green schoolyards america

Support a "Sustainable Schools Grant Program" in the California Air Resources Board's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund Investment Plan 2016-2019

November 12, 2015

Dear California Air Resources Board,

We are writing to express support for Green Schools Initiative's recommendation that "K-12 public schools be included as an urgent investment priority for Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund investments in ARB's draft Three Year Investment Plan." Green Schoolyards America signed a group letter submitted by Green Schools Initiative, and we wish to add additional information to further explain the value of directing a portion of your green infrastructure investments to school grounds in a "Sustainable Schools Grant Program".

Green Schoolyards America's mission is to inspire and enable communities across the United States to enrich their school grounds and use them to improve children's well-being, learning and play while promoting community engagement and contributing to the ecological health and resilience of cities.

Public school districts are one of the largest landowners in almost every city and town across the United States and around the world. In California alone, over 10,300 schools in more than 1,000 school districts serve more than 6 million pre-kindergarten to 12th grade students each year, on more than 125,000 acres of publicly-owned land. Choices made by school districts about how they manage their buildings and grounds profoundly impact their cities and generations of residents across our state whose perspectives are shaped through daily experiences at school.

The green school ground field is gaining momentum around the world, weaving the ideas of urban sustainability, climate change mitigation and ecological design together with academic achievement, public health, children's wellbeing, sense of place, and community engagement. Green schoolyards bring nature back to cities and suburbs by transforming barren asphalt and ordinary grass into vibrant places for learning and recreation, set within the context of the rich, local ecosystems that nurture wildlife and the natural processes that underlie and sustain our urban environment.

The California state government passed a resolution in 2014 (ACR-128, Ting), recognizing the importance of improving ecological infrastructure on land managed by public schools and connecting it to children's academic achievement and health. The resolution urges "the State Department of Education, school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools to continue to prioritize the design and construction of student-accessible green space on school campuses and to integrate use of this space into the teaching of standards based curriculum." **We believe that investments from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund should be used to help public school districts build outdoor park-like spaces that serve both as green infrastructure and benefit the local community and students. Sustainable communities cannot be achieved without including schools in the planning process.**

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Most of California's urban school grounds are covered with asphalt and concrete that have high surface temperatures, often 20 to 40 °C hotter than vegetated areas. Heavily paved campuses—most common in disadvantaged communities—contribute directly to urban heat island effects and atmospheric warming, and create unhealthy conditions for children. Paved, impermeable surfaces also carry polluted runoff into our natural water systems. By removing schoolyard asphalt, planting trees, and allowing stormwater to infiltrate onsite, surface temperatures can be decreased, carbon can be sequestered in the soil, and financial savings can be achieved through reduced reliance on municipal water and sewage treatment. These improvements, if placed in student-accessible locations on school campuses, also greatly improve children's experience at school.

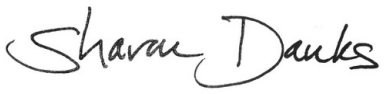
Investing in green infrastructure on school grounds is a way to address climate change equitably, while bringing nature to parts of our cities that lack green space. Studies have shown that exposure to nature reduces stress, aids social cohesion and helps students' concentration and academic achievement. Air quality problems are also of particular concern for schools since children's smaller body size, faster metabolism and weaker immune systems leave them particularly vulnerable to ozone, carbon and particulate matter (PM10). Several studies correlate the increased presence of these elements with increased sick days for local school children.

Green school grounds benefit students, their schools, and their communities in the short-term by increasing physical activity, promoting healthy food choices, and providing valuable hands-on experiences in outdoor classroom settings, while making the physical environment more resilient, healthy, comfortable and enjoyable. The long-term benefits of green schoolyards multiply over time: Not only are they highly visible community hubs, but by incorporating stewardship and environmental education into the physical school grounds and school curricula, students grow up to become adults who care for their environment.

Our future needs citizens who understand complex environmental issues and can help to find solutions to ongoing problems. Investing in climate change mitigation measures on school grounds will help solve the growing climate problems we now face, while also preparing our children to be the environmental leaders of tomorrow.

Thank you for considering our perspective on including schools as part of California's solution for mitigating climate change.

Sincerely,



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