

EDUCATION

District allocates \$10,000 for Monte Vista Elementary to construct first outdoor classroom

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LAS CRUCES – Monte Vista Elementary School will be the first school in Las Cruces Public Schools to build an outdoor classroom.

Students in Robbi Berry's fifth-grade class made a request for an outdoor classroom to the district earlier in September, and LCPS Superintendent Ralph Ramos decided to allocate \$10,000 to the project.

Outdoor classrooms are meant to provide hands-on learning in a more stimulating environment than the average classroom.

The news coincides with the first annual Outdoor Learning Week from Sept. 27 through Oct. 1, which was established by the passing of Senate Memorial 1, Task Force to Promote Outdoor Classroom.

Education: Gadsden's Mesquite Elementary designated National Blue Ribbon — among the top honors a school can get

During the 2020-21 school year, Berry's class testified to the state senate in support of outdoor classrooms. The memorial drafted by the students asked for a task force dedicated to looking into options for learning spaces in mainly pre-established outdoor areas. Legislators passed the memorial on Feb. 24, 2021.

The legislation was jump-started by the Wild Friends Program, a civics education program at the University of New Mexico School of Law that has been giving young students a chance to try their hand in drafting legislative documents on wildlife-based issues for the

past 30 years. Berry has been involved with Wild Friends for three years and said she is now seeing real change in her own school.

The \$10,000 LCPS has allocated could be used toward a shade structure, seating, a permanent whiteboard and a shed for supplies, which are all common inclusions in outdoor classrooms.

Wild Friends spokeswoman Stephanie Haan-Amato said that it's rare for districts to allocate funding for outdoor classrooms.

The project is still in the early stages, and students in Berry's class will be working on a design and prototype over the next few weeks.

Berry's students hope that their success and space for healthy and engaging outdoor learning will be an example for schools across New Mexico.