Elementary School
Harlem, New York

School Characteristics

Students
- 350 students in grades PK-5
- 20 PK-5 classes. Classes to be broken into 3 cohorts of 8 students each, to be onsite part time
- Need 10 small breakout areas for 8 students each
- Provide a trauma-informed design approach (likely for all urban schools)

School Grounds
- Urban location, almost 1 acre
- High levels of noise from car stereos, ambulances, construction
- Odors from animal waste, garbage piles, smoking
- School staff does daily walk-around cleanup of perimeter sidewalks.
- Minimal outdoor storage available.
- 5-minute walk to Central Park

Climate
- Four distinct seasons: crisp fall, cold winter with snowfall, warm wet spring, and hot, humid summers. Heavy rain, high wind, snow, extreme heat, extreme cold, and poor air quality are all factors.
- Historically ~80 days/year indoor recess. School working to change weather mindset to reduce this to ~20 days.

NOTE: These diagrams are intended to provide visual concepts to assist schools in planning. They are neither intended nor may be used for construction. Green Schoolyards America, Earth Island Institute, the Emergency Schoolyard Design Volunteers, and the partners of the National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative do not assume responsibility or liability for the technical accuracy of drawings or for any unauthorized use.
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Site Photographs

1. Recent playground improvements include new asphalt and play structures
2. Mature trees provide shade around the perimeter of the schoolyard
3. A series of classrooms with bathrooms open into the schoolyard—opportunity to pull seats and desks right outside
4. A garden area with trees and planters provides hands-on learning opportunities
Potential Outdoor Classrooms
Using Existing Tree Canopy and Shade for Mild Weather

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Scenario #1: Low Cost

Climate Considerations
• Local climate varies seasonally
• Classes will require protection from sun, rain, and snow and appropriate clothing to keep everyone warm and dry

Climate Adaptation Strategies
• Use outdoor classrooms as “Plan A” when the weather is nice; go inside or online when it is raining or too cold
• Place seating in areas where existing tree canopies provide morning or afternoon shade, and away from street to reduce noise

Use and Augment Existing Infrastructure
• Use 4 areas with shade trees and add low cost seating (mats, stumps, benches, and/or existing desks/tables)
• Place 6 seating circles outside doors
• Add storage sheds for class materials
• Preserve space for gardening and nature play

Scenario #1: Outdoor Capacity
• Max: 92 students in 10 seating areas
• Max: 16 students in active garden areas
• Capacity: 31% of enrolled students

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Potential Outdoor Classrooms
Providing Light Shelter for Sun, Rain, or Snow

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Scenario #2: Moderate Cost

Climate Considerations
Build on Scenario #1

- Install shelters to protect from rain, snow, and sun. Ideal shelters could be adjustable in height to allow winter sun.
- Add outdoor heaters and/or provide rain and snow gear so students will be dry and warm when weather is wet and cold.

Climate Adaptation Strategies

- Use outdoor classrooms as “Plan A” when the weather is nice or in mild rain and snow; go inside or online when it is too cold or harsh.

Use and Augment Existing Infrastructure

- Add low cost seating (mats, stumps, benches, and/or existing desks/tables)
- Install shelters to protect from rain, snow, and sun in areas away from street.
- Add storage sheds for class materials.
- Preserve and activate space for gardening and nature play.

Scenario #2: Outdoor Capacity

- Max: 104 students in 13 covered seating areas.
- Max: 16 students in active garden areas.
- Capacity: 34% of enrolled students.

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Potential Outdoor Classrooms
Providing Infrastructure to Support School Programs

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Scenario #3: Green Infrastructure Investment

Climate Considerations
Build on Scenario #2

- Add low, planted hills (hugels) on top of asphalt or grass along fence line to reduce noise and odors from street
- Provide potted trees for green views and to divide outdoor class areas, to be replanted in ground later

Climate Adaptation Strategies

- Use outdoor classrooms as “Plan A” when the weather is nice or in mild rain and snow; go inside or online when it is too cold or harsh

Use and Augment Existing Infrastructure

- Preserve and activate space for gardening and nature play
- Leave room and flexibility for long-term outdoor classroom vision ideas

Scenario #3: Outdoor Capacity

- Max: 104 students in 13 covered seating areas
- Max: 16 students in active garden areas
- Capacity: 34% of enrolled students

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