



**ACADEMY - Focus 2:**  
**Health & Wellness Toolkit: Topic 1:**

# **Outdoor Learning Environments**

**May 3, 2022**

**Presented by:**

Lynne Sorkin, AIA, LEED AP – FGM Architects  
Amy Veytsman & Kristy Seifert, River Trails SD26  
Brian Scully, DLA Architects  
Ashley Burger, Western Springs SD101



#iasboAC22

*Image: Play Safety Forum*



**STRONGER TOGETHER. SMARTER TOGETHER.**





# Outdoor Learning Environments

May 5, 2022

## Presented by:

Lynne Sorkin, AIA, LEED AP – FGM Architects  
Amy Veytsman & Kristy Seifert, River Trails SD26  
Brian Scully, DLA Architects  
Ashley Burger, Western Springs SD101



#iasboAC22

*Image: Play Safety Forum*



STRONGER TOGETHER. SMARTER TOGETHER.





Peterson Elementary School, Chicago

# Beyond Slides and Swings

- Benefits of Outdoor Learning
- Opportunities and Programming
- Myth Busting: Risk Assessment
- Planning
- Case Studies
- Resources





# Why Teach Outdoors?



Space to Grow



#iasboAC22

STRONGER TOGETHER. SMARTER TOGETHER.



# Risks to a Sedentary Student



Higher BMI/Obesity



Anxiety &  
Depression



Diminished use of  
Senses: Myopia



# Benefits of Learning Outside

- Natural settings engage children longer
- Less competitive / More cooperation
- Promotes Confidence



River Trails SD 26Prairie Trails ELC



# Engaging with Nature

- Improves Self-Regulation
- Increases Cognitive Development & Concentration
- Experimentation Spurs Imagination and Creativity





# Opportunities & Programming

- **Environmental Awareness**
- **Biology: Ecological Awareness, interaction with animals**
- **Biophilia / Sensorial Enjoyment**



# Opportunities & Programming

- Perceived Lack of Time
- Curriculum requirements
- Costs





# Opportunities & Programming

- Agriculture / Healthy Food Systems
- Nutrition
- Gardening and Kitchen Skills
- Understanding Food Justice
- Reducing Food Waste



Space to Grow



The Edible Schoolyard Project



The Edible Schoolyard Project



The Edible Schoolyard Project



# Myth Busting Safety Concerns

What is your Risk Tolerance?



*Simon Fraser University Childcare, Burnaby BC*



# Myth Busting Risk Assessment

## Mitigating Hazards



### 1970's - 2000

- Playgrounds became prolific in the US and standards were first developed.
- Focus on impact-absorbing materials

### Early 1980's

- US Consumer Product Safety Commission Handbook

### Late 1990's

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Standards & Certification Processes
- Move away from metal parts



# Myth Busting Risk Assessment

Manufactured Standards for vs. Behavior

## Protection/Prevention

- Falls
- Entrapment
- Sharp Edges
- Tripping Hazards
- Suspended Hazards
- Entanglement
- Crushing
- Impalement





# Myth Busting Risk Assessment

- Determining likelihood and severity of harm
- Maintain access to challenging play
- Limit exposure to permanent disability





# Myth Busting Risk Assessment

## Opportunities, Benefits and Rewards of the Activity

- Master and overcome fear of challenges
- Learn how bodies move
- Develop motor and navigation skills



Terra Nova Adventure Play Experience, Richmond, BC -Hapa Collaborative

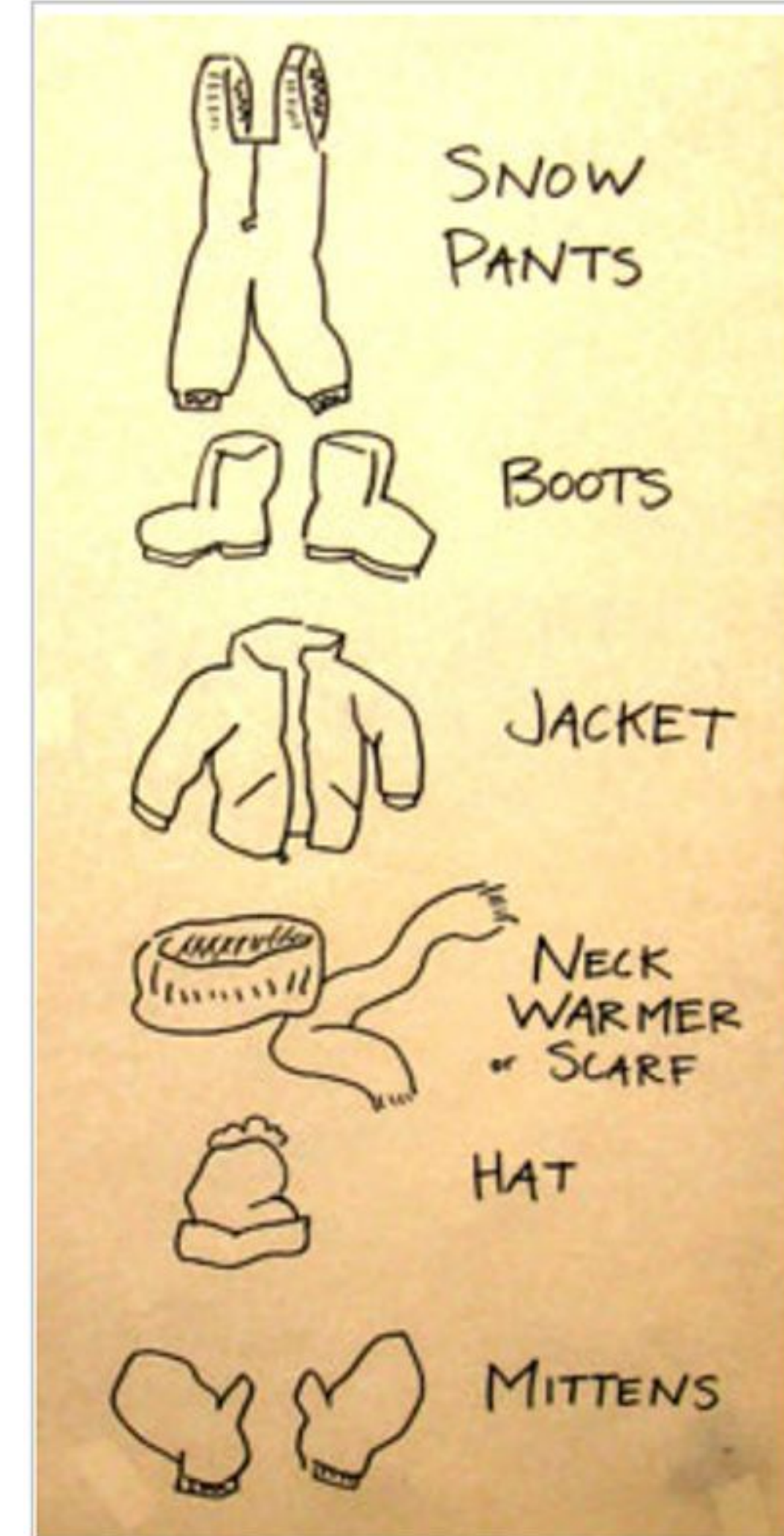


Forest School, Huddleston, VA



# Myth Busting Barriers

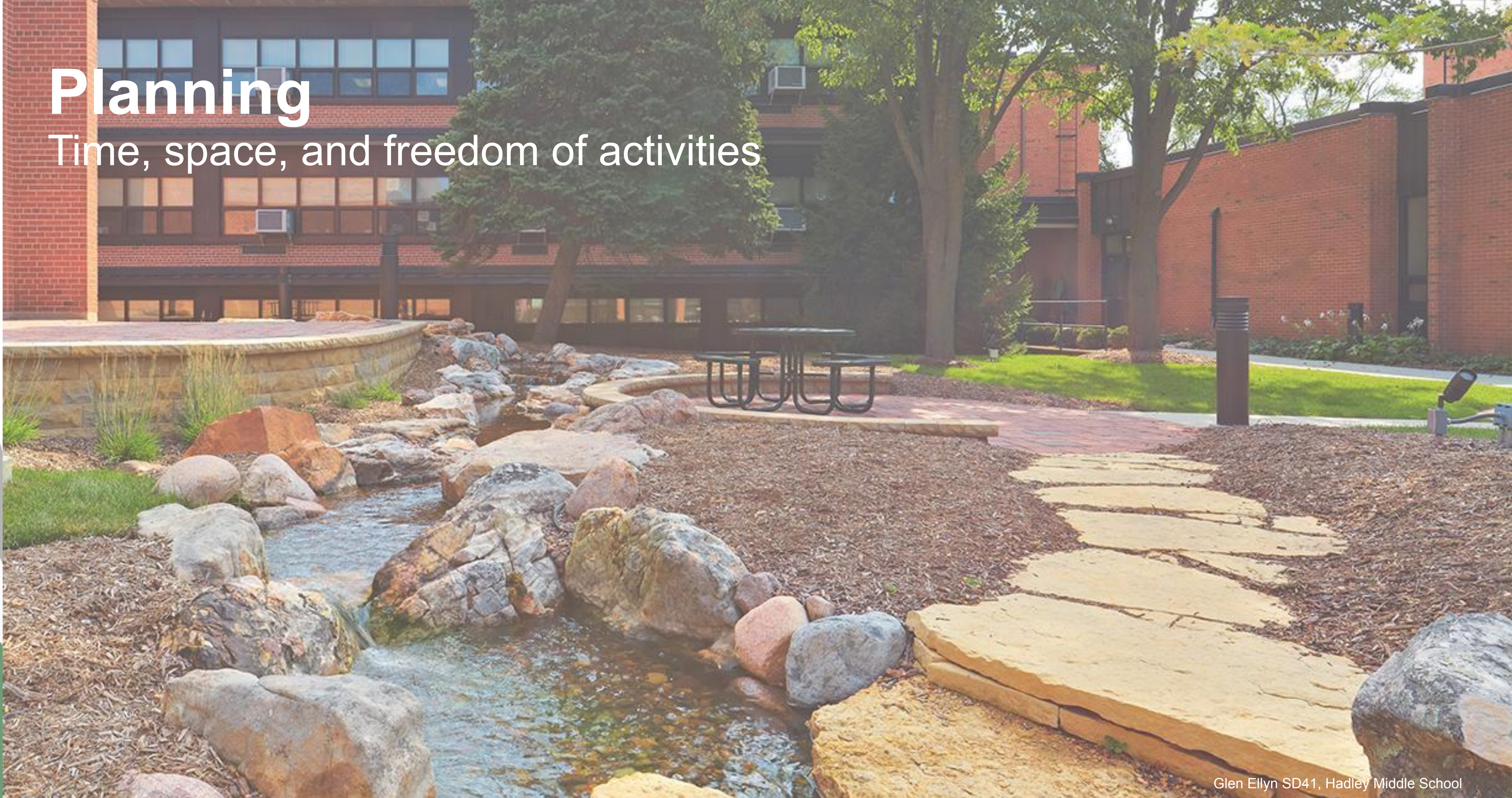
- Fear of Nature
- Managing Students
- Equipment and Training
- Getting Wet/Dirty
- Weather





# Planning

Time, space, and freedom of activities



Glen Ellyn SD41, Hadley Middle School



# Planning: Goals and Metrics

Mariana Brussoni: The Outdoor PLAYbook Value System  
Evaluating the features of your Outdoor Play Area

## Values





# Case Studies

- **Western Springs District 101**
- **River Trails District 26**
- **Chicago Public Schools**



# Case Study: Western Springs District 101

## Starting Small: Taking Advantage of What You Have



- Neighborhood Schools
- Land Locked
- Tight Budget
- Engaged Community





# Case Study: Western Springs District 101

## Starting Small: Taking Advantage of What You Have

- Newly Enclosed Spaces
- Embrace Underutilized Exterior Areas
- Opportunistic Adjacencies
- Two Birds, One Stone





# Case Study: Laidlaw Elementary School

## Inner Courtyard

- Fully Enclosed Courtyard Created by Building Addition
- Need to Retain Natural Light and Views for Classrooms
- Want for Exterior Space





# Case Study: Laidlaw Elementary School

## Inner Courtyard

- Amphitheater Seating & Patio
- Meandering Path with Bench Seating
- Small Garden Plots & Greenhouse
- Low Maintenance Landscaping





# Case Study: McClure Junior High School

## Revitalized Courtyard

- Existing, Underutilized Below Grade Courtyard
- Intended for Exiting and Light to Cafeteria
- Overgrown Landscaping Above
- Harsh & Underdeveloped





# Case Study: McClure Junior High School

## Revitalized Courtyard

- Promote Adjacency to Cafeteria by Creating Inviting Space
  - Curved Stone Benches
  - Grass & Crushed Granite Paths

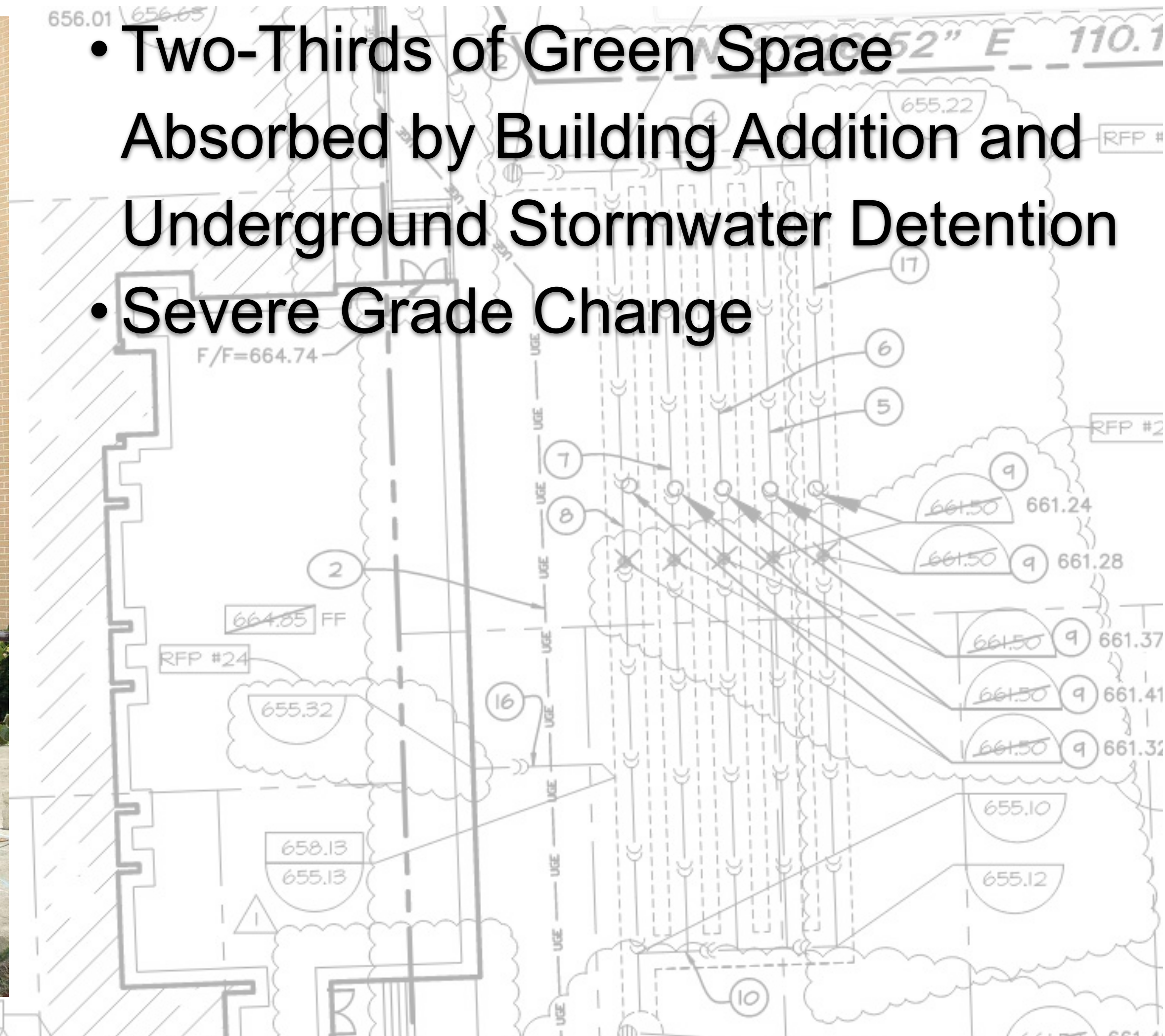




# Case Study: Field Park Elementary School Gardens



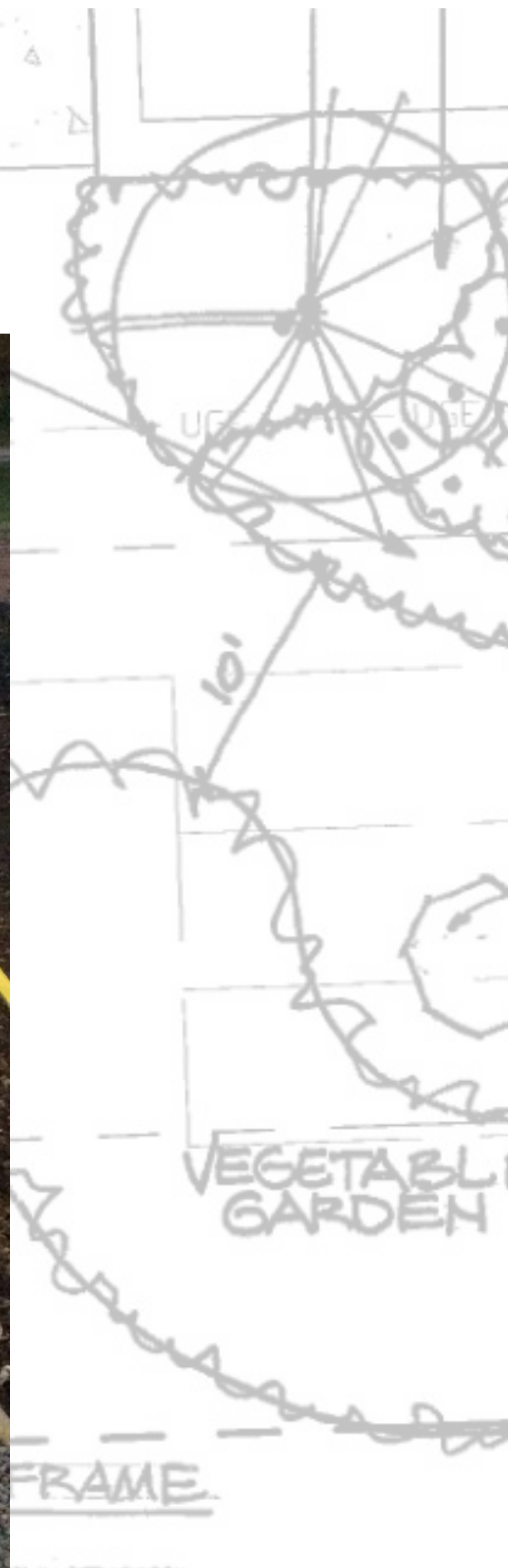
- Two-Thirds of Green Space Absorbed by Building Addition and Underground Stormwater Detention
- Severe Grade Change





# Case Study: Field Park Elementary School Gardens

- Sensory Garden and Pathway with Bench Seating
- Pollinator Garden
- Active Garden Plots & Shed
- Picnic Table Seating

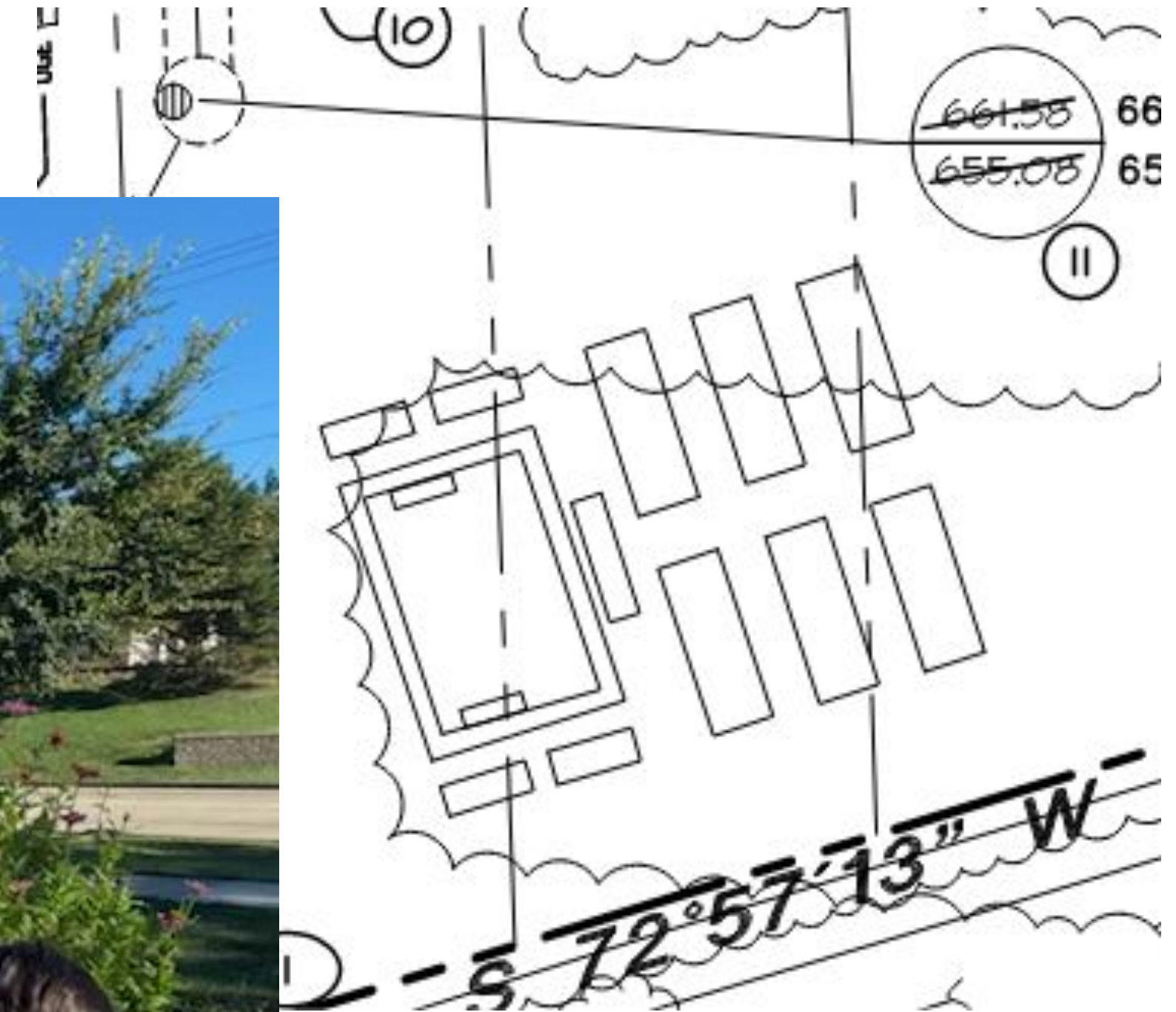




# Case Study: Field Park Elementary School Gardens



Pollinator Garden





# Case Study: Field Park Elementary School Gardens

Garden Plots



2022 ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE



# Case Study: Field Park Elementary School

## Gardens

Garden Plots





# Case Study: Western Springs District 101

## Beta Testing

- Tent Space Outside During Pandemic
  - Continuing Even as Restrictions are Lifted





# Case Study: Prairie Trails ELC Case Study





# Case Study: Prairie Trails ELC





# Case Study: Prairie Trails ELC

## Features

- Manipulative Areas
- Physical Areas
- Nature Area
- Sensory Areas
- Spatial Awareness
- Social Areas and Sit Spots
- Outdoor Classroom
- Green/Landscaped Areas



# Case Study: Prairie Trails ELC Case Study

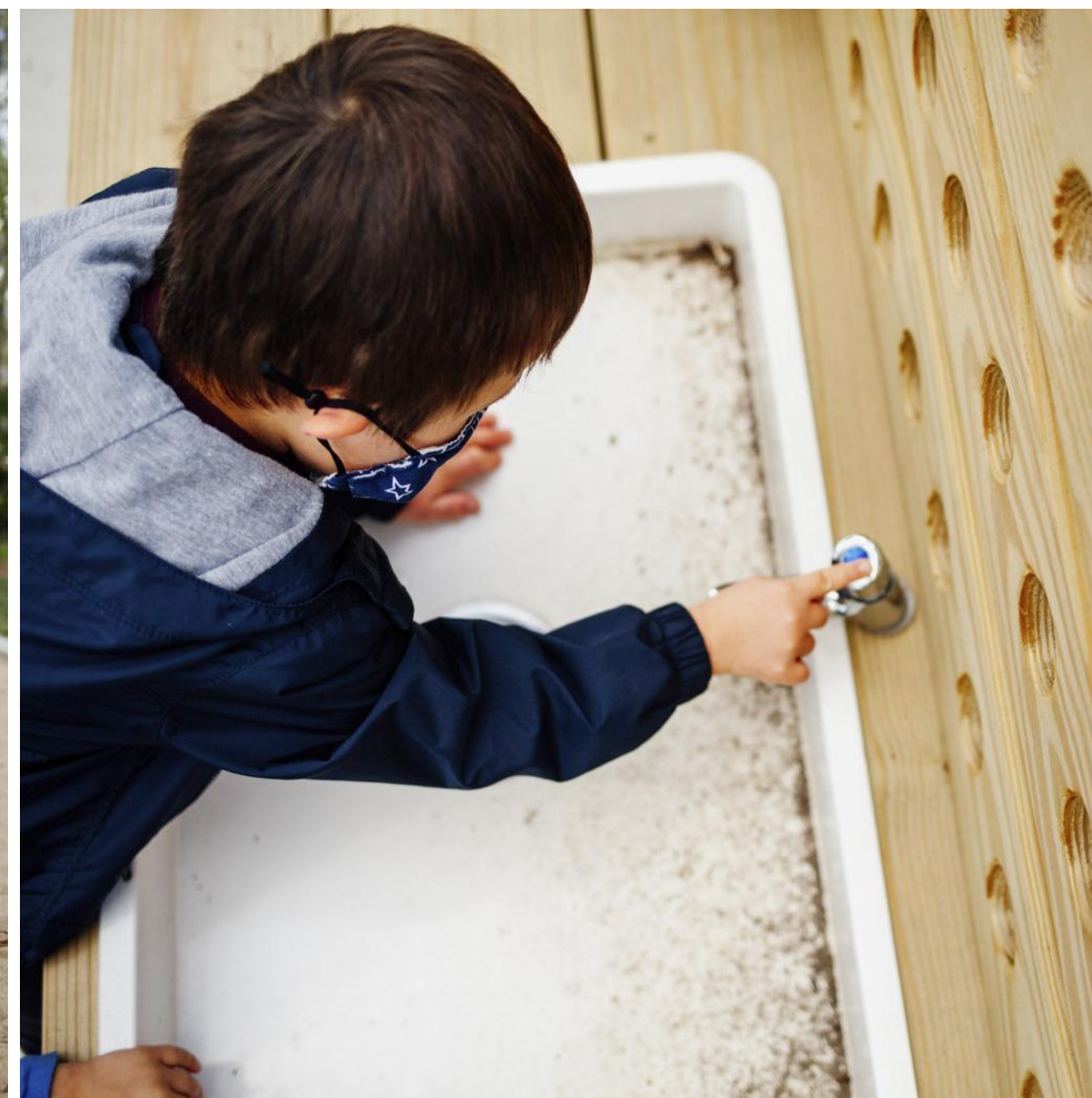
## ● Benefits

- Offers age appropriate challenges
- Encourages creative and exploratory play
- Allows students the opportunity to take risks
- Increases movement



# Case Study: Prairie Trails ELC

## Manipulative Areas





# Case Study: Prairie Trails ELC

## Physical Areas





# Case Study: Prairie Trails ELC

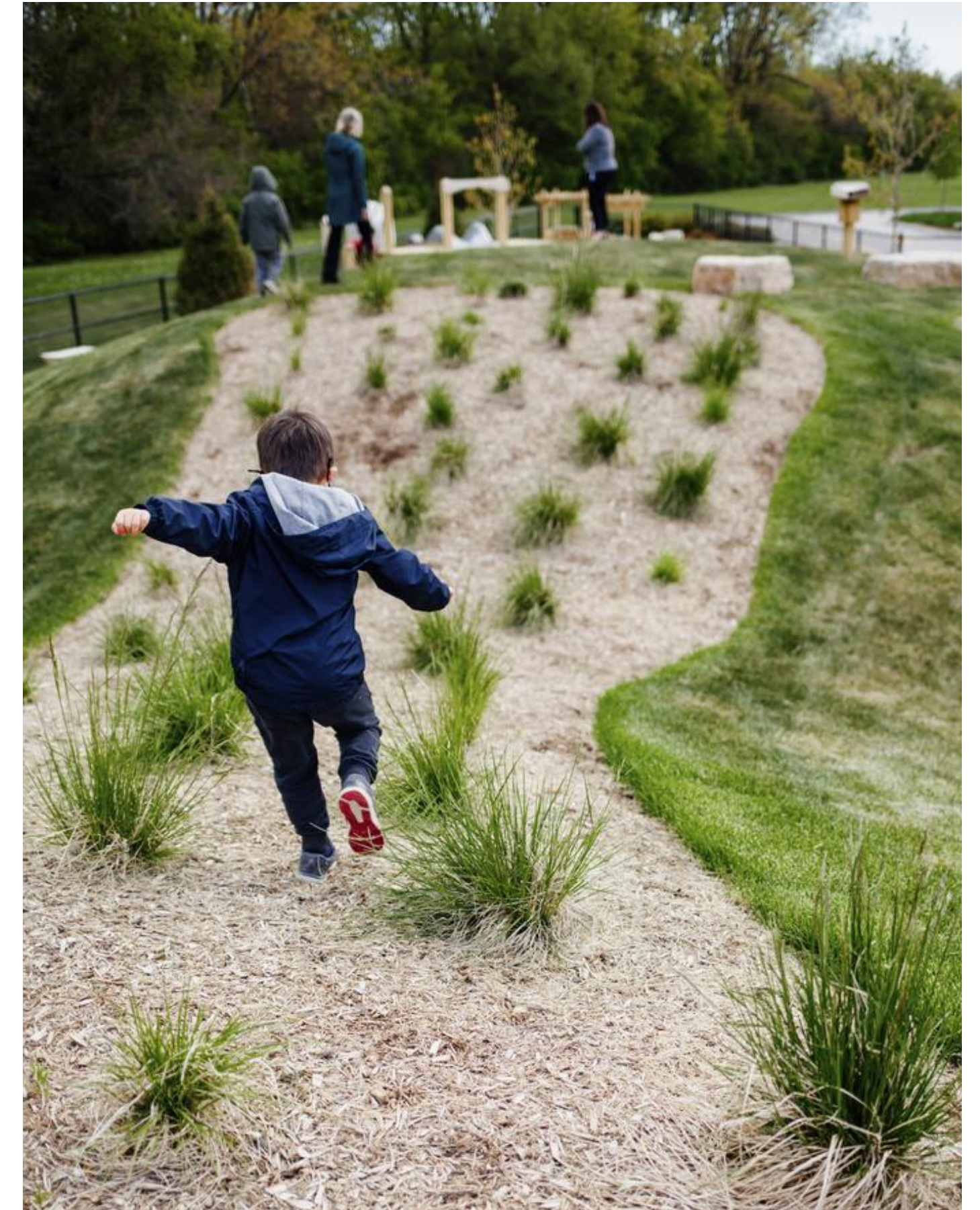
## Nature Area





# Case Study: Prairie Trails ELC

## Nature Area





# Case Study: Prairie Trails ELC

## Spacial Awareness and Wayfinding





# Case Study: Prairie Trails ELC

## Social Areas & Sit Spots





# Case Study: Prairie Trails ELC

## Outdoor Classroom





# Case Study: Prairie Trails ELC Case Study

## Classroom Connections





# Case Study: Chicago Public Schools- Space to Grow





# Case Study: Chicago Public Schools- Space to Grow



Inspiring outdoor space for kids

NEIGHBORHOODS

An investment in neighborhoods

ENVIRONMENT

Flood reduction and water conservation

WHAT IT IS

## TRANSFORMING UNDERUTILIZED SCHOOLYARDS

Space to Grow is a Chicago-based initiative working with many of the city’s low-income communities of color to transform underutilized schoolyards into inspired playgrounds for students and vital outdoor places for the whole neighborhood to get together and reconnect with nature. Our green schoolyards replace expanses of asphalt with landscaping that absorbs rainwater, helping to address neighborhood flooding issues.

WHY IT MATTERS

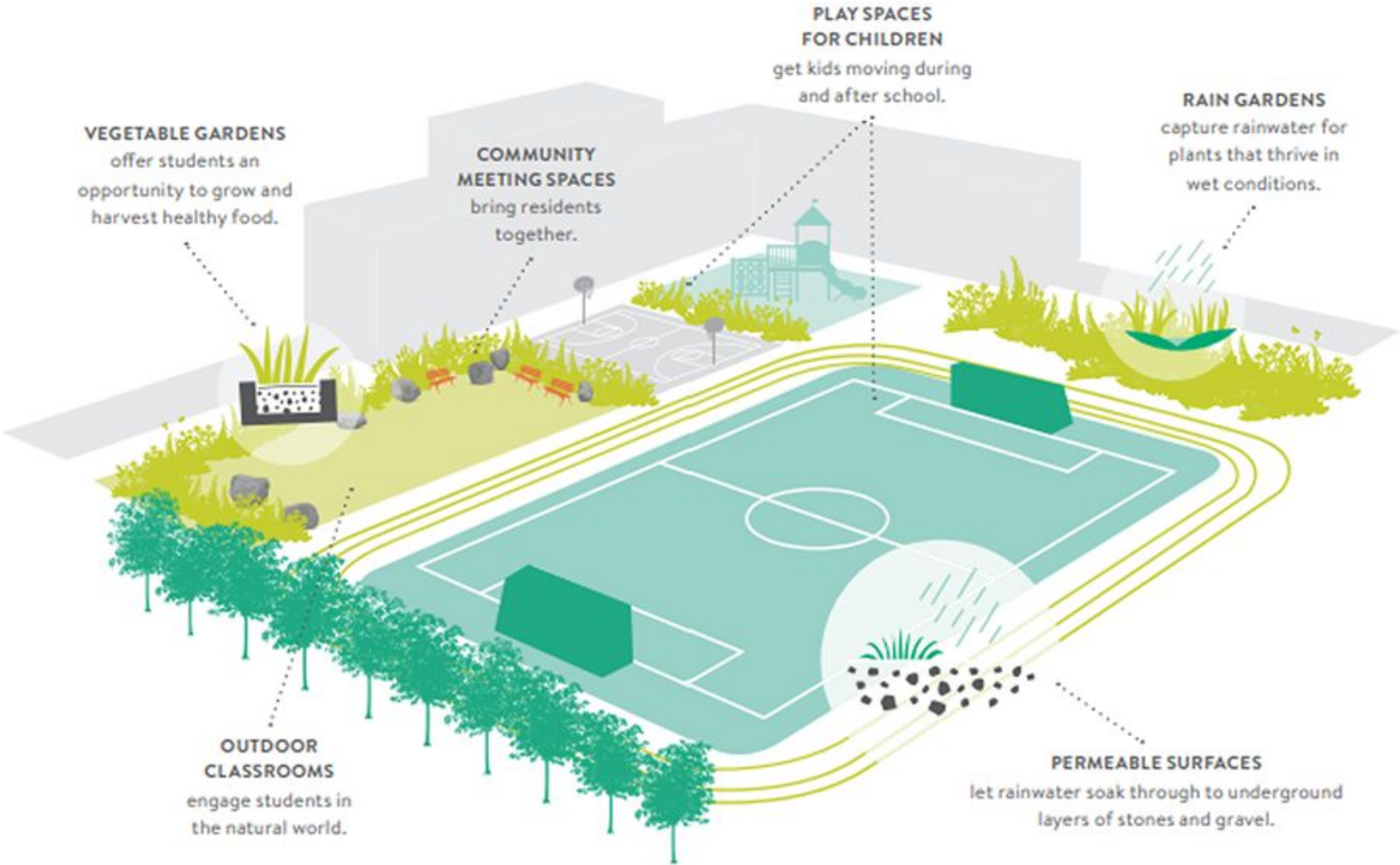
## IMPROVING CHILDREN’S HEALTH & WELLNESS

Green schoolyards provide an opportunity for kids to learn and grow outdoors, and for schools to support student health and physical activity.

WHAT WE DO

## CREATING NEIGHBORHOOD HUBS

We engage the entire school community, including neighborhood residents, to create a schoolyard that meets many needs and serves as a source of neighborhood pride.





# Case Study: Chicago Public Schools- Space to Grow



 #iasboAC22

STRONGER TOGETHER. SMARTER TOGETHER.



# Case Study: Chicago Public Schools- Space to Grow

## Virgil Grissom Elementary

- Students are more active
- Positive Community response





# Case Study: Chicago Public Schools- Space to Grow

## James Wadsworth Elementary





# Case Study: Chicago Public Schools- Space to Grow Community Engagement:

Parents and community members are invited to be part of the planning, planting, workshops, and ongoing events.





# Case Study: Chicago Public Schools- Space to Grow Support Programs & Training

- Creating a Culture of Wellness
- Professional Development
- Garden Planning and Management
- School Yard Best Practices
- Stormwater Education





# Top 10 Reasons

## To have an Outdoor Classroom in Every School Yard



### International School Ground Alliance – Kirk Meyer

1. Learning through direct experience
2. Embrace process as well as outcomes
3. Multi-sensory experience
4. Emphasizes the interconnectedness of things
5. Inter-disciplinary studies
6. Recognizes different learning styles
7. Connects school to neighborhood & world
8. Design & installation is a modest expense
9. Projects a positive message about public education
10. Blurs boundaries between academic learning and creative play





# Resources

Play Safety Forum, Managing Risk in Play Provision, Implementation Guide [untitled \(ioe.ac.uk\)](#)

Juli Ordower Landscape [PLAY | juliordower](#)

National Children's Bureau: Play England Position Paper:  
<http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/managing-risk-in-play-provision-implementation-guide.aspx>

Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA). Children's Unstructured Play Position Statement. March 2019. Available at <https://www.cpha.ca/childrens-unstructured-play>.

Simon Fraser University Childcare, Burnaby BC (space2place design inc.) <http://www.space2place.ca/sfu-childcare/>

International Play Equipment Manufacturers Association <https://ipema.org>

Risky Play and Children's Safety: Balancing Priorities for Optimal Child Development, Brussoni, Olisen, Pike, Sleet.

Terra Nova Adventure Play Experience, Richmond, BC -Hapa Collaborative [Terra Nova Adventure Play Environment - Hapa Collaborative \(hapacobo.com\)](#)

The Forest School, [A Virginia Forest School stays open through coronavirus - The Washington Post](#)

*A Review of Research on Outdoor Learning* by Rickinson, M., Dillon, J. Teamery, K. Morris, M., Choi, M., Sanders, D. & Benefield, P.

*Outdoor learning for children aged 2-11: perceived barriers, potential solutions* by Sue Waite [Losing our way preprint.pdf \(plymouth.ac.uk\)](#)

Project Learning Tree <https://www.plt.org/>

Gray, P. The decline of play and the rise of psychopathology in children and adolescents. *Am. J. Play* **2011**, 3, 443–463. [[Google Scholar](#)]

Wyver; Carson & Predy; Gill, (2019) Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development

Glen Ellyn SD41, Hadley Middle School, FGMA

*Being and Becoming in Nature" Defining and Measuring Connection to Nature in Young Children, International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education. T. Beery, L. Chawla, P. Levin (2020)*

*A Review of Research on Outdoor Learning* by Rickinson, M., Dillon, J. Teamery, K. Morris, M., Choi, M., Sanders, D. & Benefield, P. (PDF) [A Review of Research on Outdoor Learning | Dawn L Sanders - Academia.edu](#)

*Nature and the Outdoor Learning Environment: The Forgotten Resource in Early Childhood Education, , International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental, A. Cooper National Wildlife Federation (2015)*

Jeavons Landscape Architects, Melbourne Zoo [Jeavons Landscape Architects - Thoughtful, Playful, Engaging](#)

The Edible Schoolyard Project [The Edible Schoolyard Project |](#)

Reflo Sustainable Water Solutions [Reflo \(refloh2o.com\)](#)

Mariana Brussoni: The Outdoor PLAYbook Value System [Play Elements - Outdoor PLAYbook](#)

River Trails School District 26, Prairie Trails School

Natural Playgrounds [www.naturalplaygrounds.com](http://www.naturalplaygrounds.com)

Gross Motor Skill Development and Delays in Childhood, A. Logsdon, J Forman, MD Verywell Family (2019)

Moving from Biophobia to Biophilia: Developmentally Appropriate Environmental Education for Children, R. White (2001)

Space To Grow <https://www.plt.org/>

Open Lands <https://openlands.org/>

Children & Nature Network <https://www.childrenandnature.org/>

Green Schoolyards America <https://www.greenschoolyards.org/>

International School Grounds Alliance <https://www.greenschoolyards.org/>

Real Play Coalition <https://www.realplaycoalition.com/>

[Wisconsin Standards for Environmental Literacy and Sustainability | Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#)



STRONGER TOGETHER. SMARTER TOGETHER.