

eeGuidance for Reopening Schools

Examples from the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education

Extending and Expanding Learning Spaces into the Community

Examples:

One class develops a relationship with a local nature center and a small group of students meets there, instead of school during in-person learning. Students gather with their teacher at the nature center to overview the day. They spend the morning completing design challenges in science and math using the outdoor space where risk of COVID-19 transmission is lower. After a period of exploration and study, the class may spread out in some shade to journal or to listen to a read aloud. Students work on their reading, writing, and communicating skills through group and individual work outdoors. The Nature Center's indoor space is used for inclement weather or for tasks requiring computer and/or internet access. This same idea could apply to a residency at the city park or town center, town forest, recreation center, a river site, pond, historic site, outdoor athletic facilities, or nearby farm.

Using the School Grounds for Learning

Examples:

One school partners with a local environmental education provider to help inventory their school grounds for learning spaces that can be used outdoors. They work with a local party supplier to provide tents for spaces on the school grounds that lack shade. Students spend up to half of the day utilizing outdoor learning spaces. One tent has desks placed outside that can be used for work that is normally done outdoors. Shady areas are equipped with hula hoops and small carpet squares to help students remain socially distanced when completing reading or writing activities spread out under trees. A school garden onsite is used for science and math exploration to engage students in building observation and analysis skills. Teachers are paired with environmental learning professional mentors who can provide support and answer questions about designing lessons that can be done outdoors where risk of transmission is lower.

Supporting Teaching & Learning

Examples:

One district works with a local environmental and outdoor learning provider to visit schools once a week to provide learning experiences outdoors on the school grounds. The time students spend with the environmental and outdoor learning provider gives teachers a chance to have planning periods or break for lunch. The local environmental and outdoor learning provider also develops one science and math lesson per week/grade that is intended to utilize outdoor instruction. The lessons address standards and support teachers in developing new ways to use outdoor school green spaces, whether they consist of athletic fields, a garden, or a few scattered trees.

Creating Healthier Learning Environments

Examples:

One class engages students in conducting an indoor air-quality audit of their school. Students investigate current indoor air quality and create an action plan to improve their indoor air-quality to improve the overall health and safety of their school. Another class spends time each day outdoors to engage in physical activity and to support the mental health of their students. Students participate in all Physical Education classes outdoors and regularly take a 10-minute walk to a local park to broaden their opportunities for exploration.

Virtual Teaching and Learning

Examples:

One school works with a local environmental education provider to provide a virtual field trip for each class of students meeting in person. After introducing concepts, the EE provider provides a weekly design challenge for students to do in their school yard or in outdoor spaces near their home to practice science and engineering skills. The challenge is introduced via a short synchronous learning session, or via a recorded video. Students upload evidence from their exploration and environmental educators provide feedback. Teachers at another school access an online database of virtual programming to assign outdoor and environmental learning activities to their students while they are learning at home. Another school engages scientists and speakers to provide monthly synchronous programs and opportunities for students to interact with experts.

Supporting At-Home Learning

Examples:

One district, who is utilizing remote learning, partners with a local environmental and outdoor educator to provide childcare and remote learning support to their students needing the most support. Students meet in neighborhood-based locations in small groups. Environmental and outdoor educators support students in completing their remote learning, ensure students check-in to synchronous meetings with their teachers and spend at least two hours each day exploring outdoors.