Austin’s New Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights and Cities Connecting Children to Nature Plan

By Hayden Brooks

In March of 2016, the City of Austin was selected as one of six cities nationwide to receive a planning grant from the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network for Cities Connecting Children to Nature. Historically, Austin has battled systemic issues of equity and segregation that have created major barriers to nature access for children all over the city.

Our planning effort resulted, just this past January, in the Austin City Council providing unanimous approval for the CCCN Plan and the Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights (opposite page), which was signed by over 1,000 Austinites.

The CCCN Planning Team also hopes to build upon the energy of the City Hall press conference (shown below with Austin’s Mayor Steve Adler, Council Members, School Trustees, Department Heads, Executive Directors, teachers, students and parents) to use the Outdoor Bill of Rights to promote the work we’ll be doing on our CCCN Plan.

Our interdepartmental and cross-sector CCCN planning team identified for ourselves the five key elements of collective impact that include: a common agenda; mutually reinforcing activities; shared metrics; continuous communication; and a backbone organization. These elements of collective impact support our four major strategies:

- **Policy Tracking**: Developing and proposing nature access policies to include in Austin’s new Land Development Code and also across the many city departmental master plans.

- **Public Awareness Campaign**: Informing people across Austin about the importance of regular nature access for healthy childhood development.

- **Park Programming and Activation**: Creating a comprehensive nature-based program directory and aligning those programs with school parks in neighborhoods with low “nature equity” scores.

- **Green School Yards**: Creating a network of school parks at elementary campuses co-owned by the Austin School District and the City of Austin in neighborhoods with low “nature equity” scores.

Our plan identifies how city leadership can provide abundant and equitable nature access for all children in Austin, with a specific focus on greening school parks in low-income communities of color. Our planning effort resulted, just this past January, in the Austin

nonprofit or government agency can solve on its own. As a result, we adopted the “collective impact” planning process that brought together ten different city departments, leaders from the Austin School District, the health sector, dozens of nonprofits and many others to create our three-year long Implementation Plan.

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And with limited resources and constituencies for biophilic cities we should see green schoolyards as a valuable tool that can bring new partners and new funding streams to the biophilic cities movement for the benefit of children, families and biophilic cities all around the world.

Resources


Hayden Brooks is the Co-Founder of the Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin and Managing Partner of American Realty’s Asset Management Group.