



State Board of Education Resolution
Supporting School Access to Funding for Outdoor Learning Options
SR21-1

WHEREAS, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, parents, educators, and medical experts have consistently testified at D.C. State Board of Education public meetings to request support for schools to provide outdoor learning options;

WHEREAS, DC Public School (DCPS) students have testified to DC Council and the State Board that being in front of computers during the school day is causing them to experience feelings of isolation, vision problems, and mental and physical stress;

WHEREAS, low-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by lack of access to reliable technology needed to fully participate in distance learning and are also more likely to be impacted by learning loss during distance learning;¹

WHEREAS, low-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by the spread of the COVID-19 virus;²

WHEREAS, currently, Term 3 plans are focused on bringing students back to indoor settings, even as COVID-19 cases are rising, with an additional surge of cases anticipated following the holidays;³

WHEREAS, a recent DCPS parent survey revealed that families residing in Wards 5, 7, and 8 are less likely to opt to send their children back to in-person learning or CARE classrooms in indoor settings;⁴

WHEREAS, there is substantial scientific evidence that being outdoors greatly mitigates the spread of the COVID-19 virus;⁵

WHEREAS, providing families with more options to return to safe, in-person schooling outdoors will mean more working parents—including teachers—can return to work;

WHEREAS, due to the pandemic’s impact on students and families, schools must address learning loss, as well as increased social emotional and mental health needs;⁶

¹ <https://connect.dc.gov/page/fact-sheet>

² See for example: <https://news.yale.edu/2020/12/02/black-hispanic-children-bear-disproportionate-burden-covid-19>

³ See for example: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/11/20/us-could-see-another-100000-deaths-by-inauguration-day-doctor-says.html>

⁴ https://45biv636w8lm1agg3ozqtgg1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/DCPS_RCC_Elementary_Survey.pdf

⁵ See for example: <https://apnews.com/article/rhode-island-anthony-fauci-gina-raimondo-infectious-diseases-virus-outbreak-ef7e8bb311a5f71c4afb11f7d3e77e7f> and <https://academic.oup.com/jid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/infdis/jiaa742/6009483>

⁶ See for example: <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/student-mental-health>





WHEREAS, outdoor learning has been shown to improve student engagement and academic outcomes, as well as physical and mental health of students, teachers, and staff;⁷

WHEREAS, families with means are accessing outdoor education for their children through enrollment in private schools or participation in privately organized learning pods, which may serve to widen opportunity gaps within the District;⁸

WHEREAS, the Mayor’s Office has made funding available for local bars and restaurants to winterize outdoor seating areas;

WHEREAS, community-based environmental and outdoor education programs are equipped to assist schools in offering innovative and supportive partnerships that were available to many schools across the city pre-pandemic;⁹ and,

WHEREAS, DCPS and public charter schools, as well as community groups across the District, have successfully piloted outdoor learning opportunities showing that this is a viable and positive alternative to returning to in-person learning exclusively indoors.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, the D.C. State Board of Education advises Mayor Bowser to create an initial \$4 million fund to be made available immediately in the form of grants for DCPS and public charter schools to apply for—should the schools choose to offer outdoor learning options as part of their Term 3 or 4 reopening plans, as well as for possible summer programming;¹⁰ and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, the State Board requests that Mayor Bowser direct the DCPS to reinstate and increase pre-pandemic funding for outdoor education through partner agencies and organizations.¹¹

Date Adopted: January 13, 2021 Signed: 

⁷ See for example: https://www.lawrencehallofscience.org/sites/default/files/EE_A_Field_at_Risk_Policy_Brief.pdf and <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272494419303536>

⁸ See for example: <https://www.nextgenlearning.org/articles/equity-responses-to-private-pandemic-pods>

⁹ See for example <https://www.out-teach.org/partner-with-us/school-partners/> and <https://www.freshfarm.org/foodprints/schools>

¹⁰ Outdoor learning infrastructure, broadly defined includes: teacher training, professional development and support, appropriate outdoor clothing, overhead open air shelter for protection from precipitation, handwashing stations, bathroom facilities, open air transportation such as open air buses, protected bike lanes and walking routes so that children have safe outdoor alternatives to indoor contained spaces of subways and buses can be easily scaled up and guidance is available from content experts

¹¹ See footnote 8.

