



February 26, 2024

The Honorable
Senator Josh Newman
Senate Education Committee, 1021 O Street, Suite 6740,
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support Senate Bill 1091 (Menjivar): School Greening Projects

Dear Honorable Senator Josh Newman:

Green Schoolyards America and Trust for Public Land are pleased to sponsor Senate Bill 1091 will reduce a significant barrier to school-ground greening, and make it possible for many public schools, specially the ones with less resources, to implement greening projects.

In California, over 10,000 public schools serve almost 5.9 million PK-12 students on approximately 130,000 acres of public land. Most of that land is paved and lacks tree canopy in places children spend their time during the school day, so millions of PK-12 students are exposed to unhealthy high temperatures on a regular basis. These harsh conditions will get worse due to climate change. This is a problem for all schools in California, because children are more vulnerable to heat than adults, and the situation creates a significant, disproportionate burden on school communities with the lowest income and in communities of color. Adding shade trees and creating nature-rich outdoor learning spaces will not only address issues related to extreme heat and other environmental problems, but it will also be an opportunity to address some of California's stark inequalities related to access to green space, hands-on educational resources, and health and wellbeing.

Research shows that:

- **Millions of California's students do not have *any* access to tree shade at school.** 10% of our PK-12 public school grounds have less than 2% tree canopy. The majority, 85%, have less than 10% tree canopy.¹
- **Unshaded asphalt and rubber surfaces on school grounds reach high temperatures that are hazardous for students' health and negatively impact their experience at school.** Unshaded asphalt can reach 140°F on a sunny day when air temperatures are >90°F, and rubber "safety" surfaces can reach >165°F. Even on a mild 66°F day asphalt can be 120°F and rubber 156°F or more.² High surface temperatures like these severely impact children because they engage in vigorous physical activity and their smaller body mass to surface area ratio than adults makes them more vulnerable to heat.³

¹ Data analysis by Green Schoolyards America, 2019, using GIS data from California Department of Public Health and GreenInfo Network.

² Green Schoolyards America's school ground temperature study, "How Cool is Your Schoolyard. 2016-2022. Measurements above from: Eagle Rock Elementary, Los Angeles, CA; Hoover Elementary, Oakland, CA.

³ U.S. EPA, [Protecting Children's Health During and After Natural Disasters: Extreme Heat](#).

- **Trees and green spaces have been shown to significantly reduce temperatures** of the school grounds and surrounding neighborhoods.⁴
- **Trees and green spaces in school-grounds bring multiple benefits to students and their communities** including improved mental and physical health, and improved learning outcomes.

In 2022, California released “Protecting Californians from Extreme Heat: A State Action Plan to Build Community Resilience” recognizing extreme heat as one of the deadliest climate-driven hazards in California. Climate vulnerable communities will experience the worst of these effects, as heat risk is associated and correlated with physical, social, political, and economic factors. Older populations, infants and children, pregnant people, and people with chronic illness are especially sensitive to heat exposure.

We believe that all public school grounds in California should include trees and nature-filled green spaces that provide opportunities for outdoor learning as integral parts of healthy, climate-resilient school facilities. School-ground greening offers a way to address the climate crisis with an intersectional approach and is a critical strategy to closing the equity gap in access to nature, improving health and wellness, providing opportunities for hands-on learning, climate literacy, and workforce development.

Long term planning and sustained public funding investments are necessary to bring green schoolyards to scale across the state, and in addition, certain policy and institutional barriers need to be addressed to ensure that those investments are successful in creating green climate resilient school grounds that serve the most vulnerable children and communities. SB 1091 will address one of such policy barriers to greening school grounds by capping the required improvements to the path of travel, beyond the greening project boundary to 20% of the adjusted construction cost for the project, in line with federal ADA law.

This bill is an important first step towards that goal because it will remove a significant barrier to school-ground greening projects which will help address climate change, environmental injustices, racial and economic inequities, and public education needs.

Sincerely,



Alejandra Chiesa
Vice President
Green Schoolyards America

Juan Altamirano
Director of Government Affairs
Trust for Public Land

⁴ U.S. EPA, [Using Trees and Vegetation to Reduce Heat Islands](#).