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# Community Schoolyards

The community schoolyards movement is taking hold across the world as a recognized solution to address climate, equity, and health challenges facing the 21st century. In addition, community schoolyards represent the single greatest opportunity to improve park access for millions across the country.

Too often neglected, schoolyards present a unique opportunity to meet our need for access to nature. Relatively small investments of time and resources can create vibrant spaces that help children learn. Welcoming residents during non-school hours builds social bonds and strengthens the community.

## What is a Community Schoolyard

Community schoolyards, also known as green schoolyards, are open to the community after school hours and are designed by students, teachers and neighbors as nature-rich hubs for outdoor play, community health and climate resilience. They can include outdoor classrooms, gardens, stormwater capture, traditional playground equipment, nature play areas, trails, trees, water features, and more.

Time spent learning and playing in nature benefits the whole child and can help children reach their full potential. Access to safe, natural areas can enhance children's physical and mental health, from improving cardiovascular vitality and weight management to reducing stress and ADHD symptoms. In addition, regular access to high quality green space inspires strong connections to the natural world.

## Two Decades Transforming Schoolyards

More than 20 years ago, Trust for Public Land began working with cities and school districts to reimagine what schoolyards could be. We start with a participatory design process that involves students in the creation of a green schoolyard. This allows students to learn about environmental challenges and contribute to the solution. Through curriculum based on state education standards, students practice real life skills and civic engagement while becoming invested in the long-term success of the schoolyard. When the ribbon is cut, they feel a sense of pride & achievement.

All told, TPL has built more than 250 schools in a dozen communities across the country. In 2019, we launched an Atlanta Public Schools pilot project in partnership with Park Pride and the Urban Land Institute Atlanta office. At the end of 2022, we and our partners at APS will have opened our 10<sup>th</sup> community schoolyard.

## Expanding Access to Nature

Community Schoolyards provide the benefits of the outdoors not just to students, but to the community as a whole. Seeing access to nature as a fundamental human need, TPL works to ensure that all Americans live within a 10-Minute Walk of a park. One in three American – nearly 100 million people – lack access to a park within a 10-Minute walk of home.

By redesigning schoolyards and making them open to the community after hours and on weekends, we can put a great park within a 10-Minute Walk of 19 million Americans. TPL has mapped out park access in all urban areas across America, using data based on income, number of children and diverse households to prioritize where we work. TPL and our public partners can engage with communities that most need support.

## Building upon a Successful Pilot

APS continues to be an enthusiastic partner in our effort to improve schoolyards and make them accessible to the public. However, we hope that other school districts and local governments will likewise respond enthusiastically to this collaborative opportunity.

All told, it takes about \$325,000 to engage the school community and transform a schoolyard – a process that takes about 15-18 months to complete. TPL is committed to raising private funds to support student engagement and participatory design. We also will work with our local partners to explore other opportunities for private investment in capital improvements.

A successful community schoolyard requires public investment – but there is a tremendous return on that investment. Designing and building a community schoolyard invests the students, teachers, staff and broader school community in the school and in its success.

We look forward to your support as we continue to expand our program throughout metro Atlanta and across the state.



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