhaus	Fairfax County Public Schools
Dunes Learning Center	Fall in the Field
Durham Public Schools	Fallen Timbers Environmental Center
Durham Public Schools Hub Farm	Falls of the Ohio Foundation
Dutch Fork Elementary Academy of Environmental Sciences	Farm Discovery at Live Earth
E3 Washington	Ferguson-Florissant School District
Eagle Point Elementary School	Firelands Montessori Academy
Ealy Elementary - Whitehall District Schools	Florida Atlantic University
EarlySpace, LLC	FoodRight, Inc.
East Central ISD	Fort Ward Observer
Eastern Kentucky University	Fountain Creek Nature Center
Eco Expressions	FRESHFARM FoodPrints
Edible Schoolyard NYC	FRIENDS of Great Salt Lake
Edwardsville CUSD7	Friends of MidColumbia River Wildlife Refuges
Ehrhardt Elementary	Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy
El Paso County Community Services	Friends of Reinstein Woods
Emory Climate Collaborative	Friends of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve
Environmental Education Association of Illinois	Friends of the National Arboretum
Environmental Education Association of Indiana	Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River
Environmental Education Council of Ohio	Friends of the Rappahannock
Environmental Education of New Mexico	Fulton High School
Environmental Educators of North Carolina	Gaiacene Services LLC
Environmental Learning Center	Garden To Table
Environmental Policy Innovation Center	Granby Elementary School Garden
Everest Point Homeschool Academy	Grand Families Lifeline of Texas
Everglades High School	Granite City High School
	Great Smoky Mountain Institute at Tremont

Green Street Academy  
Greendale School District  
Griffin Elementary School  
GROUNDSWELL COMMUNITY PROJECT  
Grow Some Good  
Growing Healthy Waves  
Growing Minds Educational Farm  
Gulf Guardians  
Hallowed Grounds LLC  
Harris Center for Conservation Education  
Hartley Nature Center  
Hawai'i Academy of Arts and Science PCS  
Hawaii Environmental Education Association  
Hawaii State DLNR-Division of Forestry and Wildlife  
Headwaters Soil and Water Conservation District  
Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids  
High Point Friends School  
Hill Country Conservancy  
House In The Wood/Northwestern Settlement  
Houston Arboretum & Nature Center  
Indian Community School  
Indiana Children and Nature Network  
InItaliano - Bilinguismo a New York  
Innovations Academy  
Iredell County Planning Department  
Irvine Nature Center  
Jefferson County Open Space  
Jelly Beans Junction Childcare  
Jerome "Buddie" Ford Nature Center  
John Bunker Sands Wetland Center  
Johnson County Conservation District  
Ka Ohana O Na Pua  
Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education (KACEE)  
Keep Austin Beautiful  
Keep Houston Beautiful  
Kennebec Montessori School  
Kentucky Association For Environmental Education (KAEE)  
KidsGardening.org  
Kintrik Enterprises  
Kirksville Outdoor Education  
Klamath Outdoor Science School  
Knoxville Inspiring Connections Outdoors/Sierra Club  
Latin American Montessori Bilingual  
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, Program in Nutrition, Teachers College, Columbia University  
League of Environmental Educators in Florida  
Learning by Nature for ME  
Lehigh Valley Zoo  
Lennox Insites  
Lenore Cira  
Leslie Science & Nature Center  
Lexington Senior High School  
Lincoln Park Zoo

Linda Loring Nature Foundation  
Little Knights Early Childhood  
Louisville Nature Center  
Lyons Creek Middle School  
Lyons Middle School USD 405  
Madison Schools and Community Recreation  
Maine Environmental Education Association  
Maine Outdoor School, L3C  
Marine Discovery Center  
Marinette County Land Information Department  
Mary Hooker Environmental Sciences Magnet School  
Maryville College  
Mass Audubon  
Massachusetts Environmental Education Society  
Massachusetts Farm to School  
Master a Gardener's of San Diego  
Master Gardener Association of San Diego County  
MDUSD Garden Education Program  
Meals on Wheels Springfield  
Mill City Grows  
Minnesota Association for Environmental Education (MAEE)  
Minnesota House of Representatives  
Minnesota Naturalists Association  
Miron Construction Co., Inc.  
Mississippi Environmental Education Alliance  
Missouri Environmental Educators Association  
Missouri River Bird Observatory  
Missouri State University  
Montague Area Public School  
Mountain Castles SWCD  
Nature Based Education Consortium  
Nature Center at Shaker Lakes  
Nature Club Kids, LLC  
Nature Collective  
Nature Connection - writing, consulting, education  
Nature Detectives  
NatureBridge  
NC Aquarium  
NC Museum of Natural Sciences  
NC Project Learning Tree  
NC Wildlife Resources Commission  
NCSU  
Necedah Area Schools  
New England Environmental Education Alliance  
New Pioneers for Sustainable Future  
New York City District 14 Green Alliance  
Newport Bay Conservancy  
Newport High School-Cubby Preschool  
NEXT.cc STEAM by Design  
NIU Lorado Taft Field Campus  
NJ Audubon's - Scherman Hoffman Wildlife Sanctuary  
Normandy Schools Collaborative  
North Mountain Park Nature Center - Ashland Parks and Recreation  
Northwest Virginia Regional GREENetwork

Norwalk River Watershed Association	Prescott Community Nature Center
NYU	Princeton-Blairstown Center
Oahu Farm to School Network	Pringle Nature Center
Oakland Unified School District	Project New Village
Ocean Connectors	PS 333
Ocean Discovery Institute	Reflection Riding Arboretum & Nature Center
Orange Brook Elementary	Reflo
Orange Brook Elementary School	Rhode Island Environmental Education Association
Osprey Wilds ELC, Charter School Division	Rhode Island Zoological Society
Out Teach	Rising Appalachia
Outside The Box 925	River Guardian Foundation
Outward Bound California	Riverbend Environmental Education Center
Ozark Natural Science Center	Riveredge Nature Center
Pacific Education Institute	Roanoke City Public Schools
Paideia Academies, Inc.	Roanoke Group Sierra Club
Painted Oak Nature School	Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District
Pajarito Environmental Education Center	Rogue Valley Farm to School
Parkway School District	RunAbout Sports Roanoke
Pathfinder Ranch	Rural Action, Inc.
Pharr San Juan Alamo	Sacred Heart Villa
Pi Beta Phi Elementary School	Sage Garden Project
Pikes Peak Farm to School	SAGES (School of Ag and Env. Studies)
Pioneers Park Nature Center	Saint Paul Public Schools
Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy	Salem Public Schools
Pleasant Hill Elementary School	Samara Early Learning
Plymouth State University	San Antonio Area Foundation
PreK4SA	San Diego Canyonlands
Prescott College	San Diego Children and Nature

San Diego County Master Gardener Association

San Diego Zoo Global

Santa Cruz Gardens Elementary

Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group

Save Our Shores

School Board of Broward County

School of Engineering and Arts

School Sprouts Educational Gardens

Sequoia Elementary School

Sequoia Science Education

Severson Dells Nature Center

Seymour Marine Discovery Center

Short leaf Interpretive Services

Sienna ranch

Sierra Outdoor School

Small Wonders

Somatic Space

South Carolina Wildlife Federation

South Plantation High School

South Pointe High School

Southern Illinois University -Edwardsville

Southern Oregon University

SPI Sessions

Springbrook Nature Center

Sprout by Design

ST. GEORGE'S EPISCOPAL SCHOOL

St. Peter's Episcopal School

State College Friends School

Steamboat School District

Stoney Point

Striving for Zero Waste K-12 in Alameda County

Sullivan County Conservation District & Natural Resources Dept.

Sussex Academy Elementary School

Sustainable Living Center

Sustainable Nantucket

Take Root Café

Tanglewood Nature Center & Museum

Teach for America

Teatown Lake Reservation

Temple Beth El Temple School

Ten Strands

Texas Association for Environmental Education

Texas Butterfly Ranch

Texas Children in Nature

The Academy of Science - St. Louis

The Audubon Center at Riverlands

The Back 40 Schoolhouse

The Bird School Project

The College of New Jersey

The Ecology School

The Healthy Schools Project

The Kohala Center

The Monterey Bay Center for Environmental Literacy

The Nature Museum at Grafton

The New Weis Center for Education, Arts & Recreation

The Nonprofit Institute

The North Branch Nature Center

The San Diego River Park Foundation

The Watershed Project

Thorne Nature Experience

Tierra Pacifica charter school

Tracy Aviary

TreeFolks

Trout Lake Nature Center

Tucson Unified School District - Food Services

TX Sprouts

U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) - Missouri Gateway Chapter

UCCE SD Master Gardeners

UNCG Environment & Sustainability Program

Union Academy Charter School

University of Louisville

University of Lynchburg's Claytor Nature Center

University of Michigan-Dearborn

University of New Hampshire

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

University of Tennessee

University of Texas CDC- San Jacinto

Up Yonda Farm

Upper Freehold Regional School District

Upstream Alliance

Urban Ecology Center

Urban Harvest, Inc

Urban Patchwork

Utah Society for Environmental Education

Ventana Wildlife Society

Vermont Institute of Natural Science

Virginia Tech Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation

Virginia Zoo

Wake County Public School System

Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families

Washington Elementary School

Washington University Tyson Research Center

Water Resources Education Center

Watershed Nature Center

WaterWays

Web of Life Field (WOLF ) School

Welty Environmental Center

West 80s Neighborhood Association

West Hawaii Explorations Academy

Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center

Western Kentucky University

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

Westminster Woods

Whitehall District Schools

Wild Rose Education

Wilkes Soil and Water Conservation District

Will Smith Zoo School

Wisconsin Association for Environmental Education

Wisconsin Nature Action Collaborative for Children

Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

Woodcock Nature Center

Woodside Elementary

Woodstock Union high school

WUCSD

Yampatika

Yarrow Landscaping and Lawn Care LLC

Youth Environmental Alliance