



Expanding Outdoors

A Template for Equitably Supporting Schools with Outdoor STEM Learning

Use this form to help design local solutions for public safety utilizing outdoor STEM learning

Step 1: Gather a Team

Consider the groups and organizations in your community that benefit from and are engaged with this work and other connections that may represent local priorities - tribal leaders, community organizers, youth serving entities, etc. What colleges might be able to support this work? Write their names above.

Step 2: Identify existing programming and spaces

Use the following fields for local examples and contact information

Federal: Department of Natural Resources, National Park Service, National Forest Service, Tribal Partners

State: E3 Washington, Washington Outdoor School Consortium, Pacific Education Institute, OSPI Environment and Sustainability Education, Department of Children Families and Youth, Washington Nature Preschool Association

County: Parks, Solid Waste, Public Works, Conservation Districts, etc.

Other Community Based Organizations: camps, nature-based preschools, outdoor learning facilities, nature-based programs, YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, 4-H, STEM learning facilities and programs, etc.

City: parks and recreation, solid waste, and waste water treatment

Step 3: Consider Potential Models to support Accessible and Equitable Outdoor Learning

Use these examples to start thinking about your program then build your own model below.

Teacher professional learning and ongoing support (virtual or in-person) and enhancement of remote/virtual learning outdoors

Overview of model:

Teachers attend virtual and in-person workshops and receive ongoing support. Support options:

- partnered with an Outdoor Educator to collaborate on lesson development (out of the field)
- partnered with an Outdoor Educator to support outdoor instruction
- Outdoor educators develop online materials to support learning such as virtual field tours, video lessons that engage students in outdoor learning, etc.

Outdoor childcare and support for virtual learning

Overview of model:

Half the school is 'On' with traditional learning: this model involves CBO support for the other half of the school with activities, outdoor licensed childcare or seasonal camps. Students receive a full day of instructional support on-site at school to ensure access to childcare, food, and digital learning.

- ½ students with teacher in classroom instruction
- ½ students in outdoor activities facilitated by CBOs or in labs to receive digital learning support

Community-supported outdoor enrichment

Overview of model:

This model involves partnerships with CBOs to offer specials/enrichment (art, library, garden, physical education, etc.) to augment traditional learning and could be offered for the half of the school that is not 'On' with traditional learning.

- Outdoor education
- Health and wellness—outside time for stress reduction, social emotional learning, etc. (supported by youth mentorship agencies, dispute resolution groups, i.e., Animals as Natural Therapy, etc.)
- Support for homeschooled youth or those who are opting out of school (up to 20% of students by one district's estimate)
- Stewardship—"adopt a park" model where kids do stewardship on site at school or nearby park (supported by parks and similar organizations)
- Art & creativity—nature art and journaling (supported by arts-based orgs)
- Literacy/library/language arts—outside reading, journaling time (supported by literacy orgs, libraries, etc.)

What model that would best support your community?

Key Questions

When developing your plan, it's good to keep these additional thoughts in mind.

What staff resources and capacities are available from environmental and sustainability education organizations?

What capacity can be expected from school districts? Does the district maintain a process for volunteer integration and access to the volunteer pool?

How willing are community members to support the program by volunteering, given the health risks associated?

If transportation is involved, how will this be addressed?

Step 4: Determine which school districts or how many school districts will be approached

Research district programming and map outdoor learning spaces and list them.

Step 5: Approach school districts with a realistic and actionable plan

List districts that have been approached.

References:

- [Reopening Washington Schools 2020](#): District Planning Guide (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction)
- [Five Radical Ideas for Schooling for an Uncertain Fall and Beyond](#) (NPR)
- [Outdoor Classrooms in the Age of COVID-19 : Pros and Cons](#) (ED Week)
- [Washington Snapshot: The Impact of COVID-19 on Environmental and Outdoor Science Education](#) (Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California, Berkeley; California)
- [Why some Black and Latinx families lose access to nature during pandemic](#) (KCRW)
- [Outdoor Spaces are Essential Assets for School Districts' COVID-19 Response](#) (Green Schoolyards America)
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2020). [Reopening K-12 Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Prioritizing Health, Equity, and Communities](#). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25858>.

Acknowledgements:

The E3 Washington Catalyst Committee team that worked on this document include: Kathryn Kurtz (Pacific Education Institute & E3 Board), Keren Bitan (Tandem Impact), Paul Williams (Suquamish Tribe & E3 Board), Megan Karch (IslandWood), Chase Buffington (Cispus), Dave Ketter (former Seattle Schools), Catherine Collins (Sound Experience), Roberta McFarland (Highline School District & E3 Board), Elizabeth Schmitz (OSPI), Curtis Ludwig (Masters Student-UW), Ben Greene (Tandem Impact), and Nicole Corbo (Washington Nature Preschool Association).

Significant contributions were made by working team members: Steven Streufert (NatureBridge), Aliza Yair (Department of Children, Youth and Families), Suzanne Gray (parent), Rex Burkholder (WeWinStrategies), and Dana Bowers (WA Conservation Districts & E3 Board). Ideas and thoughts on this document were collected from several organizations.

Special recognition to Wild Whatcom and the Whatcom Coalition for Environmental Education, a program of the Whatcom Community Foundation from whose work the template was adapted.