Dear friends,

The green schoolyard field made an amazing amount of progress in the last three years. During the COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted lives in so many ways, Green Schoolyards America helped catalyze a national movement to use outdoor learning as a way to safely and equitably reopen schools. Thanks to dedicated partners and practitioners, and a wave of national press, millions of people now know about the benefits of and strategies for transforming school grounds into park-like green spaces. Many of the schools and districts involved in these efforts have since built green schoolyards into their management, curriculum, and funding plans for the future.

As the pandemic became less of an emergency, our focus shifted back to the climate crisis. We launched the California Schoolyard Forest System℠ in 2022 with state-level partners. This exciting, long-term initiative seeks to increase tree canopy on public school grounds to shade and protect PK-12 students from extreme heat and rising temperatures due to climate change. This will be our focus for years to come as we work to bring our vision to scale in California and across the country.

We have also made great progress in helping decision makers, across sectors, understand the value of school grounds and prioritize these vital public spaces for public funding. We applaud the State of California for allocating an unprecedented $150 million over two years to create a new green schoolyard program. We are thrilled to be working with U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich’s office to support the federal Living Schoolyards Act, introduced to Congress in 2022!

Our organization has grown and adapted to support this amazing level of public interest and scale for our work. In the last year and a half, we doubled in size and welcomed new talent and experience to our team. In the coming year, we anticipate further growth as we work to build our organizational capacity, increase our sustainability, and further develop our program and policy efforts.

We could not do any of this without the collaboration of our incredible network of partners and donors. Thank you for your continued support!

Sharon
Sharon Danks
National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative

GROWING THE FIELD IN SUPPORT OF CHILDREN’S WELL-BEING

Launched in June 2020 with Ten Strands, The Lawrence Hall of Science at U.C. Berkeley, and the San Mateo County Office of Education, the National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative (NCOLI) was created to support schools and districts in their efforts to reopen safely and equitably during the COVID-19 pandemic. This Initiative inspired one of the largest waves of engagement in the green schoolyard movement that we have ever seen.

Several hundred subject matter experts from around the country joined us to help write an online “how-to manual” to assist schools and districts in their efforts to move learning outside. The resulting online library contains more than 200 resources in areas ranging from schoolyard design and infrastructure to curriculum and policy. It will continue to be of support to the green and living schoolyard fields for years to come.

NCOLI launched an online community of practice, which ran for a total of 51 sessions and became a supportive space for school and district leaders to share their work with one another as they tested strategies for moving learning outside. NCOLI also gathered over 200 “Emergency Schoolyard Design Volunteers” to provide design assistance. With the help of a generous donor, we also created a grant program that helped four under-resourced schools build the infrastructure needed to move lunches, classroom instruction, counseling, and other programs outdoors.

In June 2021, NCOLI garnered two awards from the Center for Green Schools and Green Schools National Network for advancing the vision of green schools, even in the midst of the pandemic.

See press coverage of NCOLI: greenschoolyards.org/press-noli

© Green Schoolyards America, Paige Green
I think outdoor ed as the new "Plan A" is a brilliant and bold challenge for us all.

NCOLI teacher participant
California Schoolyard Forest System

SCALING TREE CANOPY EQUITY AND CLIMATE MITIGATION

In June 2022, Green Schoolyards America launched the California Schoolyard Forest System™ in partnership with CAL FIRE, the California Department of Education, and Ten Strands. This statewide initiative seeks to increase “child-accessible tree canopy” on public school grounds across California to shade and protect PK-12 students from extreme heat and rising temperatures due to climate change. The initiative will address schoolyard tree canopy equity and bring schoolyard forests to scale by working to align state and local policy, funding, planning, and technical assistance to support and enable broad adoption by school districts.

Green Schoolyards America’s work has been focused on helping to ensure the success of unprecedented public investments in schoolyard greening and nature-based solutions to address climate change: The 2022 California state budget allocated $150 million over two years for creating green schoolyards. Last year, the Los Angeles Unified School District also allocated an additional $58 million to green their school grounds.

California is the first state in the National Schoolyard Forest System™ that Green Schoolyards America envisions. We plan to work collaboratively with local partner organizations and state agencies across the country to replicate this program in the coming years.

Join our community of practice greenschoolyards.org/forest-forum

Any opportunity for the state to make climate investments based in schools must be urgently seized for the protection of future generations.

Tony Thurmond
CALIFORNIA STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

INITIAL ACTIVITIES

Conducted site visits, focus group interviews, and online interest surveys
Reviewed existing state policy and program documents that impact or govern tree planting and schoolyard greening
Mapped PK-12 public school grounds in California to better understand existing conditions
Reached thousands of professionals via workshops, webinars, newsletters, and blog and social media posts
Launched a monthly discussion forum to build a “community of practice” for schoolyard forests
Began developing user-friendly, free online toolkits

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Identify opportunities for alignment between agencies to take schoolyard forests to scale as efficiently as possible
Establish a baseline and track progress towards tree canopy equity
Build awareness to drive demand for schoolyard forests
 Aid school districts in their efforts to develop schoolyard forests

LONG-TERM GOALS

Plant enough trees by 2030 that, when mature, will cover at least 30% of each school property in the 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 PK-12 learning laboratory across the curriculum and grade levels
Build environmental and climate literacy by engaging students in standards-based hands-on research, design, planting, and stewardship of their schoolyard forests

2022
2023 (ongoing)
2024+

In June 2022, Green Schoolyards America launched the California Schoolyard Forest System℠ in partnership with CAL FIRE, the California Department of Education, and Ten Strands. This statewide initiative seeks to increase “child-accessible tree canopy” on public school grounds across California to shade and protect PK-12 students from extreme heat and rising temperatures due to climate change. The initiative will address schoolyard tree canopy equity and bring schoolyard forests to scale by working to align state and local policy, funding, planning, and technical assistance to support and enable broad adoption by school districts.

The initiative will address schoolyard tree canopy equity and bring schoolyard forests to scale by working to align state and local policy, funding, planning, and technical assistance to support and enable broad adoption by school districts. Green Schoolyards America’s work has been focused on helping to ensure the success of unprecedented public investments in schoolyard greening and nature-based solutions to address climate change: The 2022 California state budget allocated $150 million over two years for creating green schoolyards. Last year, the Los Angeles Unified School District also allocated an additional $58 million to green their school grounds.

California is the first state in the National Schoolyard Forest System℠ that Green Schoolyards America envisions. We plan to work collaboratively with local partner organizations and state agencies across the country to replicate this program in the coming years.

Join our community of practice greenschoolyards.org/forest-forum

Any opportunity for the state to make climate investments based in schools must be urgently seized for the protection of future generations.

Tony Thurmond
CALIFORNIA STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

INITIAL ACTIVITIES

Conducted site visits, focus group interviews, and online interest surveys
Reviewed existing state policy and program documents that impact or govern tree planting and schoolyard greening
Mapped PK-12 public school grounds in California to better understand existing conditions
Reached thousands of professionals via workshops, webinars, newsletters, and blog and social media posts
Launched a monthly discussion forum to build a “community of practice” for schoolyard forests
Began developing user-friendly, free online toolkits

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Identify opportunities for alignment between agencies to take schoolyard forests to scale as efficiently as possible
Establish a baseline and track progress towards tree canopy equity
Build awareness to drive demand for schoolyard forests
 Aid school districts in their efforts to develop schoolyard forests

LONG-TERM GOALS

Plant enough trees by 2030 that, when mature, will cover at least 30% of each school property in the 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 PK-12 learning laboratory across the curriculum and grade levels
Build environmental and climate literacy by engaging students in standards-based hands-on research, design, planting, and stewardship of their schoolyard forests

2022
2023 (ongoing)
2024+
For many kids, the closest outdoor space is not a national or urban park, but the spaces right outside their classroom doors. The Living Schoolyards Act will help schools develop outdoor learning environments that introduce more kids to new experiences on their journey to academic success.

U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM)
Local Programs

SUPPORTING DISTRICTS THROUGH PARADIGM SHIFT

Green Schoolyards America continues to support individual school districts in their efforts to design, build, and maintain green schoolyards at scale.

Oakland Living Schoolyard Initiative
In partnership with the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) and The Trust for Public Land, we launched the Oakland Living Schoolyard Initiative in 2017. As part of this initiative, OUSD passed a school-board policy on living schoolyards, built successful pilot projects, and created a staff position to coordinate living schoolyard projects. Green Schoolyards America also led professional development workshops for district leaders and staff and collaborated on OUSD's first Green Schoolyard Guidelines.

The Guidelines support, shape, and clarify how OUSD will continue to build and maintain green schoolyards across the district and are a model for other urban school districts looking to transform and maintain nature-rich schoolyards.

San Carlos School District
We collaborated with the City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County on the Resilient San Carlos Schoolyards Project to conduct professional development for teachers. The professional development focused on taking students outside to learn about watersheds, stormwater runoff, and nonpoint source pollution. Green Schoolyards America also collaborated with Bay Tree Design and Lotus Water to write a report about the project. We wrote a chapter about outdoor learning and provided a sequence of lessons and resources for further study.

The Resilient San Carlos Schoolyards Project is working with the San Carlos School District to create a replicable model for other school districts to promote climate and community resilience through heat and stormwater management.

I spent 20+ years saying NO to gardens!
I thought they were too much work and I didn't see the benefits. But then I met Sharon, got her book, and I was inspired! We engaged all these kids and they came up with water-saving projects and I wanted to show them, we are listening...

Brian Montez
GROUNDs MAINTENANCE SUPERVISOR, Rialto Unified School District

© Green Schoolyards America, Paige Green (top), Green Schoolyards America (bottom)
The scale of change we seek to create is beyond the ability of any one organization. We are grateful to the many partners that collaborate with us to change the paradigm for schoolyard design, use, and management.

Green Schoolyards America is proud to be fiscally sponsored by Earth Island Institute, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Earth Island Institute’s Board of Directors is Green Schoolyards America’s fiduciary board.

We are grateful for the generosity of our donors, who make it possible for us to bring green schoolyards to scale—improving children’s lives, enriching their environments, and growing a greener future!