



# STATEWIDE OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS: Design, Build, Learn

## Why Outdoor Classrooms?

Research shows when we support kids in daily outdoor experiences through outdoor classrooms, they are healthier and gain the knowledge, skills, and ongoing curiosity to innovate solutions to social and environmental problems.<sup>1</sup>

The need for outdoor learning has never been more evident than during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Statewide support for outdoor classrooms is at an all-time high, as evidenced by Senate Memorial 1 (Sen. Correa Hemphill), passed with overwhelming bi-partisan support in the 2021 New Mexico State Legislative session.

By establishing outdoor classrooms on school grounds across New Mexico, we can support students in outdoor learning during the school day while providing outdoor spaces that families and communities can use outside of school hours to immediately address health and park inequities.

### Benefits of Outdoor Classrooms:

- Improved physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health and wellbeing
- Increased connections with community
- Interest in civic action
- Academic skills including critical thinking and problem solving
- Enhanced academic achievement

## What Are the Components?

**DESIGN:** Outdoor learning spaces can take many forms and can be tailored to fit the needs of each individual school and community. It is critical to include students, teachers, administrators, school staff, parents/guardians,

and community members in the design of these spaces. Design should include plans for maintenance.

**BUILD:** Outdoor classrooms are a very low-cost solution (\$2,000-10,000 per school) to improving the quality of education in our state. New Mexico teachers have identified two main priorities in building outdoor classrooms: shade (through native plantings or shade sails) and seating.

**LEARN:** Teachers and staff need to be supported with training, standards-aligned activities, and Outdoor Learning Coordinator assistance to incorporate evidence-based outdoor learning into their instruction.

### How?

An **Outdoor Classroom** at every New Mexico Public School. Cost: one-time expenditure of \$7 million (877 schools at an average cost of \$8,000/school)

**Outdoor Learning Coordinators** spread throughout the state can greatly aid in the design, implementation, and use of outdoor classrooms. Cost: \$5 million annually (98 coordinators at \$50,000/coordinator to be housed at nonprofits, RECs, districts, etc. and Outdoor Learning Specialist at NMPED)

### An **Outdoor Learning Micro-credentialing Program**:

Use outdoor learning as a pilot for micro-credentialing, NMPED works with EENM on establishing content (e.g., standards-aligned outdoor learning, social and emotional learning in the outdoors, culturally responsive outdoor learning, risk management in the outdoors). Cost: \$200,000

<sup>1</sup>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](https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2017.1366155)