



# How to Create a Community Schoolyard

A COMMUNITY SCHOOLYARDS™  
TOOLKIT

THE  
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FOR  
PUBLIC  
LAND



The Trust for Public Land creates  
parks and protects land for people,  
ensuring healthy, livable communities  
for generations to come.

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FRONT COVER, TOP: Students working in their new garden at E. M. Stanton Elementary School in South Philadelphia. © JENNA STAMM; BOTTOM: Students playing at William Cramp Elementary. © JENNA STAMM; BACK COVER: Opening celebration and ribbon cutting at the community schoolyard at PS 115K in New York on November 9th 2020. © ALEXA HOYER

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# Preface

## Acknowledgments

This toolkit is dedicated to everyone who has labored to make Community Schoolyards a reality. Working with community partners across the country, The Trust for Public Land has created over 300 Community Schoolyards. Teachers, parents, community members, designers, organizers, volunteers, and students have donated thousands of hours to complete these projects. The lessons learned, summarized in this document, are due just as much to their efforts as our own. We thank you!

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Congratulations on starting a community schoolyard! Did you know that creating close-to-home opportunities to be in nature, play, and socialize will improve the health of your community and make it more resilient to climate change? Your hard work and dedication to this project will create a treasured outdoor destination for your school and community for generations to come.

The Trust for Public Land has been transforming schoolyards for over 25 years. We have worked with more than a dozen school districts around the country and have successfully created nearly 300 Community Schoolyards to date. The guidance in this report comes from multiple dedicated staff who have decades of experience on team building, designing, constructing, and stewarding Community Schoolyards. We have assembled the best guidance from these to help you

navigate the process of transforming an existing underutilized schoolyard into a vibrant community schoolyard.

### What are Community Schoolyards™?

Community Schoolyards are a center for health and climate resilience and a hub for equitable community cohesion. In order to achieve this standard, they need to be green, open to the community and involve the school and community in design and activation. A successful community schoolyard is not a product, but a process.

The process for creating a successful community schoolyard is outlined in detail in the following pages.



When community members and stakeholders partner to build a community schoolyard, they can transform a space. Check out this before-and-after shot from New York's School of Science and Technology/School of the Performing Arts (Brooklyn, New York's P.S. 152/315K). © MADDALENA POLLETTA

Many communities choose to remove some asphalt from a schoolyard and replace it with trees, plants, seating, ponds, or gardens. Community Schoolyards often include pollinator gardens, stormwater capture, traditional play equipment, nature play areas, edible gardens, trails, and trees and shrubs. Some schools create outdoor classrooms with chalkboards, tables, sinks, and large seating areas where teachers can lead lessons outdoors. In other cases, the school community may identify the need for calming spaces where children can relax or de-escalate. A range of approaches can be integrated to create healthy and environmentally sound spaces.

America's typical public schoolyard is, sadly, often a sea of asphalt, perhaps with a few cracks sprouting weeds. Bare schoolyards bake under the hot sun. They flood during downpours. Some have little to no play equipment, and rarely inspire active, creative play. Educational leaders have shared that the condition of the schoolyard correlates with student behavior and attendance rates.

When you create a community schoolyard, you improve the educational setting and thereby educational

outcomes, you make your school and community more resilient to climate change, you improve opportunities for physical and mental health and you create a place that will bring the school and community together.

## Community Schoolyards™ improve park access

Park access can sound like a tricky concept, but it is actually pretty simple. Can a person walk to a park from their home in 10 minutes or less? If they can, then they have park access. Why 10 minutes? Research has shown that 10 minutes is about the distance most people are willing to walk.

Through The Trust for Public Land's 10-Minute Walk® Campaign, mayors all over the country have agreed to work toward the shared goal of providing park access to 100 percent of their residents within a 10-minute walk of their homes. This is an ambitious goal that will provide close-to-home parks for millions of people, but is it realistic? The process of building a new park can be expensive and slow, particularly in areas where land is scarce and expensive.



In neighborhoods without an existing park, Community Schoolyards can provide access to outdoor recreation. © JENNA STAMM



You can do this! © JENNA STAMM

This is where Community Schoolyards can help. Many schools choose to make their Community Schoolyards open to the public, particularly after school hours and on weekends. When these schools are in neighborhoods without adequate park access, cities can significantly increase their park access and the multiple benefits that parks have to offer. Since school districts are often one of the largest landowners in cities and much of their exterior spaces are asphalt expanses, this is a big opportunity to create a community schoolyard.

One hundred million people lack access to a park within a 10-minute walk. If all schools had a community schoolyard, 20 million more people would gain access to a park within a 10-minute walk.

### Can I really do this?

Absolutely! Across the country, passionate community members are making a major impact by improving their local schoolyards and parks. It will take hard

work, collaboration, and perseverance, but if you follow the steps outlined in this guide, you can make your community schoolyard project a reality.

The steps below are organized chronologically, though some steps can move forward at the same time. We recommend that you read through the entire guide and adapt the process to meet your particular situation. Please note that while there are less intensive improvements that a group of volunteers could make to a schoolyard, this guide outlines the process for a major schoolyard renovation project, requiring a professional designer, contractor, and likely a fundraising plan to ensure that you start with an adequate budget. This stepper guide provides all steps in the process to create a Community Schoolyard, however each organization will have different levels of experience and capacity to take on these steps. Use the guide below to decide which of the three team types best describes your group.

# What are your team's strengths?

## TEAM TYPE 1



### Limited Project Development Experience

#### LIMITED PROJECT DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

- Your group has a vision, but is not formally organized
- Your group has experience organizing diverse groups of people
- Your group has completed small projects (e.g., installed garden beds, organized school events, or hosted fundraisers)

#### CONSIDERATIONS

If your schoolyard team is an informal group, it can be helpful to seek “umbrella-ship” under existing trusted 501(c)(3) organizations, such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or other community-based groups equipped to manage and receive funds (see Step 1a). Nonprofit status will allow your group to bring in tax-deductible donations and solicit grants. If you choose not to work under an existing nonprofit at this stage, your team should focus on organizing the community around the project tasks described in **orange**. Additionally, you should seek to partner with a nonprofit with project development experience or advocate for your school district to take on the roles outlined in the green and blue highlighted tasks.

## TEAM TYPE 2



### Moderate Project Development Experience

#### MODERATE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

- Your team has a vision and experience organizing diverse groups of people
- Your team is led by an existing nonprofit, organized under 501(c)(3) of the U.S. tax code
- Your team leader has project development experience, including the holding of professional design contracts

#### CONSIDERATIONS

If the statements above apply to your group, and you have school district approval, your team has the credentials, skills, and experience to complete the **orange** and **green** colored tasks. Additionally, you should advocate for your school district to take on the roles outlined in the blue colored tasks.

## TEAM TYPE 3



### Extensive Project Development Experience

#### EXTENSIVE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

- Your team is led by an existing nonprofit, organized under 501(c)(3) of the U.S. tax code
- Your team leader has experience with holding professional design contracts, public bidding, and managing the construction process for school district projects

#### CONSIDERATIONS

If the statements above apply to your group, and you have school district approval, your schoolyard team has the credentials, skills, and experience to complete the **orange**, **green**, and **blue** colored tasks.

You will see these three colors used for section headings throughout this guide. For example, on page 14, **STEP 6. SECURE A DESIGNER** is written in green. This is a reminder that this step should be carried out by a type 2 or type 3 team, while type 1 teams should look to partner with a more experienced organization before getting started.



# Steps to Create a Community Schoolyard





Your project kickoff is an opportunity to build your team and agree on key items like the scope and a target budget. © AMBER GARRETT

## STEP 1. THE PROJECT KICKOFF

### STEP 1A. BUILD THE PROJECT KICKOFF TEAM

Your project kickoff is an opportunity to build your team and agree on key items like the scope and a target budget.

Creating a community schoolyard requires a strong team comprising school leaders, parents, teachers, students, and community members. Team members should bring diverse perspectives to the project. Ideally you can identify team members from the following groups:

- **School district representative.** The school district representative will provide guidance on school design, construction requirements, and legal agreements you may need to enter. Remember,
- **School leadership.** The school principal, vice-principal/assistant principal, or lead teacher will provide guidance on the best ways to engage staff and students during design and stewardship. They will also provide guidance on the final design elements, aka “program,” for the site. Include the building engineer or head custodian in early discussions to understand the daily maintenance protocols, such as whether deliveries go through the yard, and any other challenges that could arise.
- **Key teachers.** Include a couple of key teachers, especially those who have a strong interest in gardening, the arts, and hands-on learning science. Key teachers will be long-term champions of the

schoolyard and will be the best teachers to practice outdoor education. A physical education teacher is a great addition to the team and someone to check in with during the design process if they are not on the team. Two to five teachers are recommended.

- **School garden coordinator.** Some schools already have raised beds or gardening areas that they use for teaching or that the community helps care for. These areas can be expanded and improved during the renovation process. The parent or teacher who leads the garden efforts is an important voice in the design process and plays a key role in helping to organize stewardship of the growing areas once the renovation is complete.
- **Parent champions.** Oftentimes, parents are best positioned to lead schoolyard-greening efforts, especially if they have a background in design, community engagement, fundraising, law, or education. Parents often have more volunteer time to help shepherd the project than teachers or other school district staff.
- **Nonprofit partner.** If possible, bring in a nonprofit partner to help support the project. The partner could be one that is skilled in creating Community Schoolyards or aligned with the outcomes you seek to create. For example, the Healthy Schools Campaign's Space to Grow program in Chicago works on every phase of schoolyard transformation, including design, fundraising, stewardship, and activation.
- **Community partner.** Often, schools have existing partnerships with community-based social service organizations that already provide after-school recreational and academic programming for students and parents. Such organizations are invested in supporting the health of the families they serve and are key collaborators in the fundraising, outreach, advocacy, design, and activation phases of the project.
- **After-school providers.** Bring in staff from after-school programs or a local camp that uses the school campus to help program the schoolyard during out-of-school time. They can also support outreach, stewardship, and activation.

## STEP 1B. HOLD THE PROJECT KICKOFF MEETING

The project kickoff meeting is an important opportunity to gather your team together, make introductions, and decide how the project will move forward. Over the course of the meeting, your project team should come to an agreement on the following items:

- **Assign roles and responsibilities.** After completing Step 1A, you should have a good understanding of why you chose each team member based on their skills and expertise. During the project kickoff meeting, make these roles and responsibilities explicit so that each team member understands what is expected of them and what they should expect of the other team members.

Team members should fill the following roles:

- **Community schoolyard lead.** The lead will bring everyone together and make sure all steps are moving forward in a timely manner. Successful leads can be a parent, teacher, or nonprofit partner. The lead will be responsible for building the team, making sure that your structure is ready to solicit funds, and confirming that school district requirements are being met during the design and construction phase.
- **Chief fundraiser.** The fundraiser will apply for grants and solicit private gifts and should be aware of school district policies regarding capital and financial donations.
- **Schoolyard designer.** If one of your parents is a designer, architect, landscape architect, or civil engineer, your project can benefit from their experience in place-making. Recruit them to join your team or bring them in from your community. Some nonprofit partners like The Trust for Public Land bring community-based design experience and can help navigate multiple steps of the process. A parent who is a site contractor can be tapped to better understand pavement removal, excavation, and landscape installation costs.
- **Engagement coordinator.** The engagement coordinator makes sure that the community, school, and staff are engaged during the design

process and stewardship. The engagement coordinator may manage the email list, website, or other forms of digital and in-person outreach.

- **Develop a preliminary budget.** Developing a detailed budget will come later in the process, in [STEP 12](#). However, having a rough early budget

figure in mind is still important, since it will help you to make sure that the design options you are considering are realistic. A rough figure will also give you a target to shoot for as you approach funders.

## STEP 2.

# SEEK EARLY APPROVAL FROM THE SCHOOL DISTRICT, THE CITY, AND KEY PARTNERS



Getting early buy-in from your school district is a crucial step in making your community schoolyard a reality. © AMBER GARRETT

Remember, your schoolyard is school district property, so you must receive written permission from the school district, and possibly from the municipal council (or equivalent), in order to advance the project. Some school districts are aware of the multiple benefits to community health and the educational setting that come from Community Schoolyards. These school districts may be able to provide additional support. In other cases, you may have to educate your school district about these benefits. Important requests to bring before your school district at this phase include the following:

- Ask the school district for **approval** for you to move forward with [STEP 3](#) through [STEP 10](#) and promise to go back to the school district for approval at [STEP 12](#), to approve the concept plan and budget.
- Ask the school district to **assign a staff member** to stay connected with your team during the course of the project.
- Ask your school district for a **financial commitment** to the project. Some school districts have prioritized open space investments and are able to provide a capital commitment and/or support design services.
- Advocate for your schoolyard to be **open to the public** after school hours to maximize the community use and benefit of this space. This can be formalized through a shared-use agreement between the school district and the city. Community members bring tremendous support for your schoolyard. They can be champions for your school, they can help raise funds during the campaign, and after construction they can help care for and activate the schoolyard during the summer and school breaks.
- Request **design standards** from the school district if they exist, and understand the level of **environmental due diligence required** for projects that involve excavation.

- Ask the municipal planning department whether **municipal approval** is required. It is possible that a courtesy submission to the planning board for review and approval is necessary. This is important to know as it will affect your project schedule and

possibly the consultant(s) who may be required. Ask about which plans the city would like to review (e.g., concept design, construction documents, etc.) and which city agency should receive them.

### STEP 3.

## CREATE A FUNDRAISING PACKET

After you have approval of your concept, you are ready to prepare the fundraising packet. The fundraising packet will likely include the following:

- **Project narrative.** Put together a high-level narrative about your project that describes the features as well as the need.
- **Financial assessment.** Prepare a funding section that includes your budget, how much you have in hand, how much you expect to receive, and how much you need.
- **Photos.** Select one or two choice photos of the existing schoolyard that show the need.

- **Letter of support from the school district.** See [STEP 13](#).
- **Concept images.** Since fundraising needs to start early in the process, you will probably not have design graphics to share. Adding photos from other successful community schoolyard projects can at least give funders a sense of the types of improvements to be made.
- **Rendering.** Later in the process, work with your designer to create one or more renderings. This can be a colored 2-D or 3-D drawing that shows the beauty of the new schoolyard. This may include perspective sketches, mockups, or images of new features from existing installations.



LEFT: Including a “before” photo of the existing conditions can help demonstrate the project’s need to potential funders. Later, you can use these photos in before-and-after shots to show the transformation. © JULIETH RIVERA, TROY FARMER; RIGHT: Your fundraising packet will evolve as the project progresses. Adding a rendering later in the process can help funders see the potential of the schoolyard and, when coupled with a current photo, can show the dramatic transformation that is possible. This community schoolyard project at Alexander Adaire School in Philadelphia was a community-led design process, implemented by The Trust for Public Land, School District of Philadelphia and Philadelphia Water Department. This concept design and the rendering were carried out by local community member, Ian Smith Design Group, working on a pro-bono basis. © RENDERING BY KIRK FROMM

## STEP 4.

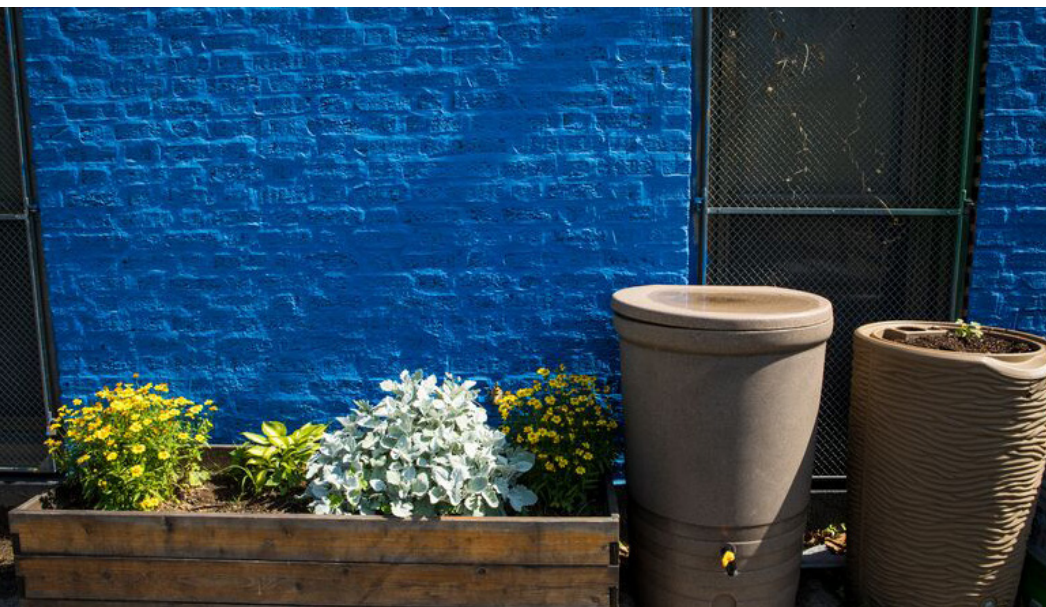
# FUNDRAISE

To ensure a full spectrum of support, try to secure funds for the design, construction, and stewardship of your schoolyard. Seek out public funding opportunities through federal, state, and local grants. Research private foundations that are active in your city and prepare a case for support. Your school district may be able to guide you to funding opportunities. Fundraising in partnership with other school nonprofits is a great strategy for widening support. Hold events such as

dinners and auctions to support your schoolyard. You can also set up an online funding platform, such as GoFundMe or a Classy campaign. You may be able to fundraise in stages. For example, you may choose to fundraise for the participatory design and conceptual plan phase first, and later you can use the beautiful rendering to inspire partners and help attract construction funding. Have fun fundraising!

## STEP 5.

# SECURE ADDITIONAL PARTNERS



Incorporating green infrastructure features like rain barrels and detention basins will make your project more sustainable. A stormwater management partner can help figure out the best opportunities. © JENNA STAMM

We recommend that you seek additional partners throughout the entire process of creating and activating the community schoolyard. Partners will make your project stronger, provide additional resources, and help to activate the space after construction.

- **Stormwater management partners.** If your city is under a consent decree (a federally enforceable agreement that resolves violations of the Clean Water Act), you may have the opportunity to bring in funding to manage stormwater by creating rain gardens or detention basins. In addition to bringing



ABOVE: The best schoolyard projects use art to enhance the space. Working with an artist can enrich the project and provide an exciting opportunity for students. © JOSHUA DOBAY; RIGHT, TOP: Community Schoolyards can play a major role in supporting health. Are there health-focused organizations in your area that fund parks, trails, or health and fitness programs? Invite them to participate! © FRANCES M. ROBERTS; BOTTOM: Physical education partners engaged early in the Community Schoolyards process may be more likely to provide programming at your site after construction has been completed. They may also be able to help locate funding. © FRANCES M. ROBERTS

in significant funding, these elements could beautify the schoolyard and provide long-term support for maintenance. For example, in New York City, a consent decree allowed the Department of Environmental Protection to allocate significant funds toward a Community Schoolyards partnership with The Trust for Public Land, supporting the inclusion of green infrastructure elements like rain gardens, trees, pervious turf fields, bioswales, and porous pathways. The 49 green infrastructure playgrounds implemented to date capture a total of 40.9 million gallons of stormwater per year. If you decide to manage stormwater, make sure that this scope is included in your design services contract and that your school district is on board.



- **Artistic partner.** Working with an artist on the project adds context to the overall design and place-making. Artists are great to include during the community design phase because they add creative engagement and thoughtful analysis. Artists can help generate community-specific improvements such as murals, sculptures, or installations.
- **Physical education partners.** Sports organizations and other physical education partners can not only offer programming support once the schoolyard is built, they also may want to support projects financially. New York Road Runners has supported many Community Schoolyards that include running tracks.
- **Health partners.** Public health foundations, hospitals, insurance companies, and wellness and disease research nonprofits typically share the public health and wellness goals that Community Schoolyards help meet and may be able to provide funding.

- **Environmental education partners.** Schoolyards offer a tremendous setting for hands-on, nature-based learning. Many environmental educators would be thrilled to support the project and bring out resources for activation and learning. Sometimes a partnership with an environmental education partner can help you secure a grant for the project. The Horticultural Society of New York and the New York Botanical Garden have helped provide gardening programming at our schoolyards.
- **STEM partners.** Bringing in partners from the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math can make your schoolyard a richer educational environment. In New York, The Trust for Public Land has partnered with UrbanMathTrails to create a Math in the Playground curriculum for K–5th graders.



Environmental education is increasingly being recognized as a vital component of every child’s development. Look for organizations doing this work in your area and invite them to join the project team. © JENNA STAMM

## STEP 6. SECURE A DESIGNER



Your designer can help with everything from community engagement to construction oversight. In this photo, a student at Abram Stevens Hewitt School explains to classmates, The Trust for Public Land’s Julieth Rivera, and landscape architect Melissa Ix why he chose a particular playground design for the upcoming Daniel Garcia Playground in the Bronx. © TROY FARMER

Your designer can help with community-based design activities, programming, budgeting, and rendering and advance you through all phases of the design and construction. You can secure a design consultant to help with all phases, or you can work through early concept designs with your partners in the community and bring in the professional designers later. A few options when looking for design assistance include the following:

- **Concept design volunteer.** You may be able to recruit a parent or community member to support early design activities if they are an architect, landscape architect, or civil engineer. They may be able to provide early design services on a volunteer basis, but it is advisable to compensate a professional after you have developed a concept.
- **Nonprofit Partnership.** Some nonprofit partners, like The Trust for Public Land, bring community-based design experience and have deep experience in designing and building Community Schoolyards. Well-experienced nonprofit partners can help navigate all steps of the process.



- **Turnkey.** Many playground manufacturers offer turn-key solutions if you purchase equipment from them directly. These contracts are also known as cooperative purchasing contracts. Be aware that they will prioritize selling playground equipment over designing more passive elements, such as gardens and green spaces. That said, the turn-key model can be an efficient option if the manufacturer is approved by your school district, knows how to navigate local permitting requirements, and is able to provide iterative support as you go through the design process.
- **Student designers.** Consider soliciting a local university that has a design program such as landscape architecture or architecture. You may be able to find volunteer design students who can support the early design process. Be aware that

design students are early in their career and may propose designs that exceed budget or require complex construction. Student designers should not take a project past the “concept” phase.

- **Professional designers.** For the full support, professional advice, and required construction management services throughout the project, you can contract with a design professional, such as a landscape architect, architect, or civil engineer. The design professional will guide you through all steps of the process and support holistic design. Be aware that there will be a cost for a design professional’s services that you should be ready to fund. [www.asla.org](http://www.asla.org) will have a list of licensed landscape architects working in your region. More information on the scope of design services is outlined in the steps below.

## STEP 7.

# COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT

A community schoolyard is an asset for the school and the entire community. A successful community schoolyard is designed in a comprehensive process that allows for multiple voices, priorities, and perspectives. Establishing a common vision will bring everyone together around a shared rallying point. Doing this early in the process will help everyone involved to unify on common goals through the design and development process.

At the Southwark School in Philadelphia, the diverse community established the vision “Our Park: Weaving Together Cultures,” in which the schoolyard serves as a park for the many ethnic groups who reside in the neighborhood. This vision will ensure that the final project will be well used and cared for into the future.

To develop a comprehensive vision, we recommend you work closely with the following groups:

- **School teachers and staff.** Schedule a time to talk to teachers during their professional development time to brainstorm ways they might take students



Establishing a shared vision for the project together with the larger school community will help give your process direction as you move forward.

© LORENZO DAWKINS

outside for learning. You will be surprised to find that many teachers, beyond science and physical education, will be excited to use this new amenity. Come to them with questions and listen deeply to what they have to say.

- **Students.** Children are terrific to involve in the design process. The Trust for Public Land’s signature

Participatory Design process engages students in all the important design decision-making. We have found that they have the capacity and creativity to produce unique, high-quality designs that serve the entire community. The design process is also an amazing hands-on, project-based learning opportunity that can foster a tremendous sense of pride and accomplishment once the schoolyard is constructed. Follow [this link](#) to learn more about The Trust for Public Land's Participatory Design process through a case study at William Dick Elementary in Philadelphia.

- **Parents.** Often the schoolyard doubles as the plaza or “common” for parents when they drop off or pick up students. This place, made better for socializing and playing, can become a tremendous asset for building stronger connections within your parent

community. Engaging parents in the design process is important for long-term use, may help recruit additional support for the project, and will help cultivate stewardship long after the project is complete.

- **Community.** Schoolyards, when designed for the community, have the potential to become a center of community life. When they are designed to welcome neighbors into the space after school, on weekends, and during the summer, they bustle with activity and improve the quality of life for your entire neighborhood. Convene neighbors, community stakeholders, and local businesses to help build the vision for the schoolyard. Reach out to your local housing authority or day care or senior center to bring as many folks into the process as possible. When people are engaged early, they care forever.

## STEP 8.

# BEGIN THE PARTICIPATORY DESIGN PROCESS



What will go in your community schoolyard? Vegetables or pollinator gardens? Soccer or basketball? There are a hundred great options, but figuring out your community's top priorities will help to guide the design process in the next steps. © DARCY KIEFEL

## STEP 9A. CREATE A WISH LIST FOR YOUR SCHOOLYARD

Your wish list will become the program for your schoolyard—a list of uses and considerations that will ultimately inform the final amenities that you include in your plan. For instance, a pre-K program may include a toddler playground. Developing a wish list is a creative process, and it is important to have multiple voices. Be sure to engage students, community members, and school staff in the process.

The wish list process can also be a good time to start collecting names and contact information for your Friends of the Playground group. While the steps of formalizing this group come much later in the process ([STEP 23](#)), if you start collecting contacts now, they will be ready to go as you get closer to opening your playground.

## STEP 8B. DECIDE ON YOUR DESIGN PRIORITIES

After community visioning, you will have a good sense of priorities regarding the final use of the schoolyard. To ensure that your vision for the yard includes something for everyone and will be well maintained, use this checklist to narrow down your wish list. Is your schoolyard design:

- **Equitable.** A well-rounded schoolyard design will serve everyone. It is important that the design is balanced with features that support use by multiple age groups and accommodates all physical abilities and interests. Include categories that resonate with your community, either by age and gender or by activities like play, sports, learning, socializing, and art.
- **Nature rich.** Make sure you plan for the schoolyard to become nature-rich. Nature play and garden classrooms are a great way to infuse nature into schoolyard use. Plan to install plenty of trees and to de-pave some hardscaped areas. Some nature-rich landscapes include the following:
  - **Pollinator gardens** are planted with flowers that provide nectar or pollen for a wide range of pollinating insects.
  - **Vegetable gardens** can provide fruits and vegetables for school lunches.
  - **Sensory gardens** are designed to stimulate the senses through the use of plants and materials that engage a person's sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. These types of gardens are particularly beneficial to people who have sensory processing issues, including autism and other disabilities.
  - **Native habitat gardens** benefit the environment by supporting habitat for wildlife. They also reduce air and water pollution since they require less fertilizer, pesticide, and mowing than most landscapes.
  - **Urban micro-forests** involve planting native species close to each other so that the greens receive sunlight only from the top and grow upward rather than sideways.



TOP: A well-rounded schoolyard design will serve everyone. Is your design providing opportunities for people of all age groups, physical abilities, and interests? © ALLANA WESLEY WHITE; BOTTOM: Engaging students in the design process builds a sense of ownership and pride. © JOE SORRENTINO

- **Flowering trees** create color in your garden and support pollinators.
- **Shade-tree groves** can help cool a hot schoolyard.
- **Evergreen buffers** can help create a visual screen from the surrounding area.
- **Rain gardens** are planted basins that absorb runoff from impervious surfaces like roofs and concrete.
- **Realistic.** Filter program elements by what is realistic. What will be approved by your school district? What will be approved by your school's principal? What will provide excitement and challenges while still being safe for multiple

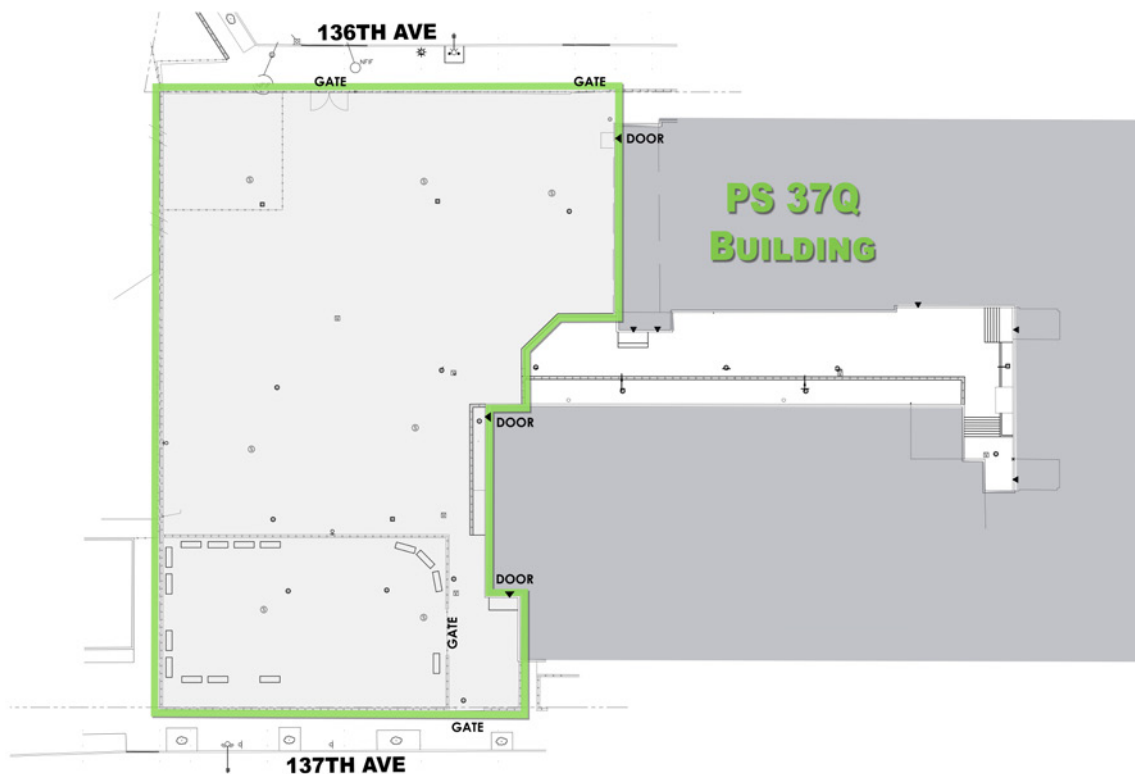
students to use at once? Make sure you talk to the custodial lead and crew who will be tending to the daily maintenance needs of the school. Understand what daily maintenance currently involves and let them know that the schoolyard will be more complex once it is renovated. Be sure they participate in some way in the design process, especially when time comes to design the garden, locate the trash receptacles, and work on the maintenance plan. Custodians should see and feel supportive of any concept plan.

- **Fundable.** The final program will help establish your budget and help you to design concept options.

Make sure your final program is feasible within a reasonable budget.

- **Maintainable.** While plantings and trees are what help make a schoolyard green, make sure your final design list is based on realistic expectations about schoolyard maintenance. Assess interest and capacity for care of new trees, gardens, and landscaped areas in terms of water source, size of planted areas, and local expertise. Remember, vegetable gardens need tending during the summer when schools are typically not in session and new trees need watering two or three times per week during warm months in order to get established.

## STEP 9. SECURE A BASE MAP



**PS 37Q  
CYNTHIA JENKINS SCHOOL**  
179-37 137TH AVENUE, QUEENS, NY 11434  
BASE MAP



SCALE  
1 inch = 10 feet  
2020-10



Finding a base plan for your site is necessary before getting started on your design. Ask your school district to provide a base map, and if it cannot, work with your designer to create one.

Your schoolyard program and vision will need to fit on the existing site. Your school district may have drawings on file. If so, you will want a physical copy of the full-scale drawings and a copy of the digital drawings, in CAD, an architectural software. If these

drawings do not exist, you can work with your designer to develop a base plan from existing drawings. It is also advisable to get a site survey, including a mark-out of existing underground utilities.

## STEP 10.

# CREATE DRAFT CONCEPT PLANS



Kids need access to nature! Nature play and garden classrooms are a great way to infuse nature into schoolyard use. © JENNA STAMM

A concept plan is a rough design for your schoolyard, drawn in color and easy for a layperson to understand. It is not as precise as the finalized designs to be developed in [STEP 12](#), but it should incorporate the elements from your program in a way that could realistically fit on your site. Plan to develop a couple of options for the school and community to review. Important considerations:

- **Design for nature.** Schoolyard greening is not only good for the educational setting, it's good for the environment. Include nature and sustainability in your design. Design to capture stormwater in gardens and tree pits and permeable surfaces like pavers and turf fields. Clean the air and reduce heat islands by adding many trees, creating low-maintenance native gardens, and de-paving

hardscape that is not essential. Amenities should come from local providers, where possible, to reduce transportation. Amenities should be sourced from manufacturers who commit to sustainability and do not generate harmful by-products during manufacturing. Use cool pavements to reduce urban heat gain.

- **Design by students.** The Trust for Public Land guides students through the process of creating concept options for the schoolyard. This is an amazing hands-on, project-based learning opportunity for students and builds a sense of ownership and pride in those who will use the yard the most. If you have a teacher, volunteer, or nonprofit partner willing to work with students, your design will be the better for it.
- **Design for budget.** You don't want to set unrealistic expectations of what the schoolyard will be when it's complete. Make sure your concepts are designed with a target budget in mind. For example, don't

show your community a \$500,000 piece of custom play equipment if your budget is \$500,000.

- **Design for school logistics.** Let's face it, the schoolyard also serves utilitarian functions. It's sometimes the only place for delivering supplies like lunches. It's a functional backdrop to school facility maintenance and an important place of egress each day and during an emergency. All these uses are important to plan for. Understand the frequency of vehicular access and advocate for a separation between students and vehicles when possible. Schoolyards are sometimes the only place where schools can locate their dumpster. Ideally you do not want vehicles driving across your schoolyards, so it may be worth considering whether or not the dumpster can be moved. Review your fire code to make sure schoolyard improvements will not block access to the building during an emergency.

## STEP 11.

# CONCEPT OPTIONS REVIEWED AND REFINED BY SCHOOLYARD COMMUNITY

Bring concept options to the schoolyard community (school staff, students, parents, teachers, partners, and community members) and solicit feedback. It is a good practice to find a forum where everyone can meet once or twice in the same place. This will help bring people together and highlight shared priorities. Solicit

responses to the design options so your designer can make adjustments. Once you understand which elements of each option community members like and don't like, you can combine different elements to incorporate the best of every option.

## STEP 12.

# FINALIZE CONCEPT DESIGN, COST ESTIMATE, AND PROJECT BUDGET

Once the community has selected a preferred design direction, combining favored design elements from the earlier concepts, it is time for your designer to develop the final concept plan, synthesizing the community's input into one final rendering.

Once the concept design is complete, your designer should create a construction cost estimate. This will in turn help you to create your project budget. Your project budget is the combined cost of the construction and the design services and testing. Your project team

should keep an overall project budget that includes the construction cost estimate plus all the costs associated with design, including professional services for design, survey, environmental engineering, and testing. Your project budget should include both design services and the capital budget. The capital budget is the cost to do construction; this will include area-specific breakouts of construction cost, line items for demolition, materials, labor, general conditions, overhead and profit, and contingencies.



Using the feedback received in the previous step, work with your designer to finalize the concept design.

**EM Stanton Schoolyard - Opinion of Cost**

					Allocations		
Demolition	#	Unit	Unit cost	Cost	NON-GSI	GSI	Alternate
E+S - Compost Sock	166	LF	\$ 15.00	\$ 2,490.00	\$ 2,490.00		
E+S - RCE	1	LS	\$ 3,500.00	\$ 3,500.00	\$ 3,500.00		
E+S - Inlet Protection	1	EA	\$ 175.00	\$ 175.00	\$ 175.00		
Construction Fence	277	LF	\$ 6.00	\$ 1,662.00	\$ 1,662.00		
Sawcut - concrete removal	550	LF	\$ 5.50	\$ 3,025.00		\$ 3,025.00	
Remove concrete - PWD related	4447	SF	\$ 2.50	\$ 11,117.50		\$ 11,117.50	
Remove concrete - remainder of site	3964	SF	\$ 2.50	\$ 9,910.00	\$ 9,910.00		
Concrete Disposal - PWD related	55	CY	\$ 15.00	\$ 825.00		\$ 825.00	
Concrete Disposal - remainder of site	49	CY	\$ 15.00	\$ 735.00	\$ 735.00		
Soil excavation, hauling, disposal - SMP#1-2 (turf)	200.4	CY	\$ 15.00	\$ 3,006.11		\$ 3,006.11	
Soil excavation, hauling, disposal - SMP#1-1 (rain garden)	96.1	CY	\$ 15.00	\$ 1,440.83		\$ 1,440.83	
Soil excavation, hauling, disposal - planting beds	7.0	CY	\$ 15.00	\$ 104.44	\$ 104.44		
Soil excavation, hauling, disposal - Overflow Trench	12.7	CY	\$ 15.00	\$ 190.00		\$ 190.00	
Soil excavation, hauling, disposal - Playground Footings	10.0	CY	\$ 15.00	\$ 150.00	\$ 150.00		
Infiltration Testing	1	LS	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 2,500.00		\$ 2,500.00	
<b>TOTAL DEMOLITION</b>				<b>\$ 40,830.89</b>	<b>\$ 18,726.44</b>	<b>\$ 22,104.44</b>	<b>\$ -</b>
Hardscape	#	Unit	Unit cost	Cost	NON-GSI	GSI	Alternate
BASKETBALL - STRIPING	1	LS	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00		
Track Painting	2042	SF	\$ 5.75	\$ 11,741.50	\$ 11,741.50		
Philly Map Painting	500	SF	\$ 5.75	\$ 2,875.00	\$ 2,875.00		
Full Depth Asphalt	412.4	SY	\$ 60.00	\$ 24,746.67	\$ 24,746.67		
PIP SAFETY SURFACE w stone	1972	SF	\$ 19.00	\$ 37,468.00	\$ 37,468.00		
Turf fabric and Pad	1546	SF	\$ 20.00	\$ 30,920.00	\$ 30,920.00		
Curb at Turf Field	160	LF	\$ 25.00	\$ 4,000.00	\$ 4,000.00		
G-max testing	1	LS	\$ 2,750.00	\$ 2,750.00	\$ 2,750.00		
Clean Washed Stone - SMP#1-2 (turf)	200.4	CY	\$ 60.00	\$ 12,024.44		\$ 12,024.44	
Clean Washed Stone - SMP#1-1 (rain garden)	41.2	CY	\$ 60.00	\$ 2,470.00		\$ 2,470.00	
Geotextile - SMP#1-2 (turf)	200	SF	\$ 0.75	\$ 150.31		\$ 150.31	
Geotextile - SMP#1-1 (rain garden)	96.1	SF	\$ 0.75	\$ 72.04		\$ 72.04	
Conveyance of parking DA to RG	1	LS	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00		\$ 10,000.00	
Observation Well	1	EA	\$ 700.00	\$ 700.00		\$ 700.00	
Clean Out	1	EA	\$ 750.00	\$ 750.00		\$ 750.00	
Overflow Inlet	1	EA	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00		\$ 5,000.00	
Connection to street	1	EA	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00		\$ 5,000.00	
Sidewalk and street repair	1	EA	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00		\$ 5,000.00	
DI Pipe Allowance	20	LF	\$ 175.00	\$ 3,500.00		\$ 3,500.00	
Underdrainage - SMP#1-2 (turf)	80	LF	\$ 7.50	\$ 600.00		\$ 600.00	
Underdrainage - SMP#1-1 (rain garden)	80	LF	\$ 7.50	\$ 600.00		\$ 600.00	
<b>TOTAL HARDSCAPE</b>				<b>\$ 161,367.96</b>	<b>\$ 115,501.17</b>	<b>\$ 45,866.79</b>	<b>\$ -</b>
Amenities	#	Unit	Unit cost	Cost	NON-GSI	GSI	Alternate
Basketball board, rim and net	1	EA	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00			\$ 1,000.00
Allowance for liner seating along building and planter	1	LS	\$ 18,000.00	\$ 18,000.00	\$ 18,000.00		
3' cl fence mesh, posts, installed	110	LF	\$ 45.00	\$ 4,950.00	\$ 4,950.00		
chain link gate	2	EA	\$ 750.00	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00		
Berliner Trii - procure and ship	1	LS	\$ 46,500.00	\$ 46,500.00	\$ 46,500.00		
Kompan Stella Nova	1	LS	\$ 5,650.00	\$ 5,650.00	\$ 5,650.00		
Kompan Blazer	1	EA	\$ 3,974.00	\$ 3,974.00	\$ 3,974.00		
Playground Install (equip 15%)	1	EA	\$ 8,418.60	\$ 8,418.60	\$ 8,418.60		
Allowance Trash and Recycling with bball hoop - ALT	1	EA	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 7,500.00			\$ 7,500.00
Picnic tables, installed with footings	2	EA	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00		
ADA Picnic tables, installed with footings	1	EA	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 2,500.00		
Rules and interpretive signage - ALT	1	EA	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00			\$ 1,000.00
Bike rack, installed with footings - ALT	1	EA	\$ 1,750.00	\$ 1,750.00			\$ 1,750.00
<b>TOTAL AMENITIES</b>				<b>\$ 107,742.60</b>	<b>\$ 96,492.60</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 11,250.00</b>
Landscape	#	Unit	Unit cost	Cost	NON-GSI	GSI	Alternate
Perennials - 1 gallon (3' O.C.) (rg)	65	EA	\$ 12.50	\$ 812.50		\$ 812.50	
Shrubs - 5 gal (rg)	12	EA	\$ 100.00	\$ 1,200.00		\$ 1,200.00	
Canopy Trees - 2.5" caliper (rg)	3	EA	\$ 600.00	\$ 1,800.00		\$ 1,800.00	
Understory trees - 2.5" caliper (rg)	2	EA	\$ 600.00	\$ 1,200.00		\$ 1,200.00	
Canopy Trees - 3.5" caliper (tree planter)	3	EA	\$ 800.00	\$ 2,400.00	\$ 2,400.00		
Shrubs - 5 gal (Planting bed)	5	EA	\$ 100.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00		
Planting soil (tree planter)	13.9	CY	\$ 60.00	\$ 835.56	\$ 835.56		
Planting Soil (garden beds)	11.1	CY	\$ 60.00	\$ 666.67	\$ 666.67		
Stormwater soil - SMP# 1-1	54.9	CY	\$ 60.00	\$ 3,293.33		\$ 3,293.33	
mulch (planter)	20.9	SY	\$ 6.31	\$ 131.81	\$ 131.81		
mulch (rain garden)	82.33	SY	\$ 6.31	\$ 519.52		\$ 519.52	
<b>TOTAL LANDSCAPE</b>				<b>\$ 13,359.39</b>	<b>\$ 4,534.03</b>	<b>\$ 8,825.36</b>	<b>\$ -</b>
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>				<b>\$ 323,300.84</b>	<b>\$ 235,254.24</b>	<b>\$ 76,796.59</b>	
General Conditions / OHP				15%	\$ 48,495.13		
Bond				2%	\$ 6,466.02		
Contingency				15.0%	\$ 56,739.30		
<b>GRANT SUBTOTALS</b>				<b>\$ 111,700.44</b>	<b>\$ 346,954.68</b>	<b>\$ 76,796.59</b>	<b>\$ 11,250</b>
<b>GRANT TOTAL</b>					<b>\$</b>		<b>435,001.27</b>

Once the concept design is complete, your designer should create a construction cost estimate. This cost estimate, taken from a 2014 schoolyard project in Philadelphia, shows the work to be completed by the contractor with unit take-offs and unit costs. Please note that the cost of these elements can vary greatly over time and by location.



## STEP 13.

# SEEK CONCEPT DESIGN APPROVAL FROM YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT

Submit your concept plan, preliminary budget, and letter of support from your principal to the approving authority at the school district. The approving authority will likely be high-level staff from the capital program department or construction authority. The school district may want to include staff from risk management in the review. This step is essential in securing the following:

- **Project support.** You may want to draft a template letter of support for the school district to modify, place on its own letterhead, and sign. You will use the letter of support to secure grants for the project.
- **Approval milestones.** Your school district may want your team to submit the project at iterative design phases, depending on the level of complexity.
- **School district design and development standards.** Each school district will have different standards, and many school districts will not have



Once the concept plan and budget are finalized, it is time to ask the school district to sign off. © J. AVERY WHAM

standards at all. You do not want to find out what the standards are after you have completed the construction documents. Ask about them early in the process.

## STEP 14.

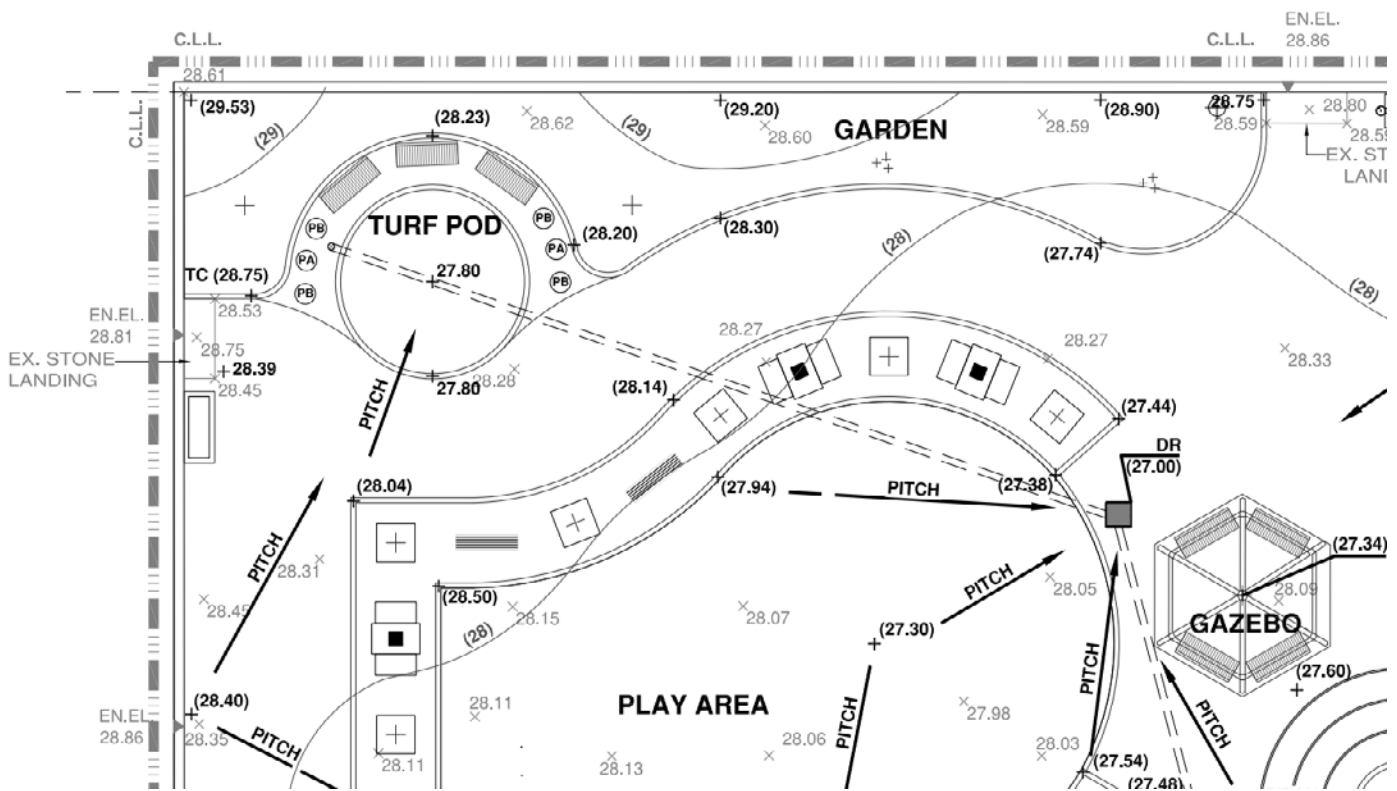
# CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS

If you have been working with a designer on a pro-bono basis until this point, you will want to fund the next phases of design services because they are time intensive and require professional registration and professional insurance. A few key concepts you should know include the following:

- **Phases of design.** Your designer will advance the concept design through more detailed phases of development, often broken down into schematic design, design development, and construction documents phases. After each of these phases, the design gets closer to being final.
- **Design contracting.** The AIA B101 Owner-Architect Agreement is a useful contracting document to manage the design process. The AIA (American Institute of Architects) contract outlines the roles of the owner and the architect and the delivery required at each phase.
- **Approvals.** Your school district and local permitting agency may want to review the design documents at each phase. They will also want to review signed and sealed drawings once complete. The entire process can take many months, depending on the complexity of the project. See [Step 16](#).

- **Final documents.** The final construction documents will include a signed and sealed full-scale drawing set and a project manual with technical

specifications, bidding information, contracting information, and procurement requirements often provided by your school district and partners.



Construction documents lay out the specifics of how your community schoolyard is to be built. A professional designer should be hired to handle the process. © STUDIO HIP LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

## STEP 15. PLANT AND TREE SELECTION

When thinking about plants for your schoolyard, choose plants that are hardy, safe to have in a schoolyard (e.g., avoid thorns), appropriate to soil and light conditions, and relatively easy to care for. Check the USDA Plants Database website for plant toxicity (<https://plants.usda.gov/characteristics.html>). Keep the plant palette simple. It may be tempting to select a host of pollinator plants. Instead, select three to five species and group plants together in swaths so identification and maintenance are easier, especially during weeding and fall cutting back. Understand that

perennials will need much more care than shrubs and trees. Grasses will need to be cut back in late winter. Avoid meadow seed mixes; weeds will invariably enter the plantings and are difficult to distinguish in a meadow planting. Do not expect parents, teachers, or custodial staff to have advanced horticultural knowledge. If possible, choose natives and include pollinators, plants with sensory interest, and a variety of colors and textures. It is a good practice to work with your community to select plants, noting that the selected plants could change based on availability.



Choose plants that are hardy, safe, and appropriate for local conditions. ©ANNIE BANG

## STEP 16. FINAL PARTNER REVIEW

Submit your construction documents to the school district, public funding partners, and other partners as required for final approval and permission to bid.

Anticipate at minimum a couple of weeks for review. Solicit approval in writing from public partners so you can keep a clear paper trail of approvals.

## STEP 17. PERMITTING

Depending on local codes, you may be required to obtain construction permits. Ask your designer to do code research during the schematic design phase to anticipate the requirements. Ideally, you will have hired a designer/landscape architect with experience building in your locality. Permitting agencies will

want to review a variety of details, including Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, footing design, sediment control details, and many other aspects of the design. You can work with your designer to prepare permit drawings and drop them off for the selected contractor to pick up.

## STEP 18.

# BID OUT THE PROJECT

Once you have final, approved construction documents and the proper permits to begin construction, it is time to find a contractor. Work with your school district to understand its bidding requirements. In some cases, you might have to go through a public bidding process. In other cases, you may have more flexibility. You will want to work with your design professional on securing the contractor. With government-funded projects, this usually happens by inviting

contractors to place bids on the construction; the contractor with the lowest bid wins the job. However, private funding may give you more flexibility in contracting. Should you have the flexibility to select a contractor, we advise you to be very careful about whom you hire. Review bids carefully and check references. Some contractors are well respected and diligent, while others will leave you with a mess. School districts often hold lists of approved contractors.

## STEP 19.

# CONTRACTING

We do not recommend that community groups enter into a contract without legal guidance. Some school districts prefer to hold the construction contract themselves. We recommend working closely with your school district regardless of who holds the contract. If you hold the construction contract, make sure you are well aware of the risks, responsibilities, and rights

associated with construction. Whoever holds the contract should also hold the levels of insurance required by the school district and have a right of entry or license agreement to do the work. Depending on requirements, you may need to work with a lawyer to set up agreements.

## STEP 20.

# CONSTRUCTION

Ideally construction happens during the summer months, but this is often not possible for complex projects with many components. It is important that your selected contractor follows local regulations and maximizes security around the site during construction. You will want to retain your design professional to provide construction administration services during the construction phase. This includes reviewing submittals, inspections, and walk-throughs to develop the punch list, preparing the certificate of substantial completion, and signing off on final completion. Schedule on-site meetings every other week to track progress.



Construction is an exciting time. Work with your design professional to ensure that construction is moving forward according to the design and schedule and arrange for regular on-site meetings. © MAE WOLFE

## STEP 21.

# CELEBRATE



It's time to celebrate! An opening celebration is an opportunity to thank everyone involved in the project, enjoy watching the kids play, and allow the student designers to showcase what they've learned in the process. ©TIMOTHY SCHENCK

Congratulations! You did it! Celebrate this milestone by scheduling an opening celebration to thank all the people involved and have fun watching the kids play! This can be an excellent opportunity to thank stakeholders in the community and showcase what the

student designers learned in the process. We often have the school plan a short performance given by a dance team, choir, or band to bring a sense of place and extra joy to the event. This is an important milestone, but the work has really just begun.

## STEP 22.

# OUTDOOR LEARNING

Your schoolyard is ready for use. Work with your principal and teachers to get students outside to learn. We recommend planning a couple of training sessions with teachers during their professional development

time to familiarize them with the practice of outdoor learning. The Trust for Public Land has a suite of learning resources to help connect students to outdoor learning, including garden-based lessons,



Your community schoolyard offers ample opportunities for hands-on, project-based learning and provides students with different learning styles a new way to engage with curricular content. ©ALEXA HOYER

math activities that use the entire playground space, green infrastructure education, and general tips and guidance for bringing any subject to an outdoor classroom. The playground offers ample opportunities for hands-on, project-based learning and offers students with different learning styles a new way to engage with curricular content. Research the informal education resources from the museums, gardens, and environmental nonprofits in your city for inspiration and partnership opportunities. Of course, recess and PE will also be enhanced and enriched by the new amenities.

## STEP 23.

# ACTIVATING YOUR SCHOOLYARD

## STEP 23A. OPEN TO THE COMMUNITY

Your new schoolyard is a tremendous asset not only for the students, but also for the whole community. However, people who are not already part of the school community may feel uneasy about using the schoolyard, and might need to be invited into the space. Creating an entry sign for your new schoolyard is an absolutely crucial part of the process. It may be tempting to skip this step. Don't! Nationally, The Trust for Public Land has found that an entry sign is one of the most important determinants of how well used a park is. This is even more important for a schoolyard. Since schools are generally off-limits to people who are not students or staff, other community members need to be invited into the space. Are community members allowed in the space? During school hours or only after the school day ends? What types of activities are allowed? By providing an entry sign with the space's hours and rules, you can clear up this confusion. The sign is also an opportunity to recognize community members, parents, staff, and funders who made the project a reality.

It is also important to plan for the different uses of the schoolyard. Hopefully, the space will come to be used for everything from in-school environmental

educational programming, to after school arts classes, to evening adult sports leagues. These diverse uses don't have to cause scheduling conflicts, since they all happen at different times. Using The Trust for Public Lands' [Playground Visioning Tool](#) can help ensure that your schoolyard is well-utilized without being overscheduled. After the schoolyard opens, invite teachers, students, neighbors, after-school program providers, and parents to work through the tool, discussing top priority uses for the site and the best time for each.

## STEP 23B. CREATING A FRIENDS OF THE SCHOOLYARD GROUP

Whether your schoolyard has a history of community use after school or has been closed to the public until now, The Trust for Public Land has found that one of the best ways to encourage your neighbors to take care of your renovated yard is to form a friends of the schoolyard group. The focus of the group is to oversee use and upkeep of the yard and troubleshoot when issues arise. Much like a friends of the park group, the friends of the schoolyard group can plan seasonal events that bring in the community, create a culture of positive activity, and help foster a sense of shared stewardship.



It may sound silly, but a sign is one of the most important parts of your community schoolyard. A sign can welcome community members into the space, lay out the basic rules and hours of use, and educate visitors about the schoolyard environment. If your community schoolyard is open to the public during non-school hours, this needs to be explicitly stated; otherwise, people will be nervous about using the space. ©NANA TAIMOURWHITE

Who should be in your friends of the schoolyard group? Perhaps during the design process, you identified neighbors or civic improvement groups that have ideas for schoolyard use. From the school, the students, teachers, after-school staff, and parents who participated in the design process are natural “seeds” for this group. It is also essential to invite members of the community to participate. You may have met someone from a neighborhood beautification group who offered to help care for the new garden beds or a resident across the street who is worried about unwanted activity in the yard and wants to help plan formal programming. Ask them to join the group and become involved in the schoolyard’s success. The friends of the schoolyard group is a great way to leverage opportunities to positively link the community

to the schoolyard. A broadly representative schoolyard group creates goodwill between school and neighbors, puts more “eyes on the park,” and gives it a better chance of being well used and well-tended over the long term.

It can also be helpful to create a schoolyard leadership committee within the friends group. The committee is different from the larger, extended network of stewards; it is a small, committed group of people who will be lead stewards for your new playground. It will take initiative and motivate others to get involved.

It is important that the friends of the schoolyard group meet regularly to discuss the progress of the schoolyard, brainstorm ideas for events and programs, and facilitate

the implementation of those ideas. If there are issues regarding use or maintenance, the group meetings function as a forum to hear those concerns and brainstorm possible solutions. You may decide to incorporate the schoolyard discussions into an existing framework, such as adding these discussions as a regular agenda item for your school leadership team meetings, where key school leaders are already gathered. Whichever you choose, it is important to find the time to talk about and organize around your schoolyard.

## Meet Regularly

It is important that the schoolyard committee meet regularly to discuss the progress of the schoolyard, brainstorm ideas for events and programs, and facilitate the implementation of those ideas. If there are issues regarding use or maintenance, the schoolyard committee meetings function as a forum to hear those concerns and brainstorm possible solutions.

You may decide to incorporate the schoolyard discussions into an existing framework, such as adding these discussions as a regular agenda item for your school leadership team meetings, where these key school leaders are already gathered. Whichever you choose, it is important to find the time to talk about and organize around your schoolyard.



A Friends of the Schoolyard group is a great way to bring in the community, planning events, fostering a sense of shared stewardship, and troubleshooting when issues arise. © SETH SHERMAN

## STEP 24

# ENSURE REGULAR MAINTENANCE

Ideally, the roles and responsibilities for maintaining the schoolyard should be clearly outlined in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) before beginning a partnership with a school community so that everyone is clear on what will be required to keep the playground thriving. When you partner with a school district, there's no relationship more important to cultivate than that with the custodial engineer, who has eyes on the playground every day! The custodial engineer has already given input on the playground design, especially regarding maintenance needs like

snowplow access and garbage removal. But when the school playground opens, it's a good practice to hold a detailed walk-through, handing over play-equipment warranties, highlighting tree-care needs, and describing how to protect the color-seal art and winterize the drinking fountain. It's important that the custodial engineer knows whom to reach out to when problems arise. The same system should apply to any individual or group taking on playground maintenance. Communication is essential for the speedy handling of issues.





PLAYGROUND MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE													
Description	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Average Frequency
Inspect all ground surfaces and remove debris	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Daily
Hard surface sweeping and/or snow removal	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	As required
Inspect play equipment, site furniture and basketball goals Notify Manufacturer of any deficiencies immediately	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Weekly
Visual inspection of fencing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Weekly
Mulch tree pits and rain garden and raised planters			X								X		As required
Turn on and check drinking fountain and hose bib weather permitting				X	X								Once
Shut down and drain all water lines for drinking fountain and hose bib										X			Once
Inspect/maintain artificial turf Notify Installer of any rips or problems immediately				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		As needed
Check and adjust hoses for watering					X	X	X	X	X				Weekly
Water each tree a minimum of 5 minutes at mulched openings or fill gator bags If temperatures exceed 90 degrees F add a third day						X	X		X				Twice Weekly
Water each tree a minimum of 5 minutes at mulched openings or fill gator bags If temperatures exceed 90 degrees F add a fourth day								X					3 times Weekly
Remove dead leaves from playground area										X	X		As needed
Green Roof remove any debris, water and weed			X	X	X	X	X	X	X				As needed
Storm water infrastructure. Inspect inlets, outlets, pipes and overflows for sediment build up. Keep structures free and clear of debris	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	As needed

Developing a calendar-based maintenance schedule can help make sure your newly planted gardens and trees survive and thrive. This calendar was developed to support new Community Schoolyards in New York City, and may be a helpful model for your own schoolyard.

It may also be possible to create a maintenance partnership with your local parks department, particularly where the schoolyard will be open to the public, since the schoolyard is playing the role of a park. In some cases, formal joint maintenance agreements are reached between the school district and the parks department, establishing how the schoolyard will be used by the public, which maintenance responsibilities the parks department will take on, and which will be carried out by the school.

To make sure gardens are healthy and maintained, develop a calendar-based maintenance schedule. Spring and fall workdays are great ways for parents and kids to get out and enjoy the weather. If vegetable garden beds are part of the plan, identify tasks on the calendar to prepare the beds to be ready for seeds and starter plants when warm weather arrives. Check with the cooperative extension agent from your state land grant institution for assistance.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Congratulations on starting a community schoolyard project. Community Schoolyards can improve your school's learning environment, increase access to outdoor recreation in your community, and create a

healthier environment. You are on your way to an incredible achievement. The road ahead is tough, but we know you can do it! Below, we share a few final thoughts.

## Keep Going!

The Trust for Public Land has been transforming schoolyards for over 25 years. We have worked with more than a dozen school districts around the country and have successfully created over 300 Community Schoolyards to date. We have assembled the best guidance from these experts to help you navigate through the process of transforming an existing underutilized schoolyard into a vibrant community schoolyard.

Does that mean that you cannot create your own community schoolyard? Of course not. Across the country, passionate community members are making a major impact by improving their local schoolyards and parks. We created this guide with them (and you!) in mind. It will take hard work, collaboration, and perseverance, but if you follow the steps outlined in this guide, you can make your community schoolyard a reality. Don't get discouraged by setbacks—they happen to professionals too.



Most community schoolyard teams hit at least a few setbacks along the way. Don't get discouraged! Remember why you started this project in the first place. Your hard work and dedication will create a treasured outdoor destination for your school and community for generations to come. © JENNA STAMM

## Team Work

Many hands make for light work. When community members and stakeholders partner to build a community schoolyard, they can transform a space. Remember that building relationships is a crucial part of this process, and inclusivity will make for a stronger project. When you hit a roadblock, work with your team to figure out how to address it. Remember, your community schoolyard team will grow and evolve as your project progresses. If you hit a problem that your team can't solve, it might be an opportunity to add new members to your team.

## Remember Why You Are Doing This!

Creating close-to-home opportunities to be in nature, play, and socialize will improve the health of your community and make it more resilient to climate change. Your hard work and dedication to this project will create a treasured outdoor destination for your school and community for generations to come.

Community Schoolyards can maximize health and wellness, provide benefits to the community and the environment, and improve learning and quality of life for students. These spaces have the potential to jumpstart a positive relationship with nature and make an impact on the health, learning, and social and emotional lives of young people.

## Have Questions about Community Schoolyards?

Feel free to reach out! Contact Danielle Denk, The Trust for Public Land's National Community Schoolyards™ Initiative Director, [danielle.denk@tpl.org](mailto:danielle.denk@tpl.org), with questions.





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