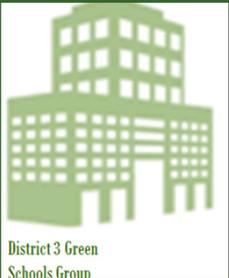


Outdoor Classrooms: COVID-19 Response

D3 Green Schools Group



July 2020



*Unifying our UWS & Harlem Communities through
School Gardens & Environmental Stewardship*

What's been happening

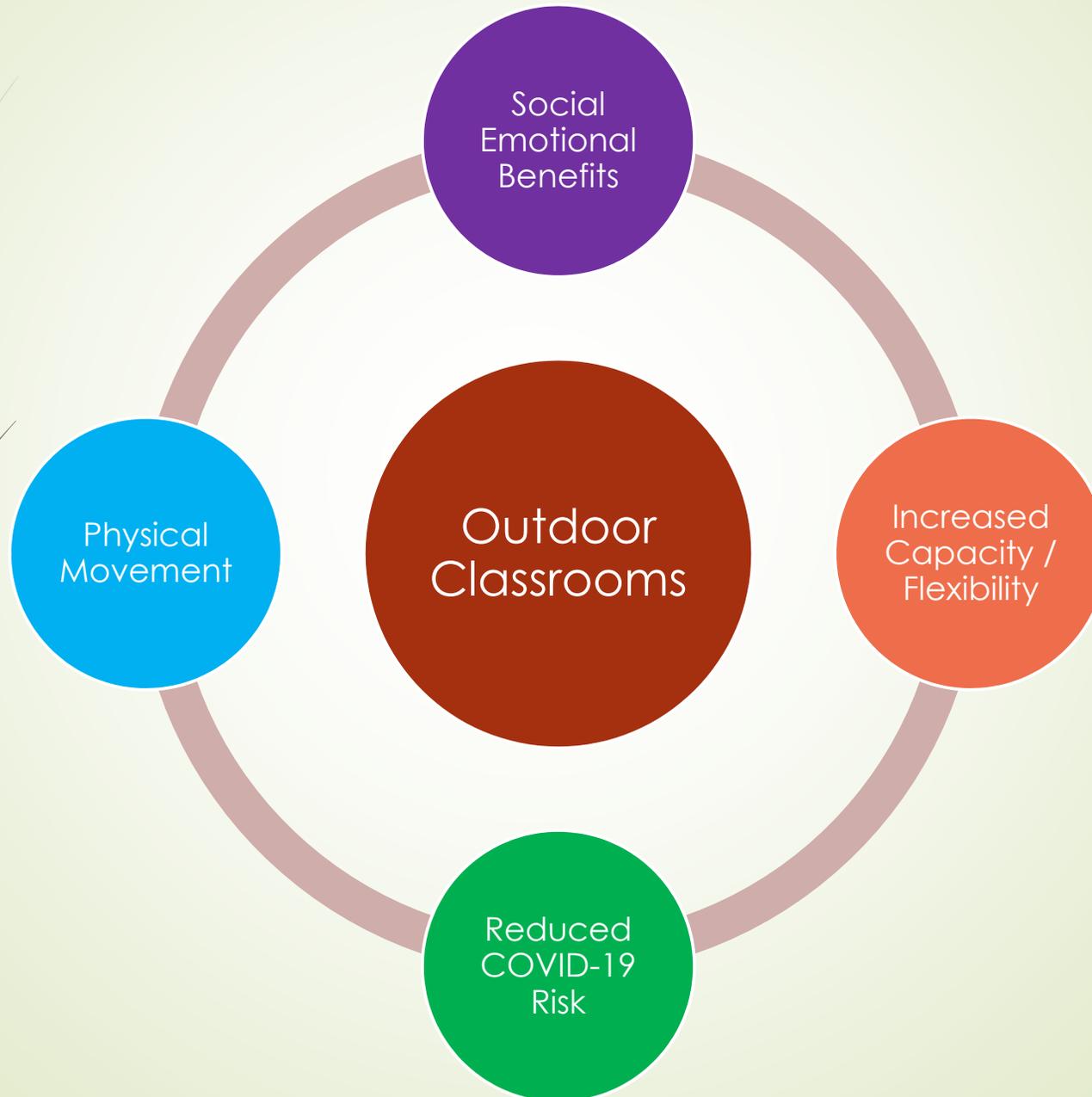
- General concern with school reopening plans – no recess, no PE, no movement from classroom
- Seems oversight not to be considering outdoor space as has been invented for restaurants (economy driving factor)
- Green Schoolyards America (GSA) nation-wide initiative
 - P.S. 185 selected as site for case study in urban environment
- National Wildlife Federation of NYC and GrowNYC task force created to develop toolkit to share with all NYC schools
- D3 Green Schools Group Initiative – building upon GSA work, grass roots effort looking to bring outdoor classrooms to our NYC public school system
 - Take 'concept' into realistic, feasible plans to gain support from key decision makers / community
 - Individual School groups – P.S. 84, 163, 165, 185 + growing
- CB7 meeting discussing how to permit street closures
- CEC3 [Resolution](#) to be reviewed this Wed
- PEP public commenting -> DoE Town Hall



D3 GSG Outdoor Schools – Who is invited to participate?

- **EVERYONE!** D3 GSG is for all District 3 schools
 - We are happy for any schools inside or outside the district to participate
- Any schools that participate need to lead their own school level work
 - Need a couple of leaders to pull together and work through activities over the next several weeks
- D3 GSG will help to guide the work with some general direction and also share information across the schools
- We want at least a few schools within D3 to be able to participate – representing different scenarios (proximity / access to green space, student population / ages)

Key Drivers for Outdoor Classrooms



NY state Reopening Guidance

Taken from July 13 presentation to Board of Regents

Social-Emotional Well-Being

Social emotional well-being must be schools' and districts' top priority in supporting school transitions, not at the expense of academics, but in order to create the mental, social, and emotional space for academic learning to occur.



Communicate social emotional well-being and learning as a priority and engage members of the school community in implementation efforts.



Identify or build a team to lead your implementation. Decide how students, staff, and family will contribute.



Consider a prolonged orientation or transition period to support the social and emotional well-being and resiliency before phasing in academic content.

DoE Letter on Return to School:

Under the blended learning model, students will be taught **on-site in school buildings** for part of the week, and will learn remotely from home on the other days of the week.

- Schools will choose a schedule from a limited number of models that take into account **the space constraints of their school buildings, and that prioritize consistency for parents and students in their scheduling.**
- You can expect your child or children to be in school one to two consistent days per week, **with additional in-person days on a rotating schedule based on groups or cohorts of students.**
- Schools will **make every effort to safely conduct as much instruction in-person as possible,** and your principal will communicate your child's schedule with you in August.

We know that there are families who may not feel comfortable going back into school buildings in the fall. You can elect to choose all-remote learning for your child; **a web form will be shared with you on July 15 that will allow you to select that preference by August 7.** Families who have chosen fully remote learning at the beginning of the school year will be allowed to transition back into in-person instruction on a quarterly basis. Once the school year begins, families can choose to go fully remote at any time.

Re-opening plans 'work in progress'

- ▶ School reopening plans - No PE, No recess, no lunch → no Social emotional release for the students
 - ▶ Students sitting at desk for 6+ hours straight with stretch breaks / jumping jacks
 - ▶ Could ultimately make the mental health, social emotional state of the students worse.
- ▶ Let's talk about equity - The parents who choose to enroll their children this September are likely those who have been hit the hardest and continually to be underserved.
 - ▶ Many of the more well to do families have left town, or have parents at home teaching, and likely will do fully remote learning
 - ▶ Parents who feel they have no choice or who aren't aware of the plans because they don't have access to these details, or time to explore them
- ▶ Missing the mark by not including use of outdoor space – most obvious solution
 - ▶ Make it work for restaurants when economy is the driver
 - ▶ Used in prior pandemics and successfully in use by countries who are back to school already.
 - ▶ those on campus like gardens or yards
 - ▶ ALSO adjacent parks, community gardens, street closures



Green Schoolyards America

- ▶ Case study for urban schools
 - ▶ Team will develop case study for P.S. 185
 - ▶ **Relevant parts of process can be replicated at other schools**



Grow NYC / National Wildlife Federation of NYC – Outdoor Classroom Task Force

- Developing 'Tool kit' to share across schools
- Can help to connect to community organizations



D3 GSG strategy for Implementing

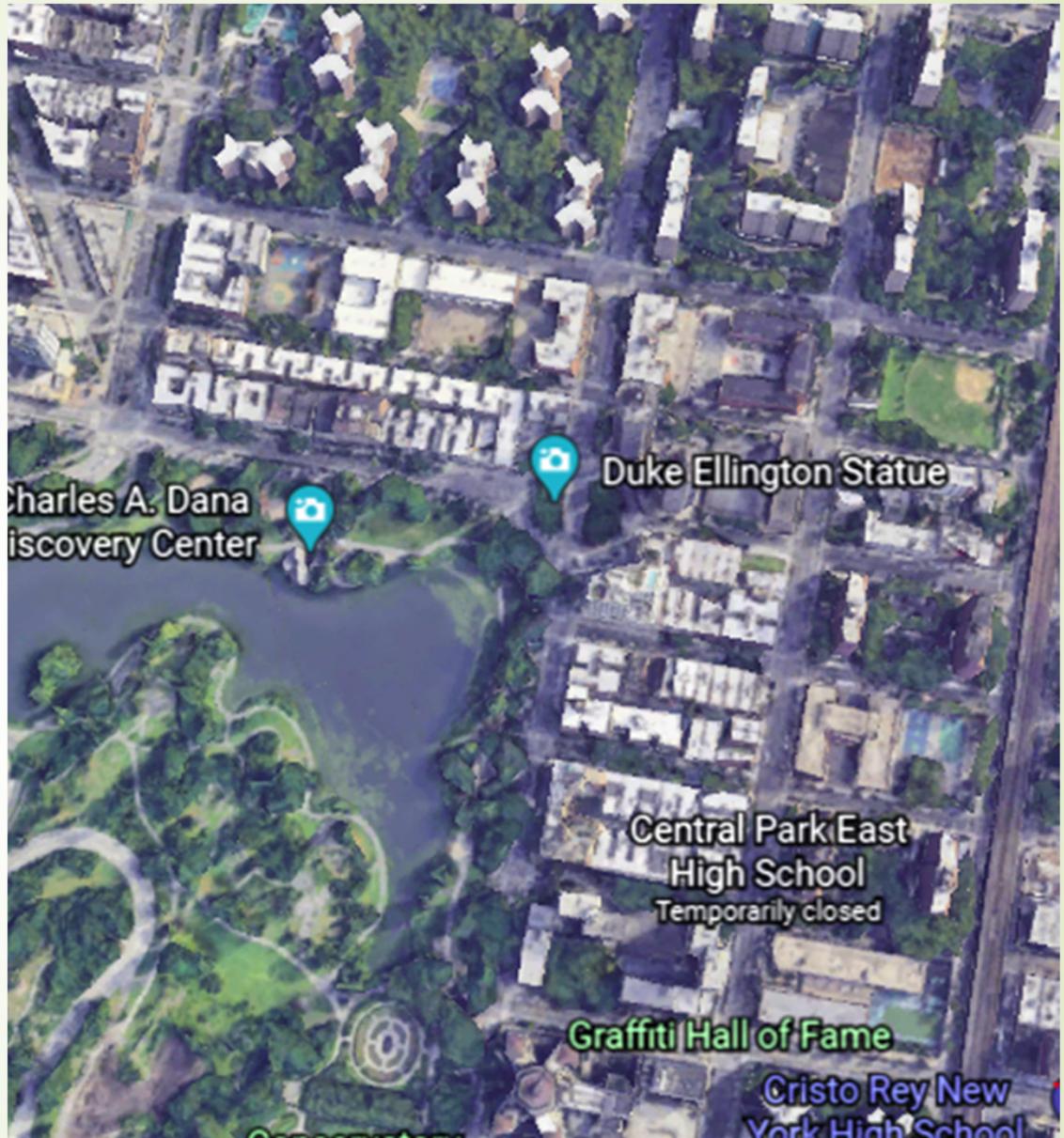
- ▶ **Step 1 – Create a vision of what the concept of Outdoor Classrooms would actually look like in at least a few of our D3 Schools**
 - ▶ This should be a ‘creative’ exercise... with some grounding in reality
 - ▶ Answer basic questions:
 - ▶ **What physical space can be used?**
 - ▶ **How many students can the spaces accommodate?**
 - ▶ **Basic logistics** – some examples: where will students go to the bathroom, how have shade, how far of a walk is it?
 - ▶ **Resource needs** – human (community partnerships, more teachers), physical (mats, portable whiteboards, etc.) & monetary (\$\$) resource needs

D3 GSG strategy for Implementing

- ▶ Step 1 – Create a vision of what the concept of Outdoor Classrooms would actually look like in at least a few of our D3 Schools
- ▶ **Step 2 – Share that vision with key senior administration to gain support for the concept**
 - ▶ **How can we implement across all schools? → toolkit / funding**
- ▶ Step 3 (after gain approval) – More comprehensive teams are formed and the ‘challenges’ and ‘assumptions’ are worked through → designs are fine-tuned
- ▶ Step 4 – Implementation strategy determined
 - ▶ Perhaps there are some ‘easy wins’ that can be implemented in September where some other ideas will require more time and money to be implemented later on

Tips for creating a Vision at your school

- Find satellite image of school yard and adjacent areas to see what green spaces are available
- Don't focus on challenges initially, think about how it should be





What's Next?

- ▶ COVID-19 data / trends across the country raising safety concerns
 - ▶ Physical re-opening in September may or may not happen
- ▶ Continue to raise concept with key groups / people of influence
- ▶ Continue work in school groups
 - ▶ Socialize further, bring to broader audience
- ▶ Stay connected to D3 GSG
 - ▶ Email D3GreenSchoolsGroup@gmail.com if you are not yet on our distribution list

Outdoor Spaces as Essential Assets for School Districts' COVID-19 Response



Slides shared from June 4 Workshop



Online learning in the last three months has not been working well for many students.

Results:

- Increasing inequalities
- Learning loss
- Mental health crisis
- Reduced physical fitness
- Parents can't go back to work with children home
- Education sector is facing large scale budget cuts and job loss

Are you designing for the margins?

Who is NOT thriving in Distance (Emergency) Learning?

- Students who were already experiencing an achievement gap, higher drop out rates, lower graduation rates
- English Language Learners
- Students with IEPs and in Special Day Classes
- Our young learners (K/1)
- Students with housing instability
- Students with food insecurity
- Students whose homes are unsafe (abuse, violence)
- Students with mental health concerns usually met by school counselors
- _____



Benefits of Outdoor Learning

- More space to accommodate students, so a higher percentage of students can return to school more of the time
- Hands-on learning opportunities
- Fresh air—less risk of virus transmission outside
- Mental health benefits of nature



Vision

Use outdoor spaces on school grounds and in nearby parks to create places for classes to meet.

Infrastructure needs:

- Basic seating
- Protection from the elements
- Outdoor teaching supplies and clothing
- Places to store teaching materials



Adapt the Scale and Design to the Place

Scale and design will vary and will reflect the climate and site configuration

Consider multiple locations

- On the school grounds
- In nearby parks
- Bussing to parks that are not within walking distance



Integrate Programs

Plan to coordinate outdoor classroom needs with the needs of PE classes, elementary school recess, and before/after school programs



Consider Staffing Needs

Bring in additional educators temporarily to share the teaching load for classes that are split into smaller groups



Public Domain Ecole de plein air, Suresnes/Wikipedia, via TreeHugger



Public Domain Ecole de plein air, Suresnes/Wikipedia, via TreeHugger

Historic precedent

100 years ago, schools around the world went outside to reduce the spread of tuberculosis and Spanish flu.

Outdoor learning is a time-tested approach to keeping school open during a pandemic.



Resilient Cities

Green schoolyards support urban resilience in the face of climate change.

Developing school grounds as child-friendly green infrastructure supports local ecological systems, builds wildlife corridors, infiltrates stormwater, cools urban heat islands, improves air quality, and sequesters carbon.

Planning considerations as schools reopen

Equity

How can school districts structure reopening plans to ensure equitable access to a high quality education and learning environment?

Location

Where will learning take place with physical distancing requirements?

- Online
- Inside
- Outside on school grounds
- Outside at parks

Learning

How can schools reconfigure their programs, teaching methods, staffing, and schedules to make it possible to return?

- Stagger schedules
- Reconfigure internal staffing assignments
- Bring in educators from outside organizations
- Integrate planning for recess, PE, and before/after care

Wellbeing

What's best for children's learning, health, and happiness as they return to school?

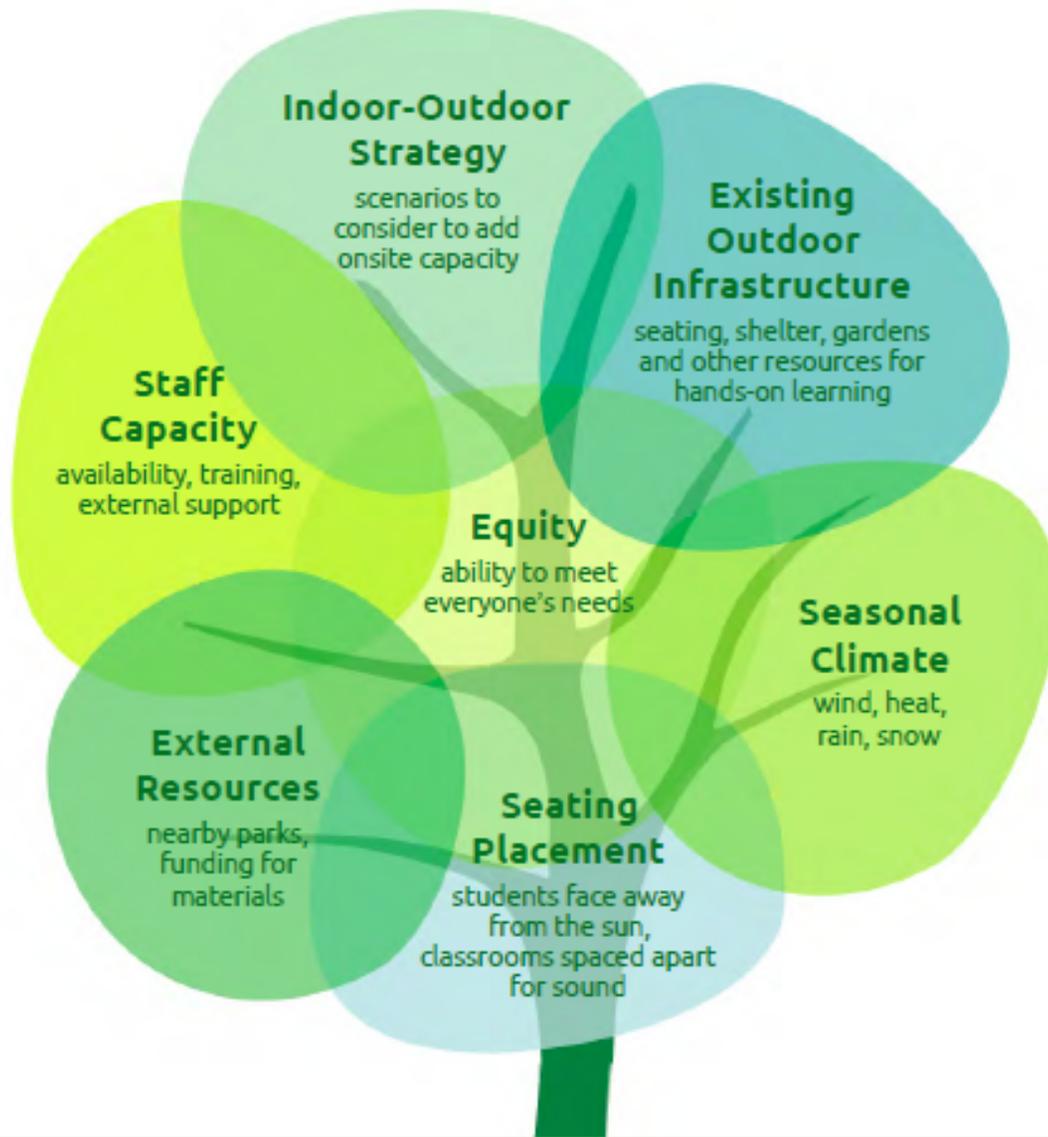
- Support mental health
- Promote physical health
- Provide opportunities for social-emotional engagement
- Nurture special needs
- Foster creativity, imagination, and happiness

Funding

How will we pay for this?
What is the impact on the economy if students are not back on campus full time?

- Cost neutral approach
- External funding
- Quantify economic impact of remaining partly closed
- Consider outdoor investments to be tools for resilience and learning

Site Planning Considerations



Planning considerations for taking learning outside

Every school site is different.

It is important to assess the physical characteristics of each school ground to help determine outdoor seating capacity and feasibility.

Potential Education Models

Educational Program and Staffing Models

How could school districts partner with nonformal education institutions to increase their staff of professional educators?

- Teachers and CBO Staff split classes inside/outside using outdoor space on campus and in local parks, where appropriate
- State, Federal, and Philanthropic funding
- Partnerships allow schools to meet their goals and local nonformal educational institutions to do their work (keep the lights on, keep staff employed, grow their program offerings)
- Mutual indemnification clauses in contracts (just like any experiential outdoor educational field trip partnership)
- Who? Residential outdoor programs, experiential ed field trip partners, science museum education staff, garden educator organizations, sustainability fellows, etc.

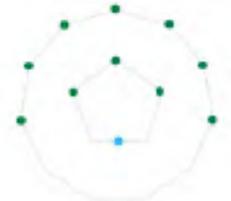
POTENTIAL OUTDOOR CLASSROOM CONFIGURATIONS WITH 6' SOCIAL DISTANCING

SCALE MODELS BELOW ASSUME EACH OUTDOOR CLASSROOM FITS PART OF A CLASS

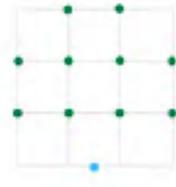
10 students + 1 adult



Circle: 21' diameter



Amphitheater:
22' dia. outside & 10' dia. inside



Grid: 18' x 18'

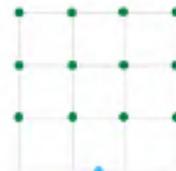
12 students + 1 adult



Circle: 25' diameter



Amphitheater:
22' dia. outside & 10' dia. inside



Grid: 18' x 18'

14 students + 1 adult



Circle: 29' diameter



Amphitheater:
25.5' dia. outside & 13.5' dia. inside
(14 – 16 students)



Grid: 18' x 18'
(rotated)

Key: student ●
adult ●
6' distance

Outdoor Learning Case Studies

What could outdoor learning look like at schools with different climates, campuses, and programs?

The two elementary school examples that follow are thought experiments to explore variations on this idea.

Outdoor Teaching Supplies and Storage

Low cost: Clipboards, white boards, and other supplies

Mid-range: Garden sheds or shipping container sheds (1 per grade level)

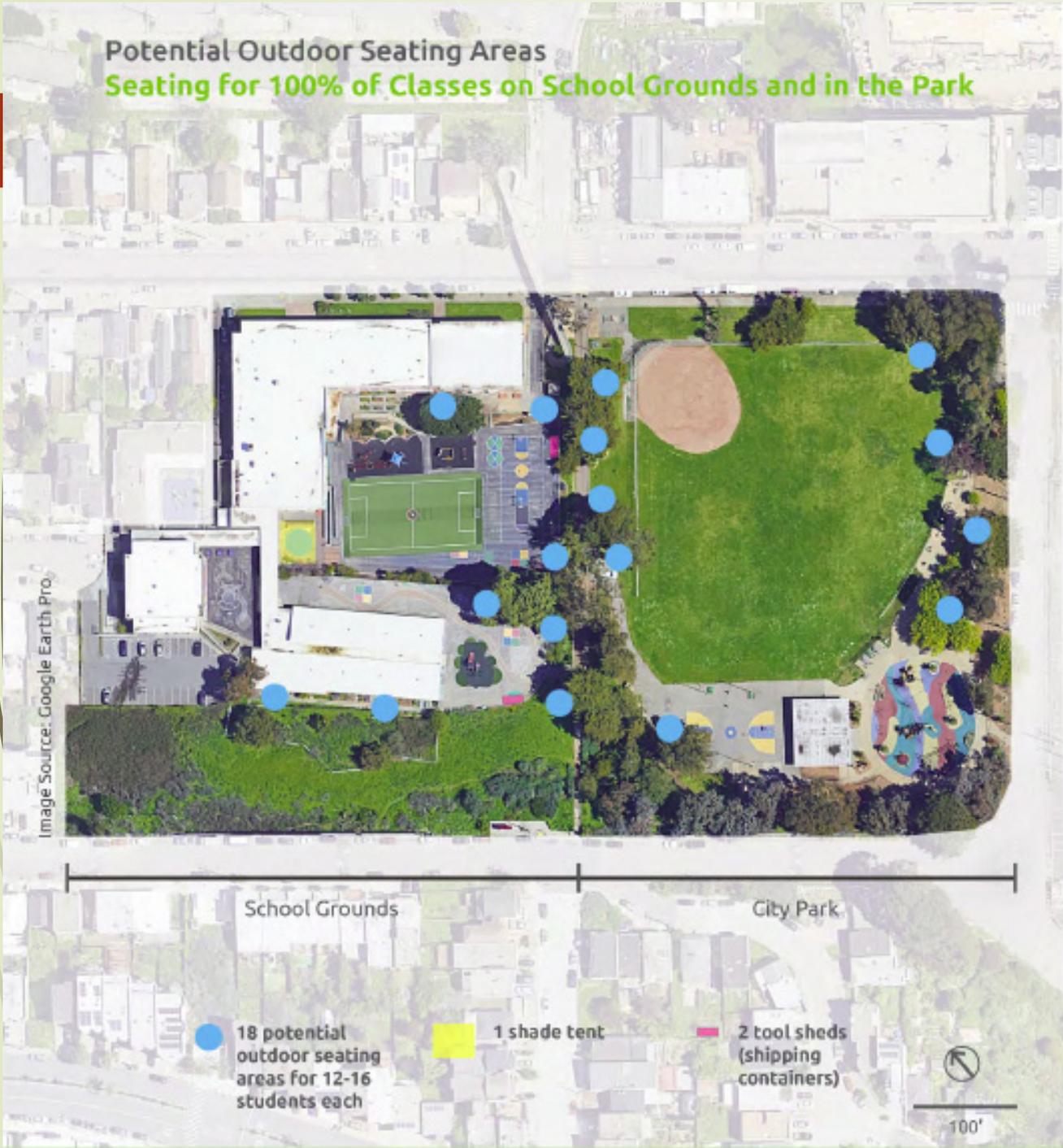
Cost/Half Class

Free - \$500

\$1,500 - \$5,000



Potential Outdoor Seating Areas
Seating for 100% of Classes on School Grounds and in the Park



Elementary School
San Francisco Bay Area, CA

Scenario #2: Expand from School Grounds to the Park

Special Considerations for Park Classes

- Create a joint use agreement to allow park space to be used for classes
- Collaborate with local organizations to expand teaching staff; provide one educator for each half class
- Request parent permission to go offsite

Seating and Supplies

- Equip each child with a backpack containing: clipboard, sun hat, water bottle, and portable seat cushion
- Establish specific locations for each class to meet at the park in the shade
- Decide if classes will return to school for lunch, or if lunch will be at the park

Safety and Stewardship

- Plan for daily park stewardship with students to avoid litter
- Check park for safety and sanitation each morning before school begins; monitor public use of bathrooms

Scenario #2: Outdoor Capacity

- Max: 288 students in 18 seating areas
- If 100% of students return, all students could have class outside, all day: 50% at school and 50% at the park



Potential Outdoor Seating Areas
Optimized: 50% of Enrolled Students Can Sit Outside



Image Source: Google Earth Pro

- 9 potential outdoor seating areas for 12-16 students each
- 6 seating areas for 7 students each
- 17 seating areas for 10-15 students each
- 2 existing covered picnic areas for 16 and 24 students
- 8 shade canopies

Elementary School
 Los Angeles Area, CA

**Scenario #3:
 Infrastructure Aligned
 with Education Program**

Assumptions

- Each class will have its own reserved indoor room *and* outdoor space for up to 16 students and 1 teacher
- Students will not be seated all day. The outdoor spaces for each class will be used for hands-on learning.
- Most of the playground and field will remain open for PE classes and recess

Strategy for Site Selection and Program

- Position outdoor classes to maximize convenience, comfort, and space for physical education classes and recess
- Include 28 outdoor classroom spaces large enough for half a class

Scenario #3: Outdoor Seating Capacity

- Max: 481 students in 34 seating areas
- 28 outdoor spaces for half a class + 6 spaces for small group work
- If only 50% of students are on campus each day, every class could be held outside, if desired
- If 100% of students return, 50% could be inside and 50% outside



Shade and Rain Shelters

- Low cost: Use existing shade trees, arbors, building overhangs, shelters
- Mid-range: Add awnings, shade sails, yurts, carports, event tents

Cost/Half Class

Free

~\$3,000 - \$10,000



Comfortable Landscape

Low cost: Position outdoor seating near trees/shrubs if available

Mid-range: Add planters with new shrubs/flowers to soften paved spaces

Cost/Half Class

Free

\$500 - \$1,000





What do we need to move from concept to implementation?

Plans to ensure equity

Outdoor infrastructure

Park/school collaboration

Staffing and instructional models

School program integration

Health and safety information

Local and state policy shifts

Funding and economic models



How can you help?

Talk with your principal, grounds and facilities managers, and/or superintendent about these ideas and invite their involvement.

Fundraise with PTO/PTA or earmark funds for supplies to ensure that outdoor learning is implemented equitably.

Offer to be the contact for your school, district, or county as resources get produced, published, and distributed.

Share the existing 2-page PDF, the recording of this webinar, and emerging resources with others—beyond your immediate work setting—when they are published.

Some Resources

Green School Yards Web Page on this initiative

- <http://www.greenschoolyards.org/covid-learn-outside>

2-page summary

- https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57682b81725e25259d8396e3/t/5ec7584383adba6fbba93aaf/1590122565462/20-05-21_USA-CovidResponse-GSA-2pg.pdf

Benefits of Outdoor Learning in Nature

- <https://www.childrenandnature.org/learn/training/>
- <https://www.childrenandnature.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/NTN-eguide-2015ALL.pdf>
- <http://eeingeorgia.org/net/org/info.aspx?s=70349.0.0.4863>

Articles

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/17/nyregion/coronavirus-nyc-schools-reopening-outdoors.html?action=click&module=Editors%20Picks&pgtype=Homepage>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/30/us/coronavirus-schools-reopening-guidelines-aap.html>
- <https://www.gothamgazette.com/overview/130-opinion/9532-how-reinvent-new-york-city-education-after-coronavirus>