



SCHOOL REOPENING DURING COVID-19: OUTDOOR LEARNING GUIDANCE



Reopening schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic is challenging our education systems like never before. Outdoor learning and engagement opportunities can help schools balance our communities' health with the critical importance of our children's education and the multiple benefits provided by time spent outdoors.

The Youth Outdoor Policy Partnership has compiled school reopening guidance and creative policy ideas to take advantage of the outdoors while keeping communities safe.

LEARN MORE

Outdoor learning spaces

- [eeGuidance for Reopening Schools](#) (NAAEE) - how environmental and outdoor education can support equitably reopening schools
- [Green Schoolyard Resource Hub](#) (C&NN) - resources to support nature-filled school grounds
- [Outdoor Learning Opportunities for Healthy Students](#) (Inside-Outside Advisory Group) - position statement identifying specific models for outdoor learning in elementary schools
- [CDC Guidance](#) - how to protect students, teachers, administrators and staff. The recommendations emphasize the value of outdoor air by opening windows, when possible
- [Outdoor Infrastructure Planning Strategies](#) (Green Schoolyards America) - summarizes tools for taking learning outside as schools reopen

Transportation

- [Safe Routes to School Partnership](#) – near-term transportation solutions
- [StreetsBlog](#) – insights for how schools and communities and plan for walking and biking to school

Other Resources

- [The Outdoors Alliance for Kids](#) - tools and resources for safely engaging with nature during COVID-19.

REOPENING STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES



OUTDOOR LEARNING SPACES

- **Outside classrooms.** Expanding to school grounds or community outdoor spaces (parks, closed streets, camps, or sports stadiums) can create additional capacity and space for students to learn. Weather can pose challenges, but we can learn from [past experiences](#) and [other countries](#). Individual teachers can take their class outside, or entire schools/districts could consider moving some or all of their students into outdoor classrooms for all or part of the day.
- **Greening schoolyards.** Investments in green school yards instead of asphalt-covered school grounds could help facilitate outdoor learning during the COVID crisis, as well as improve nature access to kids, families, and communities for years to come.
- **Outdoor preschool licensing.** Washington State eliminated “brick and mortar” building requirements from preschool licensing, creating an outdoor preschool pilot program. Many outdoor preschools and [forest schools have been able to reopen](#) during the pandemic. This early childhood education model can provide a safer option during COVID, reduce the overall cost of operating a facility, and kids benefit from time outside.
- **Blended models using the outdoors.** Many school districts are considering “blended models” for school reopening where students are in the classroom part time and learning remotely for the rest of the week. An alternative blended model could have students in the formal classroom for part of the day or week, and learning outside the rest of the time.



EDUCATION SUPPORT

- **Tap environmental and outdoor educators and community-based programs.** Many youth outdoor education programs across the country have experts in outdoor learning who may be available to provide instruction that complements classroom teachers, if non-school staff are allowed on campus. If they are not, they could also design and implement programs that align and support curricular standards off-site.
- **Engage environmental and outdoor educators to provide professional development for teachers.** Environmental and outdoor education programs can also leverage their expertise to train teachers in outdoor classroom management, and other education support.
- **Align virtual learning with outdoor and environmental education goals.** As many schools incorporate more and more virtual and online learning into the curriculum they can make sure it includes outdoor and environmental education opportunities. Lessons and activities can encourage students to explore, investigate, and learn about nature in their backyard, neighborhood, or park.



TRANSPORTATION

- **Safer routes to school and car-free streets.** Key roads or routes to school could be made car-free so that students and their families can safely walk and bike to school, reducing demand for school buses and therefore reducing crowding. This can include temporary closures during COVID (similar to what has been done in [Denver](#) and [San Francisco](#)). Longer term, towns and counties can incorporate [safe routes to school](#) into transportation and community planning.
- **Walking school buses.** Communities, schools, and districts can also support or develop walking school buses where a group of children walk to school with one or more adults.



OUT OF SCHOOL CARE

- **Outdoor education programs and environmental education programs can support out of school time.** Community-based environmental and outdoor education partners can play an important role in supporting safe childcare and ongoing learning for families outside the structured school day.