

2020-22



Impact REPORT



green
schoolyards
america

OUR WORK

NATIONAL COVID-19 OUTDOOR
LEARNING INITIATIVE

CALIFORNIA SCHOOLYARD
FOREST SYSTEM

LIVING SCHOOLYARDS ACT

LOCAL PROGRAMS

MEET OUR TEAM

OUR MISSION

Green Schoolyards America collaborates with school districts and public agencies across the U.S. to establish large-scale living schoolyard programs that transform school grounds into ecologically rich, park-like green spaces.

OUR GOAL

Our goal is to improve children's health, learning, and happiness while building communities' ecological and climate resilience.

OUR IMPACT

2M+
STUDENTS BENEFITED

50
DISTRICTS INFLUENCED

213
PARTNERS ENGAGED

2020-22
IN NUMBERS

5.9K
INDIVIDUALS PARTICIPATED

Letter from Our CEO



Dear friends,

The green schoolyard field made an amazing amount of progress in the last three years. During the COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted lives in so many ways, Green Schoolyards America helped to catalyze a national movement to use outdoor learning as a way to safely and equitably reopen schools. Thanks to dedicated partners and practitioners, and a wave of national press, millions of people now know about the benefits of and strategies for transforming school grounds into park-like green spaces. Many of the schools and districts involved in these efforts have since built green schoolyards into their management, curriculum, and funding plans for the future.

As the pandemic became less of an emergency, our focus shifted back to the climate crisis. We launched the California Schoolyard Forest System™ in 2022 with state-level partners. This exciting, long-term initiative seeks to increase tree canopy on public school grounds to shade and protect PK-12 students from extreme heat and rising temperatures due to climate change. This will be our focus for years to come as we work to bring our vision to scale in California and across the country.

We have also made great progress in helping decision makers, across sectors, understand the value of school grounds and prioritize these vital public spaces for public funding. We applaud the State of California for allocating an unprecedented \$150 million over two years to create a new green schoolyard program. We are thrilled to be working with U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich's office to support the federal Living Schoolyards Act, introduced to Congress in 2022!

Our organization has grown and adapted to support this amazing level of public interest and scale for our work. In the last year and a half, we doubled in size and welcomed new talent and experience to our team. In the coming year, we anticipate further growth as we work to build our organizational capacity, increase our sustainability, and further develop our program and policy efforts.

We could not do any of this without the collaboration of our incredible network of partners and donors. Thank you for your continued support!

Sharon

Sharon Danks

National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative

GROWING THE FIELD IN SUPPORT OF CHILDRENS' WELL-BEING

Launched in June 2020 with Ten Strands, The Lawrence Hall of Science at U.C. Berkeley, and the San Mateo County Office of Education, the National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative (NCOLI) was created to support schools and districts in their efforts to reopen safely and equitably during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This Initiative inspired one of the largest waves of engagement in the green schoolyard movement that we have ever seen.

Several hundred subject matter experts from around the country joined us to help write an online “how-to manual” to assist schools and districts in their efforts to move learning outside. The resulting online library contains more than 200 resources in areas ranging from schoolyard design and infrastructure to curriculum and policy. It will continue to be of support to the green and living schoolyard fields for years to come.

NCOLI launched an online community of practice, which ran for a total of 51 sessions and became a supportive space for school and district leaders to share their work with one another as they tested strategies for moving learning outside. NCOLI also gathered over 200 “Emergency Schoolyard Design Volunteers” to provide design assistance. With the help of a generous donor, we also created a grant program that helped four under-resourced schools build the infrastructure needed to move lunches, classroom instruction, counseling, and other programs outdoors.

In June 2021, NCOLI garnered two awards from the Center for Green Schools and Green Schools National Network for advancing the vision of green schools, even in the midst of the pandemic.

See press coverage of NCOLI
greenschoolyards.org/press-noli



112,000

unique visitors to the National Outdoor Learning Library

3K+

individuals attended our online webinars & meetings in the first 12 months

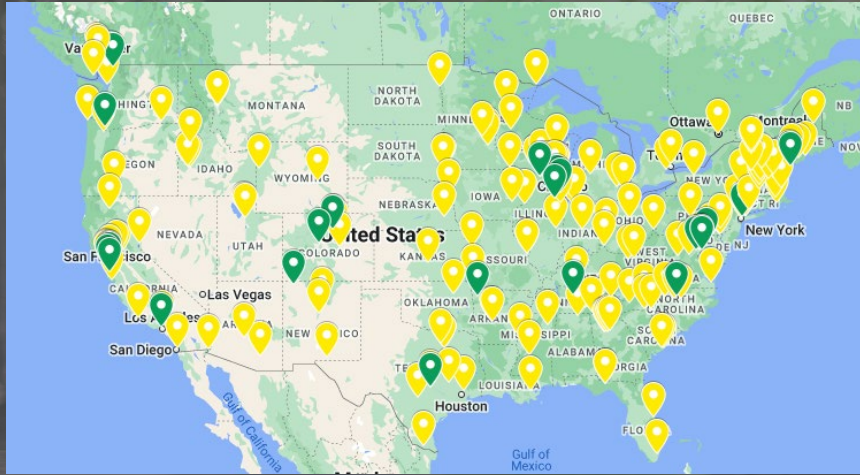
166

unique news articles in 1,110+ media outlets

300+

volunteers created over 200 online resources

PK-12 SCHOOLS IN EVERY STATE TOOK CLASSES AND PROGRAMS OUTSIDE DURING THE PANDEMIC [Learn more](#)



“
I think outdoor ed
as the new "Plan
A" is a brilliant
and bold challenge
for us all.

NCOLI teacher participant



Find inspiring case studies and other resources
greenschoolyards.org/library

California Schoolyard Forest System

SCALING TREE CANOPY EQUITY AND CLIMATE MITIGATION

In June 2022, Green Schoolyards America launched the California Schoolyard Forest SystemSM in partnership with CAL FIRE, the California Department of Education, and Ten Strands. This statewide initiative seeks to increase “child-accessible tree canopy” on public school grounds across California to shade and protect PK-12 students from extreme heat and rising temperatures due to climate change.

The initiative will address schoolyard tree canopy equity and bring schoolyard forests to scale by working to align state and local policy, funding, planning, and technical assistance to support and enable broad adoption by school districts.

Join our community of practice
greenschoolyards.org/forest-forum

Green Schoolyards America’s work has been focused on helping to ensure the success of unprecedented public investments in schoolyard greening and nature-based solutions to address climate change: The 2022 California state budget allocated \$150 million over two years for creating green schoolyards. Last year, the Los Angeles Unified School District also allocated an additional \$58 million to green their school grounds.

California is the first state in the National Schoolyard Forest SystemSM that Green Schoolyards America envisions. We plan to work collaboratively with local partner organizations and state agencies across the country to replicate this program in the coming years.



Any opportunity for the state to make climate investments based in schools must be urgently seized for the protection of future generations.

Tony Thurmund
 CALIFORNIA STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION



INITIAL ACTIVITIES	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM GOALS
<p>Conducted site visits, focus group interviews, and online interest surveys</p> <p>Reviewed existing state policy and program documents that impact or govern tree planting and schoolyard greening</p>	<p>Identify opportunities for alignment between agencies to take schoolyard forests to scale as efficiently as possible</p>	<p>Plant enough trees by 2030 that, when mature, will cover at least 30% of each school property in the areas used by children and youth during the school day</p>
<p>Mapped PK-12 public school grounds in California to better understand existing conditions</p>	<p>Establish a baseline and track progress towards tree canopy equity</p>	<p>Center equity by prioritizing schools and districts in under-served communities with the highest poverty level, fewest trees, and hottest climates</p>
<p>Reached thousands of professionals via workshops, webinars, newsletters, and blog and social media posts</p>	<p>Build awareness to drive demand for schoolyard forests</p>	<p>Use school grounds as a PK-12 learning laboratory across the curriculum and grade levels</p>
<p>Launched a monthly discussion forum to build a “community of practice” for schoolyard forests</p> <p>Began developing user-friendly, free online toolkits</p>	<p>Aid school districts in their efforts to develop schoolyard forests</p>	<p>Build environmental and climate literacy by engaging students in standards-based hands-on research, design, planting, and stewardship of their schoolyard forests</p>

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For many kids, the closest outdoor space is not a national or urban park, but the spaces right outside their classroom doors. The Living Schoolyards Act will help schools develop outdoor learning environments that introduce more kids to new experiences on their journey to academic success.

U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM)



BEFORE



AFTER

Living Schoolyards Act

DIRECTING FEDERAL FUNDS TOWARDS SCHOOLYARD TRANSFORMATION

Over the last two years, Green Schoolyards America worked closely with the Office of U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich of New Mexico on the Living Schoolyards Act, which he introduced to the U.S. Senate on September 25, 2022. This is the first time a green schoolyard funding bill has ever been introduced at the federal level.

When passed, this groundbreaking bill will direct important federal resources towards transforming school grounds by establishing an Outdoor Learning Spaces Grants program, administered by the U.S. Department of Education.

Schools and districts will be able to use these funds to plan and implement living schoolyards that provide hands-on learning opportunities, strengthen local ecological systems, and offer nature-rich places for children to play.

In addition to site design and implementation funds, the bill also allows districts to offer professional development to help educators incorporate the new outdoor spaces into their teaching, which is critical to the long-term success and viability of living schoolyards.

Green Schoolyards America is now leading a coalition of over 80 organizations working to build support for this legislation to be passed through Congress.



Our staff joined U.S. Senator Heinrich at the press conference for the Living Schoolyard Act in October 2022

View legislation and download student advocacy kit
greenschoolyards.org/living-schoolyards-act

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I spent 20+ years saying NO to gardens!

I thought they were too much work and I didn't see the benefits. But then I met Sharon, got her book, and I was inspired! We engaged all these kids and they came up with water-saving projects and I wanted to show them, we are listening...

Brian Montez
GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SUPERVISOR,
RIALTO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



Local Programs

SUPPORTING DISTRICTS THROUGH PARADIGM SHIFT

Green Schoolyards America continues to support individual school districts in their efforts to design, build, and maintain green schoolyards at scale.

Oakland Living Schoolyard Initiative

In partnership with the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) and The Trust for Public Land, we launched the Oakland Living Schoolyard Initiative in 2017. As part of this initiative, OUSD passed a school-board policy on living schoolyards, built successful pilot projects, and created a staff position to coordinate living schoolyard projects. Green Schoolyards America also led professional development workshops for district leaders and staff and collaborated on OUSD's first Green Schoolyard Guidelines.

The Guidelines support, shape, and clarify how OUSD will continue to build and maintain green schoolyards across the district and are a model for other urban school districts looking to transform and maintain nature-rich schoolyards.

San Carlos School District

We collaborated with the City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County on the Resilient San Carlos Schoolyards Project to conduct professional development for teachers. The professional development focused on taking students outside to learn about watersheds, stormwater runoff, and nonpoint source pollution. Green Schoolyards America also collaborated with Bay Tree Design and Lotus Water to write a report about the project. We wrote a chapter about outdoor learning and provided a sequence of lessons and resources for further study.

The Resilient San Carlos Schoolyards Project is working with the San Carlos School District to create a replicable model for other school districts to promote climate and community resilience through heat and stormwater management.

Meet Our Team



Alejandra Chiesa
CALIFORNIA STATE DIRECTOR



Sharon Danks
CEO AND FOUNDER



Ayesha Ercelawn
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Erica Fine
SENIOR PROGRAM
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SENIOR PROGRAM
MANAGER



Rachel Pringle
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY
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Nancy Striniste
NATIONAL POLICY
LIAISON



Dante Sudilovsky
COMMUNICATIONS AND
PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Stay Connected

Follow our work as we continue to help school districts transform their school grounds.

Sign up for our newsletter: greenschoolyards.org



STAFF

PARTNERS



The scale of change we seek to create is beyond the ability of any one organization. We are grateful to the many partners that collaborate with us to change the paradigm for schoolyard design, use, and management.

SUPPORT

Green Schoolyards America is proud to be fiscally sponsored by Earth Island Institute, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Earth Island Institute's Board of Directors is Green Schoolyards America's fiduciary board.



We are grateful for the generosity of our donors, who make it possible for us to bring green schoolyards to scale—improving children's lives, enriching their environments, and growing a greener future!

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