



CALIFORNIA Schoolyard Forest SystemSM

California Schoolyard Forest SystemSM Launch Webinar
October 4, 2022
Transcript

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Speakers and Guests:

Sharon Danks

Chief Executive Officer
Green Schoolyards America

Alejandra Chiesa

California State Director
Green Schoolyards America

Andra Yeghoian

Chief Innovation Officer

Ten Strands

Juan Mireles

Director, School Facilities and
Transportation Services Division
California Department of Education
(CDE)

Lesley Taylor

Education Administrator, Facilities
Planning Policy and Standards
California Department of Education

(CDE)

Julia Gowin, PhD

Urban Forestry Supervisor,
Northern Region
California Department of Forestry and
Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

Walter Passmore

State Urban Forester
California Department of Forestry and
Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

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Webinar Transcript

00:00 - 02:42 **Welcome and Introduction - Sharon Danks**

Sharon Danks:

Hello, everyone thank you so much for joining us today. We're excited to be introducing the new California Schoolyard Forest SystemSM to you in this webinar. My name is Sharon Danks and I'm the founder and Executive Director of Green Schoolyards America, a national nonprofit organization based in Berkeley, California.

Green Schoolyards America partners with school districts and public agencies across the United States to establish large-scale living schoolyard initiatives that transform school grounds into ecologically rich park-like greenspaces. Our goal is to improve childrens' health, learning, and happiness while contributing to communities' ecological and climate resilience. I'm honored to be speaking today alongside colleagues from the California Department of Education, CAL FIRE, and Ten Strands, who are all founding partners of the California Schoolyard Forest System.

Today, we have a lineup of speakers from all the founding partner organizations and they're listed here in the order that we'll be presenting. My name is Sharon Danks. My colleague, Alejandra Chiesa, our California State Director for Green Schoolyards America, will be speaking next, followed by Juan Mireles, the Director of School Facilities and Transportation Services Division at the California Department of Education; Lesley Taylor, Education Administrator for the Facilities Planning Policy Standards at the California Department of Education; Andra Yeghoian, the Chief Innovation Officer at Ten Strands; Walter Passmore, State Urban Forester for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection; and Julia Gowin Urban Forestry Supervisor, Northern region for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

In our webinar today, we're going to be introducing the California Schoolyard Forest System overall, and talk about the rationale for doing this work. We'll also talk about what we're working on as we begin the initiative. Then you'll hear from each of our co-founding organizations about their perspectives and the interdisciplinary collaboration that this initiative has.

We will hear from CAL FIRE about their state grants that support school year greening. We'll have some time for questions at the end as well.

In today's webinar, please use the Q&A function if you have questions that you'd like to ask. We are recording the session today, and we'll post that afterward. If you'd like to use subtitles, please use the live transcript section on the bottom of the Zoom meeting.

And so, as I mentioned, our partners are the California Department of Education, CAL FIRE, Ten Strands and Green Schoolyards America who are launching this initiative together.

Sharon Danks:

And what is the California Schoolyard Forest System?

This is a new statewide initiative to increase the tree canopy on public school grounds across California to directly shade and protect PreK-12 students from extreme heat and rising temperatures due to climate change.

Our goal is to plant enough trees by 2030 that when mature will cover at least 30% of each school property in the areas used by preK-12 children and youth during the school day. I know that's an ambitious goal that we're aiming high to protect kids from from the sun.

We also seek to center equity by prioritizing schools and districts in underserved communities with the highest poverty levels, fewest trees, and highest current and expected climates and temperatures.

We are aiming to use school grounds as PreK-12 learning laboratories across the curriculum and grade level, so that the schoolyards forests that are created will be very useful to the schools. And overall, we hope to build environmental and climate literacy by engaging students and standards-based hands-on research in design, planting, and stewardship of their schoolyard forest. This is a forest system we hope will be in part created by and for students.

So what are schoolyard forests, exactly?

In our minds, they are climate oases on school campuses that are designed to nurture and protect children from extreme heat.

And the key features of these systems are:

- They are a forest at a schoolyard - a group of trees planted in large groves - so that students and their classmates can take shelter when the weather is really hot and [the forests] are big enough to get inside.
- They are planted with climate adapted tree planting pallets, with high biodiversity, and lots of large tree species, so that they'll provide shade and be resilient to changes in the weather to come.
- They will be designed to encourage student access to shade during outdoor learning, physical activities, social gathering and play. They're placed in the parts of the school grounds that students use during the school day. This is an adaptable model that we're developing that we intend to make it feasible for schools of any size to be able to try this and to create a forest that's right for your location and for your size of grounds, and for any age group as well.

I know you might have heard about green schoolyards and living schoolyards. I wanted to explain that those are umbrella terms that cover the wider goal of greening school grounds to create a park-like environment at a school, and schoolyard forests fit within that wider umbrella as a component of what a school can put into their green schoolyard or living schoolyard.

Living schoolyards are richly layered park-like environments that strengthen local ecological systems and climate resilience while providing place-based, hands-on learning resources for children and youth of all ages.

Schoolyard forests will reflect their context because there's such different trees all over the state, and different climates, different topography, different campus size and urban, rural, suburban locations. All the different tree arrangements of these forests will look different in each place. We also are designing a system that will help schools to reflect the local culture and history and take into account the children's ages and the educational philosophy of the individual schools.

So why do we need schoolyard forests?

Across California, we have 5.9 million K-12 students who are attending public schools on almost 130,000 acres, and many of our schools look like this. This is a model developed in the 1940s originally for education. It's all across the United States. We have a lot of pavement here in California on our school grounds and the pavement doesn't provide what kids could have to improve their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their communities and the environment.

The climate crisis itself is also impacting childrens' health and well-being. Schools across California and around the world need to think about how to adapt the grounds to respond to climate change and protect vulnerable kids and youth from extreme heat.

We've done some temperature measurements with the camera here. You can see that when you choose different materials in a schoolyard landscape, add heat or different amounts of heat . . . I should say: when it's sunny outside.

What you're looking at here on the left is a regular photograph of a school on an 81 degree day, and on the right is the same school taken with an infrared camera, and the white is the hottest area, red is second, yellow, green, blue are less.

In this picture you can see on the 82 degree day, the live grass is nearly the same temperature as the air. The asphalt or concrete there is 107 and the tire rubber is 132. Material choices change the microclimate of the school grounds and shade can also decrease those temperatures. The materials themselves make a difference. We've been measuring surface temperatures, too, with these types of devices over the last few years to see how these choices in different building materials impacts microclimates and contributes to urban heat island effects as well.

Kids who are smaller stand closer to the radiating surfaces on the playground. It's important to think about what it feels like at 3 feet off of those materials to have heat coming up from the ground.

We are working on an activity that will be offered later this fall on our website for free. It is an activity for students to go and measure surface temperatures in [their] schoolyard to find out where it's hot and where we need to shade the grounds. This is an area of climate education and urban heat island education that we think is very empowering and hopeful because school grounds are on a scale that kids can change. They can find the source of the problem where it's hottest and try to shade that place.

We've also been doing some research using GIS systems in collaboration with Green Info Network on tree canopy overall across the state to find out what the baseline is. Across the state, the average across all campuses is 9%

tree canopy. However, there are more than 2 million students who attend schools that have less than 5% tree canopy and a total of 4.2 million students who are attending schools that have less than 10% tree canopy coverage across their property.

That's a really significant number of students and percentage of students across California. When you also think about the fact that the trees that we're counting there . . . a lot of them are on the property but they're in the front of the school for the curb appeal rather than over the heads of the children in the part of the yard they use every day. The Schoolyard Forest System is aiming to fix this problem and put trees where the children are on the playground.

It's also essential to look at equity in these issues. Most schools could use more trees, but the lack of shade is particularly urgent in places that currently have the fewest trees, the hottest present and future climates, and are in underserved communities.

Schoolyard Forests can act as ecological buffers. We can add trees and shrubs to provide shade where kids will use it. Trees can also shade the school buildings to reduce the sun exposure and heat inside the building and in the adjacent areas.

Next, this is part of a wider trend to look at green infrastructure. How do we design schools that are child friendly green infrastructure? They can support local ecological systems and strengthen wildlife corridors and allow the infiltration of stormwater, cool down the area, improve air quality - while also being places kids can access and use.

You can improve the stormwater management on the site by taking out pavement and putting in schoolyard forests. You can also think about what types of wildlife visit the sites or come to your city to plant things across a school district that will help species in your region like butterflies or birds.

Schoolyard forests and green schoolyards are great places for outdoor learning. They support the curriculum across the grade levels and subject areas right outside the school door. They provide a real world context that helps improve understanding and enjoyment and enhances ecological and climate literacy.

Access to trees also improves mental health, as does interactions with peers in class and positive ways outdoors. Fundamentally, green schoolyard and schoolyard forests are places that center children and youth. We seek to [center] happiness as one of the outcomes of this work.

Overall, what we're aiming at here is a paradigm shift really. It's a shift from the 1940s style landscapes that a lot of our schools across the United States have - with pavement and lawn - into schoolyard forests and living schoolyards.

The California Schoolyard Forest System is seeking to do that as a system to efficiently and effectively help school districts across the state try this. And so, the California Schoolyard Forest System was founded for the purpose of supporting this transition and helping schools and districts prepare their grounds to shade and protect students now and for generations to come.

Now I'd like to introduce my colleague Alejandra Chiesa, who is Green Schoolyards America's California State Director.

Alejandra Chiesa:

Thank you, Sharon. Hi, everyone. As Sharon said, changing the system will take time and in order to address schoolyard tree canopy equity and bring schoolyard forests to scale, we're taking the following approach:

- We're using data and research to determine the need. Sharon shared some of our recent findings in terms of tree canopy cover.
- We're also working to identify barriers and solutions at all levels.
- We're building consensus at state and local levels to align policy, funding, and support. We're also providing technical assistance on creating and managing schoolyard forests.

In terms of activities that we are undertaking this and next year - this includes:

- Mapping tree canopy equity. We are creating a schoolyard tree canopy equity GIS system with data from every school across the state. This system will be useful to track progress and inform future policy priorities.
- We are researching barriers and solutions by conducting interviews, surveys, and policy research and looking at other program documents. After that, we will provide recommendations.
- We're developing an online library. I'm going to talk a little bit more in a couple slides about what this library will contain, but the goal of this library will be to provide resources to support schoolyard forests.
- We're also working to increase demand. We are elevating and disseminating resources that will inspire local visions and actions to implement schoolyard forests. One of those activities we're gonna have shortly starting in November is a community of practice. It's going to be a monthly community of practice to share best practices and experience.
- We're also implementing 2 to 3 pilot projects and we're going to build and evaluate them. This will be very useful to test approaches. We're continuing to look at what else is needed to take this change to scale. In terms of research into barriers and solutions, today we have conducted interviews and surveys with school districts, county offices of education, tree planting organizations, design professionals, and arborists. We also have reviewed and analyzed some key policy and program documents from different [state] agencies.

Here's a preliminary summary of what we have learned.

Real barriers do exist at all levels and identifying them is the key to start finding solutions. I also want to say that there are many success stories across the state that can teach us a lot on how to overcome these barriers and that we also have seen a change in attitudes over the last couple years that has led to this watershed moment of investment at the state level. Walter Passmore will talk more about that.

I just wanted to preface the discussion about barriers with something positive because there are a lot of positive things.

Back to the barriers again. This is a preliminary summary.

- There's risk and liability concerns and many of these are related to selecting the wrong trees, planting them incorrectly, and not maintaining them. But these are real risks and liabilities that need to be taken into account.
- There's also funding barriers. People have cited lack of dedicated long-term funding for maintenance and some grant restrictions and requirements that don't cover the whole gamut of costs that these projects include.

- There's also state level barriers. There's many different competing requirements for school districts. The permit process adds costs for required ADA upgrades and [there are] some barriers about interpretation of P.E. requirements.
- There's also side constraints. Lots of the schools are old and have a lot of different maintenance issues, and in addition, there's a lot of asphalt that needs to be removed and that costs a lot.
- Access to irrigation. Some underground utilities - unknown [location of the underground] utilities. So there's basically a lot of existing site constraints that should be looked at in advance during the master planning process.
- There's also institutional and administrative barriers. The presence of silos and lack of communication between departments and between districts and school sites.
- Also, there's a lot of staff capacity limitations. People are wearing many different hats, and you cannot add one more thing to their plates. Staff turnover, competing priorities etc.
- There's also still mindset and perceptions, and I mentioned that those are changing. But there's still this idea that trees are the icing on the cake and not essential. When something needs to get cut, that's what gets cut. We need to work on changing that.

As I mentioned, one of the things we're working on right now—and it will be available at the end of this year and beginning of next year — is online resources.

We're going to have an online library with:

- Case making toolkits. What is the need for schoolyard forests and the benefits? What is a schoolyard forest? We'll also have links to available funding.
- Design and implementation guides. Also, planning and design guides with regional planting pallets developed by expert arborists. We're going to have case studies of success stories across the state, including best practices for maintenance
- And also resources for teachers on how to engage students in design, planting, and stewardship for their schoolyard forests and some additional curriculum resources.

So now, I'm going to hand it over to our colleagues, Juan Mireles and Lesley Taylor, with the California Department of Education.

20:20 - 27:35 **Transforming Schoolyards to Support the Whole Child** - Juan Mireles and Lesley Taylor

Juan Mireles:

Thank you, Alejandra. My name again is Juan Mireles and I'm the director of the school facilities and transportation services division at the California Department of Education. With me today is Lesley Taylor, who leads our policy team. We're very excited to be here on behalf of our State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Mr. Tony Thurman, and CDE as a founding partner in the California Schoolyard Forest System.

For our part today, we'll talk about the leveraged opportunity for school forests to provide engaging, healing, helpful, and inspiring learning environments that advance equity for students and communities

Green schoolyards and forests have an inherently transformative ability to equitably provide a place that meets the needs of the whole child to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. Mature forests not only clean the air that students breathe but also provide shade from the sun's harmful rays. They keep temperatures cooler and offer a setting for creative children, directed play, and project-based learning. Research from Bell and Dymont finds that, compared to conventional school grounds, green school grounds offer up a wider variety of student interests and support a wider variety of play - opportunities that promote more vigorous, moderate, and light physical activity. Trees, shrubs, rocks, and logs define a variety of places to run, climb, hide, and socialize. Moveable and natural materials, such as sticks, branches, leaves, and stones, provide endless opportunities to engage in imaginative play. Schoolyard forests also support children's health, including their social, emotional and mental well-being. They're an optimal setting for restorative justice practices and offer a sense of refuge.

When students learn in green buildings, schoolyards, and forests, they not only receive myriad health benefits, but they also reap the educational benefits our planet so desperately needs. Sustainability and environmental literacy have become must-teach concepts in our schools and schoolyard forests are an ideal setting for both.

During the pandemic, outdoor learning environments offered an alternative to indoor instruction that mostly relies on mechanical ventilation and they created new opportunities for physical distancing. This is when many people first learned about the importance of outdoor learning environments. But learning outdoors has always been an option that can help students relate to what they're learning. Forest and school gardens provide ample opportunities for data gathering, design, journaling, and sketching. Schoolyard forest also protects students from the impacts of climate change.

The historic heat wave last month here in California illustrates this. California's best climate science projects that every corner of the state will be impacted in years and decades have come by higher average temperatures and more frequent and severe heat waves. These changes will pose risks to every region and sector across natural, built, and social systems.

We need to have climate mitigation and adaptation strategies specific to the unique opportunities and challenges of school spaces—for the health and safety of children and to protect the continuity of the learning environment as well as all the supports and services students receive at school. Now I'm going turn it over to Lesley who will talk more about climate strategies.

Lesley Taylor:

Thanks, Juan. I want to stay just a second longer on this point and repeat it because it's so important. Extreme heat will pose a risk to every region and sector across natural, built, and social systems. This means our schools, too, are part of a statewide strategy to meet California's climate goals, including carbon neutrality by 2045. Best estimates for the scale of our sector are from the Center for Cities and Schools at UC Berkeley: 8,500 properties, nearly 130,000 acres, containing 730 million gross square feet of buildings. We must work together and work toward carbon neutrality with policies and practices that are inclusive of schools.

The United Nations Children's Fund defines the climate crisis as a child rights crisis specifically because climate impacts disproportionately burdened children and their smaller, growing bodies. The reality is that almost every child on Earth is exposed to at least one climate and environmental hazard. Just think of the prevalence of wildfire in our state or how rising sea levels will impact our coastal communities.

Students' physical health and well-being are threatened when our young people bear disproportionate environmental burden caused by climate change. State level investments are necessary in order to equitably and expediently protect children from the effects of climate change.

Since 2011, the CDE has administered US Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools, a recognition program centered on principles of whole-school sustainability, reduced environmental impact and cost, improved health and wellness and effective environmental and sustainability education with a focus on STEM skills, green career pathways, and civic learning.

Schoolyard forests support these goals by reducing the heat Island effect, reducing energy use by shading buildings, providing ecologically beneficial grounds and views of trees in nature, and inspiring child-led play and outdoor learning.

I want to get just a quick plug for our California Green Ribbon Schools Program. Applications for 2023 awards are due November 2nd, and it's always the right time to be thinking about how to engage students in the design and implementation of school greening projects like forests. Children spend more time at school than any other place except home. So, we need our schools to support the whole child, right? Healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. School buildings and grounds touch all of these components, and when they do, they advance equity by improving outcomes and addressing disparities that exist by health status, by race, by achievement, and in communities.

Thank you so much for your interest in the California Schoolyard Forest System and how transforming schoolyards supports the whole child.

Next, I'm proud to pass it over to Andra Yeghoian, Chief Innovation Officer at Ten Strands.

27:35 - 30:30 **Transforming Schoolyards Supports Whole School Environmental and Climate Literacy, and Sustainable and Climate Resilient Schools - [Andra Yeghoian](#)**

Andra Yeghoian:

Thank you so much, Lesley. And we're just so thrilled to be here.

I'm Andra Yeghoian, Chief Innovation Officer at Ten Strands, and we're really pleased to be in partnership again with Green Schoolyards America on this project. We really appreciated all we were able to accomplish in our partnerships in the National Outdoor Learning Initiative, and we're thrilled to be in partnership with the CDE and CAL FIRE on this project as well.

The California Schoolyard Forest System is an important part of the goals and objectives that we have at Ten Strands, as it supports the whole-school environmental and climate literacy effort and sustainable and climate resilient school efforts, which we find really important to our mission.

Just to go a little further on that, Ten Strands has been supporting the California Environmental Literacy Initiative now for a number of years, which is really focused around implementing the California Blueprint for Environmental Literacy, and we see this project as really critical to doing that work of providing equitable access to daily outdoor learning for all students, which has been shared by many of our speakers.

I just want to reiterate here how important that is to us, and how that's really connected to the work of the [California] Blueprint for Environmental Literacy.

We also see this project as really important for reinforcing the campus as a learning laboratory, and, in particular, a learning laboratory for the environmental principles and concepts. Those are our key connections to the standards and frameworks, and we recognize that schoolyard forests are really an opportunity to do hands-on, standards-based instruction that includes aspects of knowledge and action.

I also just want to highlight here that we're working on another partnership project with the San Mateo County Office of Education, where we have a project called the California Climate Change in Environmental Justice Curriculum. So, this is a project taking place between that got kicked off just a few months ago, and we're going through to 2024 to develop a curriculum for the State of California that ensures that every student at every grade level has access to learning about climate change and learning about environmental justice topics. And we feel, like this project, [this] has a lot of opportunities to do some of those hands-on activities that will connect to this curriculum. So we're excited to be able to draw those connections in this partnership.

I also wanted to just share here that we know that this project, as it was stated before, is going to take some partnership in coordination at the local level, and this is something that Ten Strands has been working on specifically through our work in the California Environmental Literacy Initiative, but also in other projects and partnerships as well. So we're ready to really jump in here and support these efforts to connect with county offices of education and districts and sites and community-based partners, and continue to build out that network and that ecosystem of support so that every child really has access to this.

So, we're excited to be here, and I'll turn it over now to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Thank you.

30:30 - 37:05 **Overview of the New CAL FIRE Grant Program for Schoolyard Forests - [Walter Passmore](#)**

Walter Passmore:

Alright. Well, I will readily admit that I am an active tree hugger, but this part of the presentation is really meant to be practical.

So, first I want to cover some of the goals that we have for the Schoolyard Forest initiative.

One is to provide students with healthy and inspirational spaces that optimize learning, respect for each other, and the environment, comfort and behavior.

We want to also shade, function, provide food, and the beauty of natural spaces that complement the facilities in the built infrastructure.

As mentioned by some of the other speakers, we want to mitigate extreme heat risk and food apartheid. And I'm gonna pause for just a second on that word, because it was brought up by one of our partners, and I think it has powerful meaning to, you know, engage students with growing food, with recognizing where food comes from and really making a mental shift in how we think about what our rights are as human beings on this planet.

Another goal: shift in culture to unify diverse populations to solve climate change while adopting responsibility, care, and respect for our natural heritage. You know, it's developing that long-term ethic of care.

We want to also connect school campuses to communities through support and shared values, a community of practice, and a unity of purpose.

Some of the strategies we're going to employ—and, hopefully, this is gonna catch some people's attention:

The state of California is investing 150 million dollars into school greening over the next two years; \$117 million committed this year; \$33 million committed next year. We hope that this is just a down payment, and we will be continuing to invest even larger amounts in the years to come. These investments may include block grants, advances, eligible costs for initial addition of staff, training, support for umbrella organizations to administer grant functions, environmental review asphalt-removal, irrigation, water-efficient landscape, and much more.

We do have links for our grant guidelines—which will be released for public comment soon—and a link to sign up for notifications.

We are planning to use these initial investments to leverage investment of federal funding through sources, such as the Inflation Reduction Act, which has dedicated 1.5 billion dollars nationally to urban forestry over the next 10 years. So I think we have a good chance of continuing to invest in this space and making a real difference for all of our school-age children throughout the state of California.

The framework of approaches was mentioned. And through our grants, we hope to support those practices, and also start to implement some of them. So, changes to policy, procedures, best practices, and, you know, through the Schoolyard Forest System, schools will have access to citations, references, case studies, mapping, gap analysis, tools, maintenance recommendations, recommendations for outdoor classrooms, gardens, space designs, training—curriculum and environmental literacy was also mentioned. So we're hoping to support all of those activities locally at individual campuses through our grants.

We're also working on interdepartmental collaboration. Even though we have a few speakers represented today, we're hoping to engage all of the state government in this important work.

Also, we're going to be enhancing partnerships with nonprofits and other partners—at a national level, even—so that these programs are effectively implemented in California and we lead the way in addressing global climate change problems.

We're going to be enhancing our work to recruit donors, sponsors, and philanthropic investments in this space, because we can't do it alone. \$150 million sounds like a big investment by the state of California—and it is. We don't want to minimize that. But the need is far greater than that initial investment.

Actions: we all need to take local actions at local campuses throughout California, whether the campus is selected for a grant, preparing for one, or documenting successes with expectation that investments will be forthcoming at some point. Good things are more likely to happen when you prepare, hope, and expect them.

Through all of our work, we are going to make the changes needed to change the experience for our students, and, really, to change the world.

So I hope that is inspirational and also somewhat practical for you listening to the webinar. We have some links posted to our programs. And with that I think we're going to go to questions.

37:05 - 55:52 **Questions and Discussion - Julia Gowin, with Alejandra Chiesa and Sharon Danks**

Julia Gowin:

So, I'm looking at the questions there's not too many questions coming in, but one just came related to the CAL FIRE funding. The question is about the state of California and the funding that the state provides. The anonymous attendee said that they heard one hundred plus 130 million, but asked if there's a link for this information.

Walter Passmore:

Yes, the last slide had links, and we can post those links into the chat, as well.

Julia Gowin:

Okay. Now the questions are pouring in. So the next question is, "Is there a maximum grant amount per site?"

Walter Passmore:

There will be a maximum per site. Grant guidelines have not been posted yet for public comment. We hope that those will be released during the month of October, and there will be maximums outlined in those grant guidelines. We will consider modifications to the grant guidelines based on the public comments that we receive.

Julia Gowin:

Next question is, "Is the funding limited to public schools?"

Walter Passmore:

So the answer is, no. We will have some funding that is dedicated to child care facilities that are qualified.

Julia Gowin:

Another question is, "Will there be funding for not only initial yard transformation, but also for ongoing maintenance?" And this is a question that always comes up, so I wanted to make sure to ask it out loud.

Walter Passmore:

There will be funding for extended maintenance, but grant funds are not intended to replace ongoing funding sources, so we will not be able to fund maintenance for the lifetime of a tree. We will fund, generally, the initial three to five years of maintenance.

Julia Gowin:

"In Southern California, drought is a big issue. How do I convince my district that watering trees is worth it in the long run?"

Walter Passmore:

So we do have evidence that suggests that landscapes with trees do not use more water than other landscape types, and trees are a really wise investment of water. So we will be producing more specific information about water-use in the coming months. But, needless to say, it is not an obstacle that should prevent you from planting trees for all of the wealth of benefits they provide.

Julia Gowin:

“I know this is a long term process. Is there funding for some pilot projects prior to release of the brand application?”

Walter Passmore:

No, but we hope to release requests for proposals very soon.

Julia Gowin:

“How will the grant work? Is it awarded to a district, and the district decides how the money is dispersed? Where will grant information be shared?”

Walter Passmore:

So individual schools can apply through their district or county department of education, but they can not apply independently of one of those two organizations. And the second part of the question?

Julia Gowin:

There's a lot of questions coming in so I'm having a bit of a hard time to really keep up with it! I cannot find where that question was so we're going to move on. “In the past lower-income school districts were prioritized for funding. Would this be similar? Can grants be for multiple sites?”

Walter Passmore:

Yes, we are going to provide assistance where it is needed most, as our first pass, and hopefully we will be able to assist every school in the state, eventually, but I'm sure everyone can appreciate that the most disadvantaged schools, with the fewest resources, need help from the state first.

Julia Gowin:

“Are there standard requests for proposal dates?”

Walter Passmore:

We will be releasing those with grant guidelines. I mentioned that we hope to post the great draft grant guidelines for public comment, during October, and then hopefully we'll be making a formal request for proposals in November, which will be due in December. So maybe we can have project activities on the ground as soon as spring of 2023.

Julia Gowin:

“Does funding include cement and asphalt removal?”

Walter Passmore:

Yes.

Julia Gowin:

“Is the \$150 million focused on school yards alone? Would an applicant be able to submit one application covering multiple school sites to reduce administrative costs?”

Walter Passmore:

Yes, you can submit one application for multiple school sites. And yes, \$150 million is for school greening.

I feel like I'm monopolizing all the answers!

Julia Gowin:

Yeah, Anyone feel free to jump in. I'm trying to keep up with all the many questions that are coming in about the funding.

“Can we know more about the workforce development grants?” Kind of unrelated.

Walter Passmore:

It's related, but it is not part of the \$ 150 million dollars in school greening. That could be a component of a project that would be funded through an Urban Forestry Grant, but it would not diminish the 150 million dollar investment.

Julia Gowin:

Here's a question, I think, for Sharon and Alejandra. “Do you have a list of model projects across the state that the public can visit or see firsthand?”

Sharon Danks:

We are developing some case studies that we will be putting onto the website later this fall. We also are, as Alejandra mentioned, starting a Community of Practice, probably in November, where we will invite speakers to share projects that are from school districts that already have Schoolyard Forest projects that can talk about those. And so if you go to our website, on the [Schoolyard Forest page](#), there's an interest form, and if you fill that out, you will be on the mailing list. When those things are ready, we would be happy to include you in the community of practice. And that I should say to that, that the community practice is for anyone who's interested: could be if you work at a school or a district or are a landscape architect or designer—or any anyone in the field, tree planting organizations—who would like to be an ally for school districts who are doing this work... Please join us!

Alejandra Chiesa:

There is a question, Sharon, and maybe now that you're spotlighted that you can handle. “Can someone expand upon how tree canopy inequities are being kept track off via GIS systems?”

Sharon Danks:

The research is underway, and we will be sharing it when it's ready, which will likely be in January or so. And so the results we have shared today are the only part that we have out and ready to share at this point. But we are hoping to develop a pretty comprehensive baseline, so that we'll know how things move forward. We want to be able to track when, you know, when schools plant forests, that we can see that change. We're working on it, it'll be there soon. See, you know, we're standing at the threshold of a multi-decade-long project with this forest system. It takes a really long time to help—is it about 8,500 properties?—change the way that they're using their grounds. And so

you know I think it will we're we're setting up the framework for a successful long-term project, and we are just really in the very beginning of it.

Alejandra Chiesa:

So there are a lot of questions about the grant and what would be, you know, eligible or not. And I would say the grand guidelines, as Walter said—and I'm not responding for CAL FIRE, this is a CAL FIRE program, not Green Schoolyards America—Walter said that the grant guidelines are gonna be released in October. And he shared a link to the website where you can sign up for getting updates. So you can sign up to know when that those draft grant guidelines get released, and then you're gonna be able to submit comments if they're improvements you want to see made to the grant program. I'm just saying this in general because there's a lot of detailed questions about the grant guidelines, which haven't been released.

Sharon Danks:

I see a question here also, that is: “Do you see any opportunities for organizations providing environmental education to get involved in this project?” And I'll turn that over to Andra in a second, but I wanted to say, yes, please come to our community of practice and sign up on the interest form, so that if we know of school districts in your region who need help with environmental education, we can help connect you. But Andra, I wonder if you want to also add anything to that?

Andra Yeghoian:

Yeah. So there's so much to be done with the partners for environmental education. We're working really closely in the California Environmental Literacy Initiative to identify different community-based partners that we can work with across the difference across the state. So we've got a few resource portals and hubs to find some of those partners. And then also, we're supporting, of course, having environmental education be something that every teacher teaches in their classroom. So those are some of the ways that we're really working on this. Hopefully that answered the question, but happy to try again

Alejandra Chiesa:

That's great! There's one question that I'm seeing here: “Before applying for a grant, do we need to develop the landscape plan for the entire school? Where can I find assistance with this portion?” And, yeah, we heard about this being a barrier. That usually to decide where you're gonna plant trees, you need to look at what you need to do planning before that. So I wonder if Walter or Julia can elaborate on that?

Walter Passmore:

So concurrently with releasing the draft guidelines for public comments, we are hoping to recruit some established nonprofit groups that have used our grant process before to provide grant writing assistance and identify professional consultants that could help with the preliminary design. You know, just kind of envisioning what is possible on your campus and, you know, putting together something that is a project with reasonable scale and budget that could be implemented during the term of a grant. So we're hoping to put that assistance in place in conjunction with requesting concept proposals.

Sharon Danks:

We should also add that there are some resources for schoolyard design and assessment on our website already on our existing National Outdoor Learning Library that was put together as part of the national COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative. We had hundreds of volunteers helping us write this. And so there's a lot of great information in

there. If you look in the chapter on design and implementation, you'll see it was originally written for COVID, but there are many things that are long-term strategies and technical assistance materials in that collection.

And in addition, we have some news—unrelated to this—that might also be helpful for the particular question about about planning money, which is that the press release just came out today for Senator Heinrich, of New Mexico, a US Senator, has created the Living Schoolyard act of 2022, which we were closely with him on, and in that in that bill that is now at US Congress—it's brand new and it has a long way to go before it might get funded—in the bill there is up to, I think it's 25 million dollars per year for four years for planning grants for green schoolyards master plans. And so, if that comes to pass, there will be a source there for people all over the country to apply for the planning money to make master plans, and it also includes implementation funds that I think offhand it is \$150 million a year for four years also. So we will post some of that information in our blog soon. That's a whole separate piece that needs support. But we're thrilled to see that happen, and I think that it could have the potential to fund some plans for this work, too.

Sharon Danks:

Someone asked a question: “I understand this is a decade zone project, but can you please recommend first steps along with actions that we can take now to help our students? They spent the first few weeks of school indoors, due to extreme heat.”

That is a good question. I mean I think we'll turn it over to others to chime in as well.

But you know shade canopies, umbrellas above picnic tables. Things like that immediate shade is useful. Temperature measurement: we'll have the activity out soon, we'll have some directions on how you can systematically measure temperatures on your ground, and start to look at where shade is most needed. Do others have thoughts about that? First thing schools should do?

Lesley Taylor:

You know, some of your typical measures to keep students comfortable, right? Loose clothing, lots of cool water, you know. Indoor in a cold space, if possible. We understand not all schools have air conditioning, right, and that's part of this shift from, you know, when schools were designed to the climate of the future. We're going to need more mechanical cooling systems to address that extreme heat. I will poke over to my other screen; the Department of Public Health did issue a great guidance on extreme heat, and I'll make sure you have that available in the response to the Q&A.

Alejandra Chiesa:

There is another question here for the grant program. “How will the highest need schools be determined? CalEnviroScreen or similar?”

Walter Passmore:

CalEnviroScreen is our standby protocol but we're also adding school specific metrics like free and reduced lunch count. So we're expanding how we identify where the needs are, and we're going to overlay that with extreme heat maps

Alejandra Chiesa:

That's great.

Sharon Danks:

And there's a question about, "Since there are so many schools that have greening needs, are you working with foundations or corporations to provide more funding?"

And the answer is, we could use more if you have any ideas. I think that we'd love to provide as much technical assistance as people need, and the role of the forest system is to help make this transition with that technical support and advice. And so we do. We do wanna make more contacts in those areas. If you have lots, send us in, send us your ideas.

Rachel Pringle (Green Schoolyards America):

One of the other questions, and I apologize if this was answered already, is, "Will the funding be given to whole districts or to specific schools?"

Walter Passmore:

It's restricted to either districts or county boards of education. It would not preclude an individual school from applying, as long as they have endorsement from either the district or county board of education.

Sharon Danks:

One question. "What steps do you recommend districts take now, to best be prepared for what sounds like a fast turnaround for the grant application?"

Walter Passmore:

That's not an easy question to answer because school greening is new to us, and happily, the legislature and the governor gave us a lot more money than we were expecting. So, you know, I think, start identifying which schools are the highest priority, and some of the basic design parameters like: where could you plant a new grove of trees, or how could you better maintain existing trees on campus? And then, you know, through the concept development process, I think those ideas will gain more clarity.

55:52 - 58:13 **What is Next?** - [Alejandra Chiesa](#)

Alejandra Chiesa:

So we have more questions. Apologies if we didn't get to your questions. There were a lot of questions coming in very quickly and you know we're three minutes away from finalizing the webinar, but this is not the last time you'll hear from us, you know. We're gonna continue having events and webinars.

Thank you to everyone that participated, and thank you to the panelists. This has been very inspiring, and it's so great to see so much interest. I think, in addition to the questions, there were a lot of ideas submitted in the Q&A, which we will take into account, for sure.

Before I delve into what's next, I wanna quote Walter again, since I love what he said: "We all need to take local action, and it is a mix of preparing, hoping, and expecting." Which I think that's a great way of putting it all together.

So in terms of what's next, sign up to receive updates. Here's our website for Green Schoolyards America. But there's also the links that Walter provided for the CAL FIRE updates. Those are separate, so sign up for both. CAL FIRE is gonna release the draft grant guidelines for comment, hopefully in October, so if you sign up, you'll get that.

Join our Community of Practice. We'll be starting that in November and I think that will deal with a lot of the questions that people submitted in the Q&A that we don't have time to answer in a few minutes. But there's a lot of the kind of nuts and bolts and barriers that we can discuss at these Community of Practice meetings.

And start planning for your grant application! I think it's good to be ready ahead of time, and Walter mentioned some of the resources that would be available, because we understand that there needs to be a planning process before you can apply and that it's important to start early.

58:13 - 58:45 **Closing** - Alejandra Chiesa and Sharon Danks

Alejandra Chiesa:

So that being said, we're at time. Here are all the partners' websites. You can go in and find more information. We appreciate all the interest, all the comments, and all the questions, and the time that our panelists spent with us today. So, thank you everyone. Have a good rest of the day.

Sharon Danks:

Thank you!