



Fact Sheet for Wild Friends: 2022 Legislative Session

In support of a funding bill for outdoor classrooms

What is an outdoor classroom?

- An outdoor classroom is a permanent designated outdoor space with protection from the elements, used by teachers and students from all disciplines to facilitate learning.
- An outdoor classroom can vary from school to school, depending on each school's location, geography, climate, and funding.

Why do we need outdoor classrooms?

- Outdoor classrooms offer a vital learning space during this global pandemic for in-person classes to commence in a safe, well-ventilated space, reducing COVID transmission.^{1, 2}
- Outdoor classrooms are a way to address issues of equity; academic and social learning; and mental, physical, and emotional health."³
- The activities and learning styles outdoor classrooms offer promote better motor skills, social skills, and environmental stewardship.⁴
- Evidence has shown that students who are engaged in learning in an outdoor setting are less likely to exhibit behavior problems, have a higher-grade point average, and perform better on tests due to an increase in concentration and motivation.^{4, 5}
- Learning outside benefits human health by increased sleep, reduced obesity, decreased stress, reduced osteoporosis, and increased immune function.⁶

Are outdoor classrooms only for science lessons?

- No! Any indoor activity can be done outdoors with a little planning and protection from the elements. Students could:
 1. draw a scene from an English or History text
 2. create a skit to re-enact a famous battle or play
 3. read a book quietly, or work independently
 4. have a group discussion or work on a group project
 5. conduct a "dirty lab" with water, flour, or soil without worrying about the floor
 6. take measurements of one another or objects around the school

What does an outdoor classroom cost?

- Standard outdoor learning spaces run from \$2,000 to \$10,000 per classroom to set up, running at an average of \$8,000.^{5, 7}
- They can range from a very minimal set-up to intricate external structures.⁵
- Wild Friends students have created prototypes with a budget of \$2,000.

What does the funding bill ask for?

- This bill is a result of the work of the Outdoor Classrooms Task Force established in response to [SM 1](#), drafted by the Wild Friends in 2021.
- The bill asks for \$500,000 to establish an outdoor classroom program at the Public Education Department (PED), to include:

1. Two fulltime employees at PED, an outdoor learning coordinator and an outdoor learning assistant.
2. Funding for micro grants which can be applied for by schools to create an outdoor classroom.
3. Funding for professional development for teachers to incorporate the outdoor classroom into their curriculum.

Why is this bill needed?

- Many schools across New Mexico have expressed interest in having an outdoor classroom, but they don't know where to start. PED can provide guidance and help in designing, funding, and using outdoor classrooms, so that they are available to everyone who wants one.
- For schools that already have an outdoor classroom (and there are several!), this bill will provide support for teachers on how to utilize these spaces and connect to any part of their curriculum, from English to Math.

What are other states doing?

- States across the country are using outdoor classrooms, including our neighboring states of Colorado, Arizona, and Texas, especially during this pandemic.^{3, 8, 9}
- Six states, California, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Washington, Washington D.C., and Wisconsin each have state level environmental/outdoor learning coordinators tasked with oversight, development, and evaluation of environmental and outdoor learning throughout their state.^{10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15}
- **With New Mexico's beautiful climate and a small investment, we could be a national leader in establishing a statewide program to help interested school districts establish this innovative, yet common-sense solution to better learning!**

¹ Compilation of Reentry Guidance – nmlegis.gov

² Closed environments facilitate secondary transmission of COVID-19, Hiroshi Nishiura et.al.,
Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.02.28.20029272>

³ Outdoor classrooms as plan-A – arizonaee.org

⁴ "Classrooms Are Going Green: How Green Classrooms Are Reconnecting Kids with Nature" Cleaver Samantha – Dec 2007

⁵ Total cost – classroominnature.weebly.com

⁶ "Experiential learning theory: the importance of outdoor classrooms in environmental education" International Journal of Science Education, Part B - Jan 2017

⁷ Outdoorclassroomproject.org

⁸ Colorado project learning tree – CBS Denver denver.cbslocal.com

⁹ Education Colorado public schools turn to outdoor instruction during COVID 19 – hcn.org

¹⁰ California Blueprint for Environmental Literacy - cde.ca.gov

¹¹ Maryland Environmental Literacy - marylandpublicschools.org

¹² Pennsylvania Environmental Education Act

¹³ Washington Environment and Sustainability - k12.wa.us

¹⁴ Washington D.C. Environmental Literacy Program - osse.dc.gov

¹⁵ Wisconsin Environmental Education - dpi.wi.gov/environmental-ed