



## EDUCATION OUTSIDE RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL GARDEN PROGRAMS

### Introduction

The resources included herein were created by Education Outside, a nonprofit based in San Francisco that operated a successful AmeriCorps program serving schools throughout the Bay Area. Education Outside was committed to advancing science education in public schools, outdoors. In 2019, Education Outside served 56 public elementary schools, reaching over 23,000 students. Education Outside closed its doors in June of 2019, but garden-based programming continues in these schools through other organizations.

These resources represent our approach, best practices, and lessons learned over eight years of training and deploying garden educators in public schools. We've published these materials for use by schools, School Garden Support Organizations, AmeriCorps programs, or other environmental education programs working in schools. Our intention is to provide these materials to support garden-based/outdoor education in schools and to add to the collective work of the field. We cover a range of topics from building buy-in to building and maintaining infrastructure. Also included is an abridged version of our kindergarten through 5th grade curriculum. These resources will be particularly helpful for organizations supporting multiple school gardens and the specialized educators who teach in them, but will also provide many useful tips and templates for classroom teachers who bring students to the garden. For parents and teachers looking to start a school garden and aren't sure where to begin, please refer to our book, *How to Grow a School Garden: A Complete Guide for Parents and Teachers* which can be purchased online.

Importantly, Education Outside has included here materials related to our approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion in our hiring practices, programming, and training. While our work in this area was still evolving upon our closure, with the help of our corps members, key staff and consultants, we created several tools that others may find useful.

To navigate these resources, please refer to the Table of Contents where you will find links to specific topics and documents. Please note that these resources are made available to the public for free, but are not for commercial use. Credit should be given to Education Outside if any material is used or adapted.

Over the years, many Education Outside staff, corps members, and partners contributed to these resources. Their contributions are deeply appreciated and are now part of the legacy of the organization represented here.

Some experts suggest that humans have 12 years to address climate change before irreversible shifts take place. To succeed in addressing this challenge, we need both swift governmental action as well as the energy of a generation that is connected to the natural world and sees science as integral to how we understand our environment. We hope these resources help schools and organizations bring students outside to learn and connect in order to create that next generation we so desperately need.



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## Education Outside: A Brief History

Beginning in 2001, Education Outside spearheaded the effort to transform San Francisco's asphalt school playgrounds into dynamic green schoolyards designed to get students outside to learn and connect with nature, promote environmental literacy, and cultivate students' interest and engagement in science. In 2019, Education Outside closed its doors. Below you will find a brief history of the organization's work and impact over 18 years.

Education Outside was founded in 2001 as the San Francisco Green Schoolyard Alliance (SFGSA) by the board of San Francisco's Tule Elk Park Early Education School. In 1991, Tule Elk was one of the first San Francisco schools to replace its hard asphalt yard with a living green schoolyard. The results were amazing; the green schoolyard was an ongoing adventure for children who were growing up in the city to experience nature every day. Inspired by this transformation, Tule Elk's board founded SFGSA based on the belief that every public school student and neighborhood in San Francisco should have access to the academic, community-building, and greening benefits afforded by green schoolyards.

From 2001 to 2010, SFGSA grew from a volunteer-run program to a professionally staffed organization that supported schools throughout San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). SFGSA's major organizational accomplishments included:

- **Helping to secure nearly \$14 million in city bond funding for the design and construction of 84 green schoolyards at K-12 public schools throughout San Francisco**—the largest green schoolyards system of any public school district in the country.
- **Working with 27 school communities in order to help them successfully navigate the master planning process for their new bond-funded green schoolyards**, which were installed in SFUSD schoolyards between 2010 and 2012.
- **Fostering school and urban greening through innovative partnerships** such as its Tap the Sky rainwater harvesting program, which provided 18 schools with rainwater harvesting cisterns and technical assistance, and the Trees for Tomorrow campaign, which planted trees in and around SFUSD school sites.
- **Helping the city's public school communities integrate green schoolyards into the fabric of academics and school life** by providing outdoor classroom programming, teacher training workshops, standards-based curricula, and other resources to a network of green schoolyards and school garden projects through its Outdoor Classroom Initiative.
- **Providing more than \$90,000 in Garden Coordinator Challenge Grants to schools serving low-income students** to ensure that they had the financial resources needed to hire part-time green schoolyards/outdoor classroom staff.
- **Developing innovative conferences and informational resources** such as its biennial Growing Greener School Grounds Conference attended by more than 750 people, the United States' first international green schoolyards conference held in September 2011, and the annual Green Schoolyards Resource Directory.
- **Working with San Francisco Unified School District and partners to draft green schoolyards development guidelines** to provide school communities with a framework for student and community stewardship of these new green spaces.

In 2011, SFGSA became an independent nonprofit and changed its name to Education Outside. That same year the organization launched its signature corps member program, first known as Green Schools Corps. Starting in 4 schools in SFUSD, Education Outside ultimately grew to support 56 schools in 6 school districts in San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Cruz counties and the corps member program became its sole programmatic focus. Staff grew from 2 to 25 people and our budget went from \$150,000 to \$4.9 million, annually.

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From 2011 to 2019, Education Outside developed a robust program that:

- At its peak, **brought over 23,000 public school students outside in 6 school districts** to learn, annually.
- **Matched the public investment of \$14 million in bond funding for green schoolyards with nearly \$21M in government and private funding**, including two, 3-year AmeriCorps grants totaling nearly \$4.5M.
- **Created the first professional learning community of garden educators** in a large urban public school district
- **Developed a two year training program that served over 150 educators** and could be considered one of the first comprehensive garden educator “certifications” in the U.S.
- **Launched the careers of over 150 young professionals**, with nearly eighty percent continuing on in education positions.
- **Created a garden educator-specific curriculum** that spanned 6 grades and was one of the first to incorporate the Next Generation Science Standards.
- **Was invited to present its program model and resources at major conferences** such as the North American Association for Environmental Education Conference, American Horticultural Society’s National Children & Youth Gardening Symposium, National Farm to Cafeteria Conference, International School Grounds Conference, Green Schools Conference & Expo, National Science Teachers Association Conference, Children & Nature Network Conference, and PGM ONE.
- Conducted an extensive evaluation in partnership with the Lawrence Hall of Science at U.C. Berkeley and found that **the program increased the science activation of students in its lowest-income schools.**
- Was featured as a case study by the Children & Nature Network in 2019.
- **Partnered with The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission to operate the first educational garden owned by a utility provider in the nation**, and more.

In June of 2019, Education Outside closed its doors, but the program lives on through other organizations serving our schools in San Francisco and San Mateo counties.