

Living Schoolyards for Oakland



*Students in a gardening class show their fruits and vegetables, Markham Elementary, Oakland CA
Photo cred: Paloma Collier*

The Trust for Public Land, Green Schoolyards America and the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) are implementing a living schoolyards program in Oakland that will transform asphalt-covered schoolyards serving disadvantaged communities into green spaces that will provide access to nature, improve health and learning, and benefit the schools and their surrounding communities.

The living schoolyards program will serve as a national model to help fulfill The Trust for Public Land's goal of ensuring that everyone has access to a park or natural area within a ten-minute walk of their home, as well as the partnership's vision of providing every child within OUSD access to nature every day.

Why living schoolyards? The need for green or "living" schoolyards is clear: schools serve as community hubs. One in five Californians visit public schools daily, but many schools are primarily paved and lack natural areas, trees, and shade. OUSD has 122 schools on 505 urban acres, presenting a great opportunity to provide communities access to nature. However, OUSD schoolyards are often bleak and covered in asphalt with very few trees or plants. Imagine how Oakland could benefit from more opportunities for children and communities to learn and thrive in healthy environments!

What are living schoolyards? Living schoolyards are rich outdoor environments that strengthen local ecological systems, provide hands-on learning resources, and foster a wide range of play and social opportunities while enhancing health and well-being. These re-imagined schoolyards are open for community use outside of school hours and include trees, gardens, and spaces designed by and for the students and the surrounding community. (adapted from Green Schoolyards America)

Multiple benefits of living schoolyards: Living schoolyards provide many benefits for students and the community.

- **Environmental benefits** such as reduced urban heat island effect, increased wildlife habitat, and improved stormwater management.
- **Learning benefits** such as environmental literacy, increased attention span, and academic performance.
- **Health and wellness benefits** such as increased physical activity, decreased asthma, social-emotional wellness, mental health, and healthy eating habits.
- **Community benefits** such as family engagement, community cohesion, and increased stewardship.

What we have accomplished: This program builds on The Trust for Public Land's successful living schoolyard programs in New York City and Philadelphia, and Green Schoolyards America's fifteen-year history of working in Bay Area school districts to transform 'asphalt to ecosystems.'

For the past year, The Trust for Public Land, Green Schoolyards America, and OUSD have been working to develop a partnership agreement, build a collective vision, and secure initial funding for pilot projects at five OUSD schools. We have engaged OUSD departments including Facilities, Buildings and Grounds, Health and Wellness, the School District Board of Directors, the Superintendent's office and other non-profit partners in a process spearheaded by Director Jody London to develop a Board of Education policy on living schoolyards. We have also been working with each of the schools and their communities to develop master plans and visions for their future living schoolyards.



*Students design with a model of their school
ICS/TCN, Oakland CA*

What is next: Our partnership has successfully laid the groundwork for the launch of a large-scale program. In order to transform these efforts into a full-fledged and thriving program, we will accomplish the following goals over the next three years:

- **Build pilot projects.** Complete construction and develop stewardship plans for five pilot living schoolyards through a deep community engagement process.
- **Support Joint Use.** Advance the 10-minute walk goal by helping develop a comprehensive joint use agreement between OUSD and the City of Oakland.
- **Develop policy and guidelines.** Assist the District in developing policy, guidelines, and staffing structures and professional development to support successful implementation, operations, and management of living schoolyards.
- **Professional development.** Assist the District by providing professional development to support successful implementation, operations, and management of living schoolyards.
- **Develop sustainable funding.** Ensure that the next OUSD Facilities bond measure includes substantial funding for living schoolyards, and develop coalitions to help pass the measure in 2020.
- **Share a scalable national model.** Develop practices and resources to help implement a living schoolyards programs across California and nationally.



*A student looks at classmates' visions for schoolyards
Markham Elementary, Oakland CA*

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Living Schoolyards for Oakland: Pilot Schools



OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Community Schools, Thriving Students

THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

The Trust for Public Land has secured initial funding to design and implement pilot projects at five Oakland public schools: Melrose Leadership Academy, International Community School / Think College Now (ICS-TCN), Markham Elementary, Ralph J. Bunche Academy, and Emiliano Zapato Street Academy. To select the schools, The Trust for Public Land mapped campuses across the district using GIS technology and data, and took into account site conditions, need and readiness, the demographics of the school community and neighborhood, and the commitment and ability of each school to implement and maintain improvements. The Trust for Public Land and Green Schoolyards America, in partnership with OUSD and local non-profits The Watershed Project and Growing Together, are leading a participatory process to engage students, teachers, and school community members in designing living schoolyards for the five pilot schools. From this process, we will develop construction documents and implement the initial improvements with secured grant funding from the California Coastal Conservancy, Kaiser Permanente Northern California, and the Hellman Foundation.

Melrose Leadership Academy is an elementary school with a dual Spanish/English immersion program serving 495 students. The schoolyard is mostly asphalt. The community's vision for their living schoolyard includes gardens, fruit trees, outdoor classrooms, vegetated swales, a nature play area, and a significant number of shade trees. We expect to build the first phase of improvements by the end of 2018.



Existing



Proposed

Markham Elementary School serves a diverse population of 350 students. The schoolyard is currently 97% asphalt with almost no vegetation. The community's vision for their living schoolyard includes an expanded garden, an orchard with fruit trees, a grass field, outdoor classrooms, seating areas and shade trees. We expect to build the first phase of improvements by 2019.



Existing



Proposed

International College School & Think College Now (ICS-TCN) are two elementary schools that share a campus. Together the schools serve a diverse population of 628 students. The campus is next to a freeway and has no vegetation to help buffer its impact on air quality. The community's vision for their Living Schoolyard includes a garden and orchard, vegetated swales, an outdoor classroom, play areas and a significant number of shade trees. We expect to build the first phase of improvements by 2019.



Existing



Proposed

Emiliano Zapato Street Academy is a small and diverse high school with 83 students. We anticipate starting the participatory design process to develop the vision in 2018 and building the first phase of improvements by 2020.



Existing

Ralph J. Bunche Academy serves a diverse student population of 201 students in West Oakland and provides alternative education programs. We anticipate starting the participatory design process to develop the vision in 2018 and building the first phase of improvements by 2020.



Existing

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