

Out in Front 2025: Small-scale Interventions

Small Spaces Big Impacts: Design Interventions for Outdoor Learning

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One of the most important interventions landscape architecture can provide for schools are highly effective, usable outdoor classrooms. Existing research suggests that time spent learning outside improves student academic achievement and mental health.¹²³ For the 2025 Out In Front exhibition, our designers take a closer look at three case studies of outdoor classrooms at public schools in the Seattle metro area to identify the connective themes of the interventions that create effective outdoor learning areas.

The three case study examples have unique site conditions, student body populations, and school character. Thorough site analysis and applied research about the effectiveness of nature in education form the basis of each design. Research-based outdoor interventions are threaded intentionally throughout the sites and collectively create a tapestry of outdoor classrooms. These seemingly small outdoor spaces become cherished and integral to the identity of the school.

Landscapes for children must be scaled to their attention and needs. These spaces make them feel safe, engaged in learning, connected to the change of the seasons, and mindful of their own growth. They are places to explore, connect, and thrive. These are small spaces that make a big impact.

¹ Williams, D. R., Dixon, P. S., (2013). Impact of garden-based learning on academic outcomes in schools: Synthesis of research between 1990 and 2010. *Review of Educational Research*, 1 -25.

² Scott, G., Boyd, M., & Colquhoun, D. (2013). Changing spaces, changing relationships : the positive impact of learning out of doors. *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*, 17(1), 47–53. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03400955>

³ Children & Nature Network (2016). *Nature can Improve Academic Outcomes* [Infographic]. Web. <https://www.childrenandnature.org/the-benefits-of-nature/>