

House Education

02/06/2025 01:30 PM

HB25-1061 Community Schoolyards Grant Program

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
<p>Angelica Prisciliano For Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition</p>	<p>Thank you, House Education Committee, for the opportunity to deliver our testimony today and to the sponsors of this bill.</p> <p>My name is Angelica Prisciliano, I testify on behalf of the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition and our community groups formed by families and childcare providers named VOZ and Grupos de Lucha. CSPC mission is to support families and childcare providers become the strongest advocates for their children to succeed in school and beyond. We ask that you vote in support of HB25-1061 Community Schoolyards Grant Program.</p> <p>CSPC supports long term investments in communities to create environments that provide a range of hands-on learning resources as well as activities to enhance health and well-being, and spaces that foster nature play and social opportunities for all students, their families, and community members. Families and FFN childcare providers rely on accessible and welcoming places that are familiar, welcoming, and well resources to support their kid's educational journey.</p> <p>We believe this grant can support underserved schools and their communities have access to educational play opportunities in a social and familiar environments, strengthening the sense of belonging in their communities and the children's educational experience overall.</p> <p>We ask that the sponsors consider including technical support for those schools that cannot allocate resources to grant applications, which may pass on this great opportunity due to the lack of support. We understand that this year's budget is already stretch that is why we ask that this body considers long term transformative tax policy to support initiatives like this and provide the schools the support they</p>

	<p>need to build the learning environment all Colorado children should have access to.</p> <p>Thank you for your time in listening to our testimony, please vote yes on HB25-1061. THANK YOU.</p>
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House Bill 25-1061
Testimony in Support of Community Schoolyards Grant Program



February 13, 2025

Dear Chair Lukens, Vice Chair Martinez, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Becca Katz, and I am the co-founder and Executive Director of Good Natured Learning, a Colorado-based nonprofit that empowers PK-12 educators to integrate nature into their teaching practices. I strongly support HB25-1061: Community Schoolyards Grant Program which can be used to create nature-rich, green schoolyards for students, teachers, and neighbors.

In Colorado, over 900,000 students and 60,000 educators spend most of their school days indoors, despite strong evidence that outdoor learning improves academic achievement, enhances well-being for both students and teachers, and strengthens connections to the natural world. Research consistently highlights the benefits of green schoolyards and outdoor learning. A 2019 review¹ of the evidence linking nature and education concluded: “It is time to take nature seriously as a resource for learning and development. It is time to bring nature and nature-based pedagogy into formal education – to expand existing, isolated efforts into increasingly mainstream practices.”

Green schoolyards make the mainstreaming of nature-based pedagogy and widespread nature access possible.

Beyond the research, we have dozens of stories corroborating the evidence:

A Colorado Springs teacher shared: “After two difficult years of teaching, even as a 21-year-veteran teacher, I was ready to quit. **Nature based learning, especially teaching outdoors, has reenergized my love for teaching. It not only supports the whole student, it supports the whole teacher.**”

In Leadville, a teacher asked her 9th grade student, “**Why do you participate so much more when we are here in the outdoor classroom?**” He replied, “**I don’t know, my brain just seems to turn on!**”

These are just two stories among many of what happens when teachers move learning outdoors. Green schoolyards make outdoor learning possible for students across our state, especially in urban settings where this work is even more critical. I urge you to support this bill to create healthier, more engaging learning environments for Colorado’s students and educators.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Becca Katz".

Becca Katz
Executive Director & Co-Founder, Good Natured Learning, becca@goodnaturedlearning.org

¹ Kuo M, Barnes M and Jordan C (2019) [Do Experiences With Nature Promote Learning? Converging Evidence of a Cause-and-Effect Relationship](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305). Front. Psychol. 10:305. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305>

House Bill 25-1061

Testimony in Support of Community Schoolyards Grant Program
February 7, 2025

Dear Chair Lukens, Vice Chair Martinez, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Erin Allaman, and I am the Director of Learning & Evaluation, Co-Director of Research at the Children & Nature Network (C&NN). I live and work in Frisco, Colorado. I am also the parent of two school-aged children who go to school in Summit County. I am writing on behalf of the Children & Nature Network to support House Bill 26-1061, which would create the Community Schoolyards Grant Program.

The Children & Nature Network was founded in 2007 by Richard Louv, author of the groundbreaking book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*. We are a national organization working around the country, including in Colorado, to ensure that all children have access to the proven benefits of nature everywhere they live, learn, and play.

In Colorado, school districts manage large amounts of public land designated for children's use. Much of the land around schools is paved with asphalt and provides almost no shade, particularly in the hottest, lowest-income, and least-resourced communities. Additionally, many Colorado youth face mental health challenges and schools need more ways to support students and teachers with healthy learning environments.

Converting schoolyards to nature-filled spaces, also known as green schoolyards, provides many educational, health, and conservation benefits where kids spend most of their time: at school. We know that green schoolyards can:

- Provide natural areas for personal, physical, and social development and improved mental health;
- Increase standardized test performance across grade levels;
- Provide spaces for environmental education that can lead to support for environmental protection and stewardship in adulthood;
- Increase tree canopy, which helps lower the impacts of heat islands and improve air quality;
- Lower energy costs for buildings;
- Support a reduction in schoolyard and local area flooding; and
- Provide habitat for pollinators and threatened and endangered species critical to our local and global food supply.

Schoolyards exist in every Colorado community. We can reimagine these spaces to be nature-filled neighborhood assets that enhance learning, protect our environment, create multigenerational gathering spaces, and improve the health and well-being of Colorado's youth, families, and educators.

From our experience across the U.S., we know green schoolyards deliver the biggest benefits when communities are engaged in the design process and when training is provided for teachers to fully use and activate outdoor learning spaces. Based on this evidence, we heartily endorse the designation of funding for these activities in the proposed Community Schoolyards Grant Program.

We have robust examples of the benefits of green schoolyards in Colorado, including:

- Denver's Learning Landscapes is among the longest-running district-wide green schoolyard programs in the country. A recent economic benefits study on that program showed a minimum of a 3:1 economic return on investment.
- A model for community and teacher engagement in green schoolyard design in Colorado Springs, from Trust for Public Land and Colorado-based not-for-profit, Good Natured Learning.

Green schoolyards are a wise investment of public funds in Colorado that will benefit students, teachers, and communities. The Children & Nature Network encourages support of House Bill 25-1061. Thank you for your consideration and your support of Colorado students.

Contact:

Erin Allaman, PhD

Frisco, Colorado

Director of Learning & Evaluation, Co-Director of Research

Children & Nature Network (C&NN)

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Research

- Rich soil: The economic benefits of green schoolyards:
<https://www.childrenandnature.org/resources/fnn-rich-soil-the-economic-benefits-of-green-schoolyards/>
- Research-based Benefits of Nature:
<https://www.childrenandnature.org/the-benefits-of-nature/>