



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **New California Schoolyard Forest System<sup>SM</sup> Designed to Provide Shade to Protect Students from Extreme Heat**

Berkeley, CA (August 30st, 2022) — Green Schoolyards America and Ten Strands announced today the launch of the California Schoolyard Forest System<sup>SM</sup>, a statewide initiative in partnership with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the California Department of Education. The initiative will increase tree canopy on public school grounds across California to shade and protect PreK-12 students from extreme heat and rising temperatures due to climate change.

The goals of the California Schoolyard Forest System<sup>SM</sup> are to:

- **Plant enough trees** by 2030 that, when mature, will cover at least 30 percent of each school property in areas used by children and youth during the school day.
- **Center equity** by prioritizing schools and districts in under-served communities with the highest poverty level, fewest trees, and hottest climates.
- **Use school grounds as a learning laboratory** in PreK-12 curricula.
- **Build environmental and climate literacy** by engaging students in standards-based hands-on research, design, planting, and stewardship of their schoolyard forests.

In California, more than 10,000 public schools serve 5.9 million PreK-12 students on 130,000 acres of public land. Most of that land is paved and lacks tree canopy in places where children spend their time, leaving millions of students regularly exposed to unhealthy, high temperatures. The lack of tree canopy in schools is an important environmental justice problem and is becoming an alarming crisis as temperatures continue to rise due to climate change. Communities of color and lower income communities have significantly fewer trees and disproportionately suffer the impacts of the climate crisis.

“We know that students’ well-being and ability to learn is being threatened due to global warming, and the lack of tree canopies and green spaces places a disproportionate burden on schools within the lowest-income communities, and in communities of color,” said Tony Thurmond, California State Superintendent of Public Instruction. “The California Schoolyard Forest System<sup>SM</sup> will increase access to tree canopies on public school grounds, providing a transformative place that meets the needs of the whole child to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged.”

International urban forestry experts recommend that cities plant enough trees to shade and cool 30 percent of every neighborhood. California's schools are far from this goal. According to research by Green Schoolyards America, 10 percent of California's PreK-12 public school grounds have less than 2 percent tree canopy and 85 percent of school grounds have less than 10 percent tree canopy. This means that millions of California's students do not have access to shade when they are outdoors.

California's school grounds are already hot and temperatures will increase in the years to come. High temperatures are particularly hazardous for children due to their smaller body size. Unshaded asphalt can reach hazardous levels and is often 140°F on a sunny day when air temperatures are above 90°F and rubber play surfaces can reach more than 165°F. Even on a mild 65°F day, asphalt can be 120°F and rubber 155°F or more.

“The land that schools and districts manage matters and has a profound impact on children's learning and health and the ecological health and climate resilience of our communities. There is an urgent need to plant schoolyard forests that will directly shade and protect PreK-12 students from extreme heat during the school day and act as climate oases in the decades to come,” said Sharon Danks, CEO and Founder of Green Schoolyards America.

“Our students are eager to participate in climate change solutions at a local level and this new student-centered initiative will provide ample opportunities for students—particularly those disproportionately impacted by climate change—to do so,” said Karen Cowe, Executive Director of Ten Strands.

“The first phase of this initiative, funded through a \$1.5 million dollar Urban and Community Forestry Program grant from CAL FIRE and private philanthropy, will lay the groundwork for scaling the California Schoolyard Forest System<sup>SM</sup> and establish the framework of information and practice to prepare for widespread action to green schoolyards,” said Walter Passmore, State Urban Forester with CAL FIRE.

More investment and partnerships will be needed to ensure large-scale adoption and implementation throughout the state. As a start, the California state budget as proposed sets aside \$768 million over two years for nature based solutions and \$300 million over two years for extreme heat. Part of this funding will be allocated for the creation of schoolyard forests through a new grant program that will be administered by CAL FIRE.

“Kids from all communities deserve the benefits of being outdoors in healthy, inviting places,” said California Secretary for Natural Resources Wade Crowfoot. “Placing trees near classrooms improves the health and wellness of our kids, which in turn improves learning. Plus, it shares the lesson that even in schoolyards small steps taken can help cool the planet and counter climate change.”

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**Green Schoolyards America** partners with school districts and public agencies to establish large-scale living schoolyard programs that transform school grounds into ecologically-rich, park-like green spaces that improve children's health, learning, and happiness while contributing to communities' ecological and climate resilience. They are working to change the norm for school ground design, use, and management so all children will have access to the natural world in the places they already visit on a daily basis. They center equity in their work and collaborate with communities that have the greatest need for educational, environmental, health, and open space improvements. Green Schoolyards America is a fiscally sponsored project of Earth Island Institute, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. For more information, please [visit their website here](#).

**Ten Strands** is a California-based nonprofit that focuses on advancing environmental and climate change literacy in California's public schools. They lead a number of statewide initiatives, including the California Environmental Literacy Initiative (CAELI) and the Climate Change and Environmental Justice Program (CCEJP). For more information, please [visit their website here](#).