Designing Creative Learning Experiences Through Outdoor Innovation
Today’s Discussion

Impactful learning experiences

A philanthropic approach

Educator perspectives

Integrated learning opportunities
Impactful Learning
Sensory Input

Emotional Connection

Movement
Experiential Learning

Concrete Experience

Active Experimentation

Abstract Conceptualization

Reflective Observation

Experiential Learning
Everyone enters every learning situation with more or less articulate ideas about the topic at hand. **We are all psychologists, historians, and atomic physicists.** It is just that some of our theories are more crude and incorrect than others.  

- David Kolb
Learner Engagement

91% more engaged in learning

69% better able to concentrate

68% better behaved

PROJECTDIRT
Brain Downshift
Philanthropic Approach
Our Challenge
Scaled Learning Opportunities
Leveraging Partnerships
SMSD 2016
SUSTAINABILITY
YOUTH SUMMIT PRIORITIES

School Gardens + Natural Areas

Educational Awareness + Student Involvement

Health + Well-Being

Efficiency: Energy, Water, Recycling, Composting

Transportation Alternatives
80% of schools host gardens or natural areas

Sustainable landscaping
Elementary Grade Level Alignment

PK-2: School Gardens & Native Plants
3: Butterfly Gardens (life cycles/habitats), Severe Weather
4: Energy Efficiency (incl. audits), Air Quality
5: Water Quality Monitoring
6: Energy Alternatives (renewable energy)

Middle School Water Quality Alignment
All district facilities recycle and compost

11 schools achieved energy star status – top 25% nationwide

LEED design at new facilities
Walking and biking to school: safe routes checklist & workshop
Mental health
Physical health
Nutritional health
Indoor air quality & natural light
Student innovation and involvement
Joan Leavens
Coordinator of Sustainability & Community Engagement
White – 65%
Black – 14%
Hispanic – 11%
Two Or More Races – 7%
Asian – 3%

K-6 | 360 students | 47 total staff | 28% free and reduced
Building a Positive Culture
CHANGE TO GCE
NEXT GENERATION
SCIENCE
STANDARDS
For States, By States
Design Elements

garden beds
native grasses
shade structure
large group area w/ flex learning wall
cistern
small group areas
garden beds
solar panel
dry rock bed
native grasses
project tables
learning wall
Open Ended Exploration
Early Educator Perspectives
creative fun environment experiential
adventure curiosity Socates
boundless flexible
age appropriate science hands-on
active fresh nature
happy real-world exploration engaging
STEM
"Do you need additional support or helpful resources?"
Anticipated Content Areas

- science: 43%
- language arts: 21%
- math: 12%
- social studies: 12%
- collaboration & community: 7%
- mindfulness: 5%

Total: 100%
Anticipated Usage

- Daily: 0%
- Weekly: 41%
- Every Other Week: 12%
- Monthly: 41%
- Every Other Month: 6%
- Never: 0%
Focused Efforts
Concern for Student Ability Level
Excited to Harness Increased Engagement
Thoughtful Curriculum Integration
Just Don’t Know Where to start
“Gardening is Empowerment”
KCCG Support

- Garden planning support
- Reduced cost plants
- Workshop training for teachers
- On-site training for kids
- Curriculum options
- Follow-up support
“Can I be on the carrot team? I love carrots!”

“Wait! Are we farming?”

“Yeah we are!”

“Can I get my hands dirty?”

“This is so awesome!”
I want to help our students feel connected to our school. If they’re planting something and taking care of it by watering it and weeding it, they’ll have the chance to feel a connection. –Brittney Fuchs
Creating Connections
Hands-On Solar
Digital + Analog

Find these items in nature...

- soft
- yellow
- rough
- your height
- slimy
- smelly
- wet
- living
- red
- noisy
- fuzzy
- crushable
- buoyant
- creepy
- crawly
- that flies
Empowering Teachers

• Teachers individually building expertise
• Other outside resources
Professional Learning

Kansas State University
College of Agriculture
Updated Educator Perspectives
Pre-Use Thoughts

- creative
- fun
- environment
- experiential
- adventure
- flexible
- age appropriate
- science
- active
- calming
- on
- curiosity
- nature
- happiness
- engaging
- real-world
- exploration
- STEM
Pre-Use Expectations

- Daily: 0%
- Weekly: 41%
- Every Other Week: 12%
- Monthly: 41%
- Every Other Month: 6%
- Never: 0%
Post-Use Reality

- Daily: 0%
- Weekly: 8%
- Every Other Week: 31%
- Monthly: 8%
- Every Other Month: 15%
- Never: 38%
“Did you use the space as much as you hoped you would?”

25%

42%

33%
Actual Content Areas

POST-USE CONTENT AREAS

- Science: 43%
- Language Arts: 24%
- Math: 28%
- Social Studies: 5%
- Collaboration & Community: 28%
- Art: 24%
- Mindfulness: 5%
“Do you need additional support or helpful resources?”
Data Takeaways

- Support for ideas beyond science
- A balance of digital & analog
- Include those outside the typical classroom

Collaboration impact

Engagement increase

Ongoing professional learning is key
Teacher Reflections

- Life-cycle understanding…
  “This year it really clicked”
- Support was essential
- Student excitement was sustained and awareness was built
- Variation in experiences is awesome
Infusing learning connections
Outdoor Learning Resources
Keys to Success

- Close proximity: indoor/outdoor bridging is ideal
- “Getting started” info from the design team
- Identify and use key partnerships
- Intentionally guided professional learning
- Professional learning community support
- Tell the story! Multiple formats & audiences
Thank You!

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