Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way

A multi-year shared vision and strategy to provide daily equitable access to the outdoors and environmental learning for all New Mexico kids.
Every Kid: At each grade level (preK-12th grade), every New Mexican child will have access to the outdoors and environmental learning. Through redistribution of resources to ensure all kids have access to the outdoors and environmental learning, we can ensure a thriving future that includes outdoors for all.

Every Day: When we support kids in daily experiences outdoors through in-school and out-of-school opportunities in their communities and beyond, kids gain the knowledge, skills, and ongoing curiosity to innovate social and environmental problems.

Every Way: By supporting a variety of approaches without focusing on a specific way of connecting with the outdoors, we honor the many approaches for engaging in the outdoors and environmental learning including, but not limited to conservation, experiential, environmental, land-based, nature-based, outdoor, and place-based education and learning. The following recommendations support connecting to the outdoors and environmental learning in ways that are local, meaningful, relevant, kid-centered, culturally responsive, and multidisciplinary and that support physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health and wellbeing.

Meaningful outdoor experiences and environmental learning bring us together to learn about our world, including how best to care for and sustain it for future generations. Supporting Every Kid in the Land of Enchantment with Every Day access to outdoor and environmental learning in Every Way will lead to stronger, healthier people and communities.
The following recommendations were developed through a series of community convenings hosted by Environmental Education of New Mexico (EENM) from 2018 - 2020. The convenings utilized a radical inclusion approach using “whole systems” thinking. These gatherings were open to educators, teachers, youth providers, interested community members and youth, and brought together over 200 individuals representing interconnected interests like outdoor recreation, education, conservation, and environmental justice. In 2020, EENM supported 17 Exploring Equitable Education Outdoors Fellows to reflect on these convenings and engage in systems mapping to envision a future for Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way. Hundreds of pages of notes representing ideas, perspectives, solutions, and opportunities were distilled down to this prioritized set of recommendations. They serve as testament to the incredibly strong community of outdoor and environmental educators, teachers, outdoor program providers, community members, and youth that shared their valuable experience, expertise, and wisdom.

This document is a living document, open to changes as future discussions unfold. Each of the recommendations is shared in one of four categories: Policy, Professional Development and Communities of Practice, Aligned Programs and Shared Resources, and Funding and Sustainability. These four pillars provide a framework for systemic change to ensure the shared vision of Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way is achieved. Systemic change to support equitable daily access to the outdoors and environmental learning in New Mexico requires a number of structural contributions and the contributions of many working toward a common framework for success. Once implemented, these recommendations will lead to the following in our youth (Nicole M. Ardoin, Alison W. Bowers, Noelle Wyman Roth & Nicole Holthuis (2018) Environmental education and K-12 student outcomes: A review and analysis of research, The Journal of Environmental Education, 49:1, 1-17, DOI: 10.1080/00958964.2017.1366155):

- Improved physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health and wellbeing
- Increased social skills and self-esteem
- Civic and community interest, engagement, and responsibility
- Academic skills including critical thinking and problem solving
- Feelings of empowerment and ability to take action
- Environmentally conscious behavior
- Knowledge gains across multiple disciplines
- Motivation to learn and increased enthusiasm
What is systemic change?

By looking at a system through identifying and exploring its elements and the rules and connections at play (i.e., systems thinking), we can identify and address the actual root cause(s) of complex and complicated issues. Discovering and addressing root causes, rather than the symptoms, of issues means greater impact and better utilization of resources. Although quick fixes can be part of systemic change, without applying systems thinking to problem solving, too often root causes are not identified and the quick fixes do not address them. The multi-year effort to create this community-generated vision and strategy incorporated systems thinking in each step to ensure maximum impact and effectiveness for these recommendations.

Systemic change requires ongoing reflection on how bias, assumptions, policies, power, and structures can perpetuate or abolish systems of oppression including racism. Constant reflection on an individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural level are required for this type of transformative change. There is a need at all scales - within and across organizations, institutions, communities, and sectors - for conversations that lead to action to eliminate systemic oppression. These conversations were woven into the community-centered process to develop these recommendations, and EENM is committed to providing space for these types of dialogues.
POLICY

1. Resource an Office of Outdoor and Environmental Education at the state level to support teachers and school staff. Embed Outdoor Ambassadors in every school district and ultimately at every school.

When looking at other states that have more outdoor and environmental education, there is one commonality: state-level support in the form of state agency staff working with a professional support network, often an Affiliate organization of the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) like EENM. There is no standard across the country for where this agency staff is housed, and potential spaces for New Mexico could include the Public Education Department, State Parks, State Land Office, Outdoor Recreation Division, or Department of Game and Fish. Environmental Education of New Mexico is an established professional support network (2021 marks 25 years as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization) and already provides space for networking, professional development and learning, collaboration, and leadership development and is well positioned to begin working with new state agency staff immediately.

There is a great need for support staff within local districts and schools to facilitate outdoor experiences for students both during school time and through out-of-school time activities and programs. Outdoor Ambassadors can work with teachers to coordinate outdoor learning during the school day through standards-aligned activities in all subjects while organizing after-school programs and other out-of-school experiences for students outdoors. Additionally, these individuals can liaise with teachers and community-based organizations offering programming and field trip opportunities. Across New Mexico, there are already successful models to look at like Communities in Schools Coordinators to learn how to successfully implement this type of support staff.

2. Develop a network of outdoor gear “plus” libraries to support kids, families, and community members.

New Mexico has an opportunity to demonstrate national leadership in addressing barriers to the outdoors for local communities by supporting outdoor gear “plus” libraries. These libraries can not only provide outdoor recreation gear, apparel, field guides in multiple languages, and other items for outdoor activities, they can provide access to family-focused outdoor activities and serve as a hub of learning (e.g., “Intro to Camping”) and discussion in local communities (e.g., “Histories of Public Lands”). This effort can build upon already existing outdoor gear libraries like those at the University of New Mexico and Western New Mexico University. The gear libraries can be housed at various locations like public libraries, schools, public lands agencies, or community-based organizations, depending upon the needs of local communities.

Establishing such a network will allow for the development of spaces that are meaningful and relevant to local communities while allowing for ongoing sharing of how learning and discussions evolve in response to barriers to access to the outdoors.
3. Incorporate accessible outdoor spaces to facilitate hands-on, standards-aligned learning in school as well as schoolyard design and improvement projects. End goals: students spending at least one hour outdoors daily in outdoor learning, and these spaces being accessible for families and community members outside of school hours.

There is an ongoing need to enhance and develop outdoor classrooms and learning spaces at all schools in New Mexico. During school hours, students can spend time learning outdoors and engaging in outdoor learning as part of their daily learning. These spaces can also serve as green spaces for families and community members outside of school hours to assist in addressing park inequities in local communities.

It is critical to include students, teachers, administrators, school staff, parents/guardians, and community members in the design of these spaces. As spaces are created, teachers and staff need to be supported with training and standards-aligned activities. It is recommended that all future capital outlay requests for schools and districts include a minimum of 1% dedicated to the enhancement and development of outdoor classrooms and learning spaces.

Learning outdoors vs. outdoor learning

Although these two terms are often used interchangeably, these represent two distinct approaches. Learning outdoors references bringing classes outdoors to engage in learning that could happen in a classroom (e.g., reading literature while enjoying fresh air.) Outdoor learning is the act of utilizing the space in the learning (e.g., using a school garden to explore phenomena in science). Both of these types of learning are valuable for the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health and wellbeing of students and are supported by the recommendations in this document.

4. Invest in the development of standards-aligned curricula in climate change, environmental justice, and place-based cultural learning by bringing together educators and content experts. Indigenous knowledge and history and exploring other cultural and land connections can be centered in place-based learning.

While there are many curricula available for outdoor and environmental learning, our convenings identified a need for more New Mexico-specific, standards-aligned activities and curricula in climate change, environmental justice, and place-based cultural learning. A key to developing these activities and curricula is to resource the pairing of content experts with teachers and educators (for example, supporting staff time from community-based environmental justice organizations and funding local teachers during a summer institute to develop activities together). In particular, activities to support the “Science and Society” of the NM STEM Ready! Standards are needed immediately. Lastly, cultural connections to the land have too often been overlooked in outdoor and environmental learning and there is a great need for place- and land-based activities that honor cultural land connections, especially those of New Mexico’s 23 Native Nations.
5. Restructure requirements and resources for pre-service and in-service teachers to include an "Introduction to Outdoor Learning" class. Resource and support teachers for ongoing Professional Development (PD) annually.

Currently, there are no classes or requirements in New Mexico for pre-service or in-service teachers to support outdoor and environmental learning. Any discussion of restructuring teacher licensing requirements should include the addition of outdoor and environmental learning as well as access to ongoing PD in outdoor and environmental learning.

Current state of Professional Development for outdoor and environmental learning in New Mexico

In the 1990s and 2000s, there was an abundance of PD opportunities for teachers and educators across New Mexico. Specifically, state agencies and nonprofit organizations offered regular workshops ranging from half-day to week-long opportunities on a variety of topics. Teachers were required to participate in PD annually, and often self-selected outdoor and environmental education workshops to fulfill this requirement. Organizations and agencies would often charge a small fee to cover the costs of staff time and materials for these workshops.

In the 2010s, New Mexico saw the removal of the annual continuing education requirement for teachers with the unintended consequence of a drastic reduction in outdoor and environmental education workshops. Now, teachers primarily receive PD through their districts and workshops offered outside of in-service days experience low attendance because of the lack of structural support in place to resource teachers in attending these opportunities. Workshops that previously could charge a small fee to cover costs now must seek outside funding to cover those costs and even provide stipends to teachers as a way of resourcing teachers, putting an extra burden on organizations and agencies to do additional fundraising. This shift in support has led to an exponential decline in outdoor and environmental learning workshop opportunities available in New Mexico. Additionally, there are no standards set for outdoor and environmental learning for pre-service teachers at public higher education institutions in New Mexico, leading to a lack of consistency in pre-service teacher opportunities.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT and COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

In addition to the structural recommendations made in Policy Recommendation #5, the community convenings revealed an ongoing need for more professional development and communities of practice across New Mexico. Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (definition from https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/). These groups provide a dedicated time and space to go deep, and be among a community of peers. Often members in these groups build long-term relationships and collaborations. The Exploring Equitable Education Outdoors Fellowship is an example of a Community of Practice and there is an ongoing need for more communities of practice across education in New Mexico.

In particular, more opportunities are needed for learning and communities of practice in the following:
- Standards alignment
- Cultural responsiveness
- Social and emotional learning
- Supporting the whole child
- Experiential education
- Inquiry-based learning
- Supporting students with special needs in the outdoors

To help address some of these topics, EENM hosted a Fall 2020 webinar series called Introduction to Outdoor Learning at Home, in Communities, and at Schools. The series was developed to support the New Mexico Outdoor Learning Guidance drafted by EENM and released by the New Mexico Public Education Department to support school reentry in the 2020 - 2021 school year in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Three webinars were held on the following topics: Social and Emotional Learning in the Outdoors, Standards-aligned Outdoor Learning, and Cultural Responsiveness in Outdoor Learning. The implementation of this webinar series directly supports the recommendations in this report.

Informal educators and outdoor program providers also need access to ongoing professional development. Outside of higher education degree programs, there is a growing need to provide alternative pathways to support cultivating outdoor and environmental educators. In particular, a new model for supporting adults working with youth in the outdoors like an outdoor learning certification and/or a micro-credentialing program is needed.

Environmental Education of New Mexico sponsored an Environmental Education Certification program from 2016 - 2019 based upon the Core Competencies for Environmental Educators included in the NAAEE Guidelines for the Preparation of Environmental Educators. Although the certification was robust and the program was well attended, it was challenging to implement and support without additional financial resources. There is an opportunity to evolve this already established certification program into a new Outdoor Learning Certification and/or micro-credentialing program that includes topics discussed in this paper (e.g., social and emotional learning and cultural responsiveness). Environmental Education of New Mexico would like to prioritize this conversation with outdoor and environmental educators in 2021 and 2022 and is seeking financial support to develop this alternative pathway to support outdoor educators and providers in bringing youth outdoors.
ALIGNED PROGRAMS and SHARED RESOURCES

There is an ongoing need to support conversations among teachers, organizations, schools, agencies, and communities about sharing resources and strategically aligning programs. Ongoing trust and relationship building through these conversations can lead to partnership and collaboration, in turn leading to program alignment and resource sharing among groups. Kids benefit the most when they have an aligned series of opportunities that continuously build upon one another through the grade levels. Individuals and organizations need to be resourced to engage in these conversations. The educational networks, coalitions, and alliances like EENM that cultivate these networking spaces also need the resources to continue offering these opportunities.

In addition to supporting spaces for program alignment and resource sharing, government agencies (local, school districts, county, state, regional, and national) have been identified as the entities to best implement the following prioritized recommendations:

1. When plans and policies include recognizing the values and benefits of outdoor and environmental learning, there are far reaching advantages in supporting teachers, educators, and youth providers.
2. Coordinating grant opportunities among agencies through marketing and utilizing a shared proposal format when possible could dramatically reduce educational staff time in seeking funding. Increasing transparency of grant selection processes through sharing rubrics in marketing efforts can decrease staff time for grantors and potential grantees in ensuring proposal submissions fit funding criteria.
3. Through marketing local education programs and activities offered by local nonprofit organizations and small businesses, agencies can connect community members with opportunities offered beyond the current capacities of the agencies themselves. Marketing and utilizing existing programs and activities can reduce the use of agency resources overall.
4. An online library of standards-aligned activities and units in all subject areas for outdoor learning at every grade level could be utilized by teachers, educators, and youth providers.
What about an inventory?

This is the most frequently asked question to EENM about outdoor and environmental education. In response, EENM developed the first statewide inventory of K-12 environmental education programs in 2017, and expanded it to include preK in 2019. This effort was a result of exploring past efforts in New Mexico like the Watershed Education Network and learning from inventories in other states. This inventory included over 300 programs offered by over 120 groups serving 125,000+ students annually. In 2020, EENM began working in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service Southwestern Region and the Arizona Association for Environmental Education to update the inventory and gather more information beyond programs, which will allow for a better understanding of the landscape of outdoor and environmental learning across the Land of Enchantment. This new inventory will be released in 2021.

Although inventories can serve as a platform for collaboration and partnership, reduce overlap in programming, and guide the development of new program offerings (with the use of the Best Practices Tool for Environmental Education Program Development co-created by over 40 educators in 2018), this can only happen when these resources are used. Design of the inventory, including data fields and how the data would be accessible, included significant community input and the current inventory has been marketed to approximately 10,000 teachers across New Mexico and hundreds of informal educators. Even with all of this effort, the inventory has been underutilized and only a handful of programs in New Mexico have undergone alignment between organizations. Through tracking visits to the inventory and discussions with community members, we have discovered what is critically needed are conversations and networking events to build and deepen trust among individuals and organizations. This trust and relationship building can then lead to collaboration including strategic program alignment. Individuals and groups need to be resourced and supported to develop these relationships and there is a need to have spaces, like those that EENM supports, to explore the possibilities for collaboration, program alignment, a reduction in the duplication of effort, and new program development. Additionally, teachers cannot utilize resources from inventories without the structural and systemic support to engage in outdoor and environmental learning.
FUNDING and SUSTAINABILITY

The need for increased and additional sources of funding was named too many times to count in the development of these recommendations. Both public and private funding is increasingly limited for outdoor and environmental learning and current funding only meets a fraction of what is needed. For example, environmental education funding represents only 5% of overall environmental and conservation funding distributed in the United States (Nicole M. Ardoin & Alison W. Bowers (2012): *Trends in Philanthropic Support: Foundation Giving in Environmental Education*, The Journal of Environmental Education, 43:4, 259-273 [http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2012.654830](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2012.654830)). Although education is frequently discussed in conversations around topics including conservation, environment, and sustainability, it is consistently under resourced.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are approximately 400,000 preK-12th grade aged children residing in New Mexico. When looking at free and reduced lunch data, the majority of New Mexico kids are low-income. Additionally, over 75% of these youth identify as youth of color. There are both historic and current structural inequities that contribute to limited access to the outdoors and environmental learning across New Mexico, and the vast majority of kids need additional resources to address this.

Conversations are needed with funders and providers to address these funding needs and we anticipate the recommendations presented in this report will lead to these conversations. In addition to funding needs, here are recommendations of how to leverage already existing resources to grow support for outdoor and environmental learning:

1. Support marketing of local resources including outdoor spaces and programs available for kids and families.
2. Develop public campaigns on the values, benefits, and opportunities for kids, families, and communities to spend time outdoors.
3. Invest in more collective research on the social and emotional benefits of being in the outdoors for New Mexican kids and families.
4. Explore how to utilize existing funding to create dedicated funded pathways to support teens and young adults to explore outdoor careers, regardless of their socioeconomic status.
CONCLUSION

New Mexico is filled with beautiful landscapes, incredible cultures, and strong, thoughtful, resilient people and communities. All of this represents an abundance of resources to contribute to a thriving future for all with the knowledge, skills, and engagement to innovate social and environmental challenges. Individual educators, teachers, community members, and decision makers working together with organizations, businesses, and government agencies have an opportunity to play a role in the implementation of Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way.

When the recommendations in this report are carried out at all scales, long-lasting change and impact will be achieved for current and future generations of kids. Through a shared, coordinated effort over the next several years, the Land of Enchantment will become a model for supporting equitable access to the outdoors and environmental learning for youth, families, and communities. In conclusion, systemic change often does not happen quickly and sometimes the shifts and impact are not immediately visible. The creation of Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way in itself was a form of systemic change by bringing equity, inclusion, and transparency into the development of proposed policies that address equity. Cultivating spaces that are open to anyone representing interconnected interests like outdoor recreation, education, conservation, and environmental justice brought unlikely allies together to engage in dialogue that led to deepening trust. This trust and relationship building led to more collaboration, as was visible and evident in how the outdoor and environmental education community came together in New Mexico during the COVID-19 global pandemic. This resulted in new opportunities for outdoor and environmental learning at home, in communities, and at school across the state and through the development of the New Mexico Outdoor Learning Guidance.

Lastly, the creation of policies that address equity, including those that represent access to the outdoors and environmental learning in its many forms, too frequently lacks transparency and limits the voices that are represented and reflected in those policies. It is critical to have more open, transparent, inclusive conversations when developing policies and to allow enough time and space for these dialogues to ensure resources are distributed in more equitable ways with purposeful impact. The conversations to develop these recommendations for Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way required an ongoing investment, and that investment realized further reaching benefits and impacts by supporting individuals and groups in the dialogues necessary to come to a shared vision and strategy. It is our hope that this work will mark a shift in policy development, from groups asking for sign-ons to already developed policies to engaging others in development of those policies - especially those directly impacted by these policies and unlikely allies.

We at Environmental Education of New Mexico look forward to working with all of you on the realization of Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way in the coming years.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Any effort to support system-level change requires an investment by many individuals and groups and the development of Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way was realized by the contributions of hundreds. This project was co-led by Eileen Everett, Executive Director of Environmental Education of New Mexico (EENM), and Vicki Pozzebon, Owner of Prosopa Partners. The concept of Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way was refined in partnership with Environmental Education of New Mexico, Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education, Maine Environmental Education Association, and North American Association for Environmental Education.

This effort would not have been achieved without the intentional sharing of power and leadership from EENM’s Leadership Team. Continuously investing in an approach that moved power from a centralized place out to the community showed a real commitment in believing in the strength, resilience, brilliance, thoughtfulness, and innovation of New Mexico’s outdoor and environmental education community. Additionally, this effort required an ongoing openness by all Leadership Team members to reflect on power, privilege, and systems of oppression. Many thanks to all of the Board Members who served during the development of Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way including Vanessa Barela, Marcia Barton, Gwen Carla, Rick Cole, Steve Glass, Cindy Griesmeyer, Molly Madden, Colleen McRoberts, Ryan Pemberton, Jamie Radenbaugh, Tallie Segel, and Kelly Steinberg.

In 2020, we were incredibly fortunate to have the extraordinary leadership of the Exploring Equitable Education Outdoors Fellows: Sarah Candelaria, Kimberly Caputo-Heath, Juliana Ciano, Dakota Domínguez, Laura Flores, Joe Garcia, Eric Griffin, Katie Macaulay, Olivia Marin, Allison Martin, Scott Nydam, Shantini Ramakrishnan, Kateri Sava, Fiana Shapiro, Jordan Stone, Mara Yarbrough, and Kelly White. These Fellows represent the incredible transformation that is possible when we each step into our own leadership and come together to change the world.

There are too many people to name that engaged in our conversations over the last three years. Thank you to each of you who showed up and shared your ideas, knowledge, perspective, wisdom, and dreams with us. We value each of you and what you shared, and look forward to many more years of conversations with all of you.

Every Kid, Every Day, Every Way would not have been possible without the ongoing financial contributions of EENM members and donors and the incredibly generous support of the Pisces Foundation, McCune Charitable Foundation, and Lineberry Foundation.