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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Over 450 Environmental and Outdoor Education Organizations appeal to members of Congress to support more effective use of nature and outdoor spaces for school districts in reopening.

Washington, DC, July 22, 2020 – More than 450 national, state, regional, and local organizations sent a joint letter this week to the bipartisan leadership of the House and Senate, asking them to think creatively about ways to fund school reopening. These organizations recognize that whether to reopen in person or virtually is a local decision but are recommending that school grounds and outdoor spaces be strongly considered for Congressional funding when schools do reopen.

The North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), its state and regional Affiliates, and hundreds of colleague organizations feel that, for schools that plan to reopen in the coming months, outdoor spaces and programs are a major safety and educational asset. The use of outdoor spaces, schoolyards, gardens, vegetated areas, and more can help students and faculty have engaging places to learn while staying distanced and safer. Combined with other measures such as the use of masks, sanitizing work surfaces, handwashing, contained student cohort groups, indoor air filtration, and more, the use of the outdoors for learning and play should be a meaningful part of any reopening plan.

These organizations and agencies not only recommend more funding for outdoor classrooms and play spaces, they also want them to be green, using trees, gardens, and naturally landscaped areas. The average primary school sits on five or more acres, while the average secondary school occupies 15 to 20 acres. And yet very few of the 100,000 public K-12 schools in the U.S. fully utilize outdoor space for learning. To that end, the NAAEE has developed [comprehensive reopening guidance](#) that explains ways to use nature and the outdoors at schools for added safety. Doing so will have the added benefits of providing students with hands on opportunities to engage in environmental and science education and community service. Nearly every public K-12 school could benefit.

Funding for schools in the COVID-19 relief packages is being considered by both houses of Congress. Making better use of outdoor and nature-oriented spaces will be particularly helpful to older schools in lower income areas of the U.S. These schools often have less room indoors and would have difficulty maintaining distances.

The [NAAEE guidance for school reopening](#) has nationwide support and offers a framework for using outdoor spaces for learning and partnering with nonformal outdoor and environmental education programs for educational support that is complementary to other guidance efforts such as the illustrative site recommendations developed by [Green Schoolyards America](#).

The following national organizations joined NAAEE and hundreds of state and local organizations in asking Congress for this consideration:

America Walks, American Camp Association, American Public Gardens Association, Association for Experiential Education, Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies - Project WILD, Association of Nature Center Administrators, Association of Science and Technology Centers, Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Blue Sky Funders Forum, Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, Campaign for Environmental Literacy, Children & Nature Network, Climate Generation: A Will Steger Legacy, Earth Day Network, Earth Force, EcoRise, FoodCorps, George B. Storer Foundation, Green Schools Alliance, Green Schools National Network, Inc., Green Schoolyards America, Institute for Learning Innovation, Life Lab, National Project for Excellence in Environmental Education, National Association for Interpretation, National Science Teaching Association, National Wildlife Federation, Natural Learning Initiative, Outdoors Empowered Network, Seed Your Future, Sierra Club, Teach for America, The Acorn Group, The Cloud Institute

Read the full letter [here](#).

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About NAAEE

For almost five decades, the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) has served as the professional association, champion, and backbone organization for the field of environmental education (EE), working with EE professionals across United States, Canada, and Mexico, as well as globally, to advance environmental literacy and civic engagement to create a more equitable and sustainable future. NAAEE is the only national membership organization dedicated to strengthening EE and increasing the visibility and effectiveness of the field. NAAEE's work aims to provide professional development, access to learning networks and collaborative partnerships, tools and resources to promote effective practice, and leadership and capacity building. NAAEE is also involved in a number of field-building activities and signature programs, including the Natural Start Alliance to advance environmental education in early childhood and the Global Environmental Education Partnership—a global network dedicated to building capacity at the country level (see thegeep.org). For more information on NAAEE, visit <https://naaee.org>.

About the NAAEE Affiliate Network

NAAEE and its 56 Affiliate organizations form the largest network of environmental educators in the U.S. Together, we are a driving force for creating a more environmentally literate and engaged citizenry. We have been working together for decades to build a robust and dynamic community of EE professionals and partners who understand the value and power of EE to ensure a more just and sustainable world. Find your Affiliate: <https://naaee.org/our-partners/affiliates>.