

Waldorf School of DuPage

Warrenville, Illinois

Site Level Example of Innovative Outdoor Classroom Design

School Website: <https://www.waldorfdupage.org/>



Independent School
Early Childhood - 8th Grade
Enrollment: 90 - 130 students
Humid Summers and Cold Winters



Fig. 1: Outdoor Classroom on Wood Mulch with Early Childhood Sized Student Desks



Fig. 2: School Garden with Outdoor Classroom Tents



Fig. 3: Community Built Child Sized Desks

Q: What is Waldorf Schools philosophy?

Waldorf education is a holistic teaching method that does not just rely on intellect but rather engages a child's entire being for learning. Every subject is taught through art, music, movement, and story, allowing students with a variety of learning styles to thrive and achieve deeper comprehension. The playing field is leveled so children do not just learn through textbooks and lectures. On any given day you may find a class painting, hiking, or singing while learning.

- Read about Waldorf Philosophy: <https://www.waldorfdupage.org/waldorf-education>

Q: Why did your school decide to bring education outside this year?

Fig. 4: Campus Map by parent Chess Valenti

Early-on, after shelter-in-place orders were enacted for COVID-19, faculty initiated conversations about long-term planning and reopening of their campus for on-site learning. This pilot group formed a reopening committee in the spring while the 2019-2020 school year was still in progress. Since the focus of the Waldorf School of DuPage is early childhood education, this committee was especially focused on investigating ways to reduce the risks of disease transmission with reduced use of face coverings. They noticed that all state and federal communications and guidance encouraged being outside for its increased ventilation and ability to physically distance. In surveys to families about what they would feel comfortable with in Fall 2020 the only thing that 100% of people responded positively towards was being outdoors. In Waldorf education, nature is already incorporated into instruction and curriculum. Given these factors (family support, state and federal guidance, and Waldorf philosophy) the question for the reopening committee became: How do we get outdoors more?



- View Waldorf School of DuPage's reopening in this [Slide Deck](#)



Q: What are your outdoor learning goals? Fig. 5: Students in outdoor classroom

Waldorf School of DuPage is aiming for outdoor instruction 100% of the time when possible. Exceptions will be if families are opting for distance learning or distance learning is needed due to health concerns, or for severe weather days. To achieve this goal the school adjusted its school calendar to consolidate breaks to the coldest parts of the year. Additionally, they plan to offer in-person learning using indoor classrooms or distance learning on severe weather days. By investing in outdoor learning infrastructure they are making long-lasting additions to their programming and enhancing their existing instructional opportunities. Their overarching goals with outdoor learning are to provide an opportunity for

safe and healthy in-person interaction and make up for loss of learning that happened in Spring 2020.

Q: What has been your process in planning for outdoor learning?

The school started with a lot of ideas and solutions for the question of how to get outdoors more with students. They began with three different scenarios for outdoor infrastructure: 1) Temporary Tents 2) Wooden Pavilions 3) Canopy spaces in forested areas. Due to permitting, the wooden pavilion-style structures have been delayed, but remain a long-term vision for the school campus. The school partnered with a company to provide tents that can handle the snow and are approved by the fire department. The family community has come together to support the school in planning for outdoor learning. Families have volunteered their time and labor to support the installation of tents. A parent who is an architect drew up designs for outdoor learning desks and other parents have worked together to build them. The desks come in three sizes for different aged children and are designed for an individual student which makes physical distancing easier. The community also helped install canopies in the campus's forested areas for use by early childhood classes. Through community volunteerism and family support Waldorf School of DuPage has been able to save on costs and build classroom areas quickly to get students back to in-person learning.

Waldorf School of DuPage started the school year with on-site learning in September 2020.

- View Waldorf [Photo Gallery](#) to see the community building outdoor classrooms

Q: What are the costs associated with outdoor learning for your school?

Material	Cost per unit
Student Desks	\$35 - \$ 40 (materials only, designed & constructed with community volunteerism)
4' x 8' Double Sided Chalkboard	\$80
Handwashing Station	\$80
Materials to modify tents (used to make a gutter for rain water) - Carpenter's Clips	\$1 - 12 needed per tent
Wi-Fi and Technology	\$4,000

Resources

Outreach and Publications:

- Local News Article on Waldorf School of DuPage outdoor learning plan: <https://patch.com/illinois/wheaton/why-one-school-turning-outdoor-classrooms-amid-coronavirus?fbclid=IwAR3PQXAnZdFONvE0kMgJqPjEs3xJhWyc1bHpzSG7k-S4t9nYKkzKCr7PEdo>
- Blog Post: <https://www.waldorfdupage.org/blog/outdoor-learning>
- Slide Deck Presentation: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1d_wz2b4uMpekp_eDcdeEXUfX9cY8LHUC/view?usp=sharing
- Photo Gallery: https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipNm40Sd2ZayHKVSCF_LbSGTC3kzJNXOmZHZJY_bImq22VAD08H1Y_MWd7RYWvvsBxbA?pli=1&key=TWd2OWtwa3dGdGdWVDlrR2Ria1lia28zcVJNQUBF

Infrastructure:

- King Canopy Shelters: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DnMI2TCcgxSbM_f0wHDw0imsWZoGJUWQ/view?usp=sharing
- Student Desks Construction Video: <https://vimeo.com/440867395>



Fig. 6: Students using desks



Fig. 7: Tent Canopy on mulched surface



Fig. 8: Shade canopies in wooded area



Fig. 9: Students physical distancing for Rose Ceremony
Fig. 10: Third grader at custom desk in outdoor learning tent
Fig. 11: Adult volunteers in outdoor learning area



*Fig. 12: Students reading in meadow with classroom tents behind
Fig. 13: Early education students eating snack in tents on a rainy school day*