



LIVING SCHOOLYARDS FOR CALIFORNIA

EXCITING NEW STATE RESOLUTION WILL BRING MORE CHILDREN OUTSIDE AT PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

By Sharon Gamson Danks

While students were enjoying their summer vacation this year, the movement to green school grounds and connect children with nature took an important leap forward with the adoption of a new California state resolution that encourages school districts to design and construct schoolyard green spaces and use them to teach academic curricula outdoors. Authored by Assemblymember Phil Ting of San Francisco (D), the Living Schoolyard Month resolution (ACR-128) adopted on June 16, 2014 also establishes an annual, statewide celebration of school grounds to be held each year in May.

Support for vibrant outdoor classrooms has been gaining momentum over the last two decades in California, across the USA, and around the world. California has been a national leader in the school garden movement since 1995,

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when then Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin collaborated with chef Alice Waters to create the Garden in Every School initiative through the California Department of Education. In 1999, the state established the Instructional School Gardens Program (AB 1014) to support garden-based learning. Over the years, tens of thousands of children have enjoyed school gardens inspired by these efforts, and learned firsthand about horticulture, nutrition and a variety of academic disciplines. To promote continued growth of these programs, California passed legislation in 2006 (AB 1535) that provided a total of \$15 million in school garden grant funds for equipment, supplies, and related professional development for 3,500 school sites.¹

The new Living Schoolyard Month resolution is an





School gardens and ecological schoolyards improve children's wellbeing and provide vibrant environments for hands-on education, recreation and community building.

important milestone in California's approach to promoting outdoor green spaces for all children in K-12 public schools and for the state's thriving green schoolyard movement. Building on the success of previous school garden programs, it expands the depth and breadth of outdoor education beyond horticulture and nutrition to connect schoolyard greening to the health of urban ecosystems, child development needs, and the quality of life for students and their school communities.

This new resolution addresses the potential for green school grounds to improve their neighborhoods' environment by recognizing that "[o]n-campus green space designs have environmental benefits such as rainwater collection, urban carbon and runoff sequestration, air quality improvement, and ecological resiliency..."², making school grounds important components of their cities' green infrastructure as well as key places for learning about the ecosystems that sustain our cities.

The resolution frames green schoolyards within the context of students' lives and their child development needs, noting that the "amount of time the average American child spends outdoors... [is] in constant decline" and yet "[o]utdoor activity is essential to learning, health, and the overall quality of student life". Schools have the power to increase children's outdoor time and help reconnect them with the natural world, since children spend 840 to 1,080 hours each year at school.³

The resolution further connects children's wellbeing to schoolyard design and the subtle influences the natural world has on students' mental health and social interactions, noting that "[a]n ecological schoolyard setting provides a peaceful, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasant environment for students...[and] encourages collaborative and cooperative play, reducing the aggression that occurs on traditional playgrounds."⁴

CONNECTIONS TO SCHOOL GROUNDS AROUND THE WORLD

California's adoption of Living Schoolyard Month holds great promise for children throughout the state and is also significant for the wider, international green schoolyard movement because it highlights the ongoing dialogue between efforts in California and those in other states and countries.

California's resolution was strongly influenced by the *Westerbeke Declaration on School Grounds*, produced by a global nonprofit organization called the International School Grounds Alliance (ISGA). Written collaboratively by leaders in the school ground field from thirty-one organizations in seven countries, the *Westerbeke Declaration* expresses a vision for using school grounds to improve children's wellbeing. The adoption of ACR-128 marks the first time the *Westerbeke Declaration* has inspired public policy, and it is hoped that the message it expresses will resonate with institutions in other states and countries in the years to come.

The annual celebration component of California's Living Schoolyard Month is also intentionally aligned with ISGA's annual May festival, International School Grounds Month, so students around the world will celebrate their school grounds simultaneously.



Ecological schoolyards are key components of urban infrastructure that have the potential to improve the cities we now inhabit while educating children to be thoughtful stewards of the future.



HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

Public support is very important to the success of green schoolyard programs. Whether or not you live in California, you can:

- Plan to promote Living Schoolyard Month amongst your networks and help spread the word.
- Encourage your city agencies to include schoolyard ecology as a component of their wider green city plans.
- Help your local school or district organize their first celebration of Living Schoolyard Month in May 2015.
- Assist a local school or district with their green schoolyard plans by volunteering on a schoolyard work day.
- Persuade your own local and state governments to support ecological schoolyards and outdoor classrooms to improve neighborhood ecosystems and children's learning and play environments.

Free resources with ideas to help you celebrate the first Living Schoolyard Month in May 2015 will be available this winter from Green Schoolyards America and the International School Grounds Alliance. (See: <http://bit.ly/GSA-guides>) With your help to spread the word in California and around the world, this resolution will bring the benefits of green schoolyards to an increasing number of schools, and thousands more children will go outside to learn, explore and discover the world just outside their classroom door.



ACR-128 SUMMARY

- State: California
- Bill Name: Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 128, Living Schoolyard Month (ACR-128, Ting)
- Author: Assemblymember Phil Ting (D)
- Adopted: June 16, 2014
- Subject: Living Schoolyard Month
- Co-Sources: Green Schoolyards America
Education Outside
- Source Texts: *Westerbeke Declaration on School Grounds* (International School Grounds Alliance)
Asphalt to Ecosystems: Design Ideas for Schoolyard Transformation (Sharon Danks / New Village Press)

NOTES

- ¹ Kwong Kim, Sophia. Concurrence in Senate Amendments, ACR 128 (Ting), As Amended May 22, 2014. Analysis for the California State Legislature. Sacramento, California, June 5, 2014. Page 2.
- ² Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 128, Resolution Chapter 68, Relative to Living Schoolyard Month. Assemblymember Phil Ting (D). California Legislature, 2013-14 Regular Session. Filed with the Secretary of State, June 16, 2014.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.

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For more information, please visit Green Schoolyards America at greenschoolyards.org.



Many California cities, including Berkeley, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Santa Cruz, have created their own citywide school garden or green schoolyard programs to enrich students' outdoor experiences at school.

