Getting Students Outside during COVID-19

This resource is to encourage school principals and teachers to consider outdoor spaces and outdoor activities in their planning for bringing students back in person during the pandemic.

School districts across the country are grappling with whether and how to resume in-person schooling this fall. With limited staff and resources, schools are developing procedures to maintain students and staff safe amidst rising caseloads.

Though there are still many uncertainties about whether it is safe to resume in-person learning or how COVID-19 spreads, one data point is clear; the risk of transmission is greatly reduced outdoors.

Overview

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommended that all policy considerations for the coming school year begin with a goal of having students physically present in school citing evidence of the negative impacts of social isolation, and inability to identify and address learning deficits, trauma and depression. Beyond the educational and social impact of school closures, there has been impacts on food security and physical activity for children and families. The challenge is how to bring students and staff back safely.

Increasing the amount of time students spend outside can help keep the risk of transmission low and at the same time increase physical activity and improve mental health and learning for students.
Resources

Below are links to great resources and guides to support outdoor teaching and activities.

**Green Schoolyards America Infrastructure Guide**
Includes planning tools for outdoor infrastructure including how to make use of existing outdoor spaces and enhance them with practical low cost options.

**North American Association for Environmental Education Guide for Reopening Schools**
Includes recommendations to support equitable reopening of schools based on tools used by community-based and outdoor education programs.

**Full Option Science System**
Includes tools and training videos for teachers to teach science outside.

**Food Corps Education Outside**
Offers Science-based lesson for K-5, all aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards.

**Whole Kids Garden Lessons**
Offers 35 lessons for grades K-5, covering seeds, planting plans, pests, pollinators, and food systems.

**Green Schoolyards America Outdoor Activity Guide**
Includes many ideas for activities to do with students in the schoolyard.

**The Trust for Public Land’s Learning on the Garden Guide**
Includes additional resources and tips for teaching and learning in the garden.

Recommendations

With some planning, many activities can happen outside with significant positive impacts on students, including improved health, improved learning and reduced risk of exposure to COVID-19. The following are three key recommendations that we encourage schools to consider:

1. **Outdoor Programs**
   Maintain PE and other activities that can be easily done outside. According to AAP, it is critical to maintain a balanced curriculum with continued physical education and other learning experiences rather than an exclusive emphasis on core subject areas.

2. **Outdoor Recess**
   Ensure that students get time outside for recess and play. This can be achieved by cohorting students and limiting the size of groups participating in playground time.

3. **Outdoor Classes**
   If possible, hold core curriculum classes outside. If no physical infrastructure exists, create temporary outdoor classrooms by providing sitting, rain protection, shade and a few other basic infrastructure elements.

For more information:

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