Nature Explore Classroom Portfolio:
A Sampling from Across the Nation
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"I am so happy to have partnered with you, *it so helped our teachers to get a vision for outdoor play.*"

- Pat Rackliffe, Westport Weston Cooperative Nursery School
“This process worked extremely well to help a large number of people come to consensus quickly. Nature Explore gave us a solid research framework for planning, and helped us communicate our goals to parents, funders and the community.”

-Vicki Bohling, Parent Educator, Forest Lake, MN
Design Process

The dynamic design process begins as a collaboration between your staff, families, your community and our landscape architect/educator team. Working with you, our team will synthesize site conditions, the needs of your program and staff, and Dimensions’ research based on direct observations of children interacting in naturally designed outdoor environments.

The result: a cost effective, efficient, and attainable solution is created. Your concept plan will be drawn to scale and will incorporate outdoor activity areas, accessible pathways and surfacing, playground safety standards, and will indicate where plantings should be placed.

During your initial presentation, the designer will walk through the spatial organization and circulation of the outdoor classroom. The final concept plan is rendered in color and can help you with fund-raising for implementation.

Visit us at natureexplore.org or call (888) 908-8733 to learn more.
Early Education
Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)

Facts

Size: Varies
Designed: 2007-2013
Established: On-going
Location: Los Angeles, CA

“We tell parents if their children come home clean, they didn’t have a good day. Parents know this is how it is and this is how they learn. Parents tell us that when they go to kindergarten, they’re better prepared.” - Ranae Amezquita, LAUSD Early Education Director

“Our Nature Explore Outdoor Classroom is a piece of heaven for our stakeholders. It is so beautiful that parents have expressed that our environment provides a sense of a daily retreat.” - Josefina Navarro, Principal at 4th Street EEC
Early Education Centers | Los Angeles, CA

Brooklyn Early Education Center

4th Street Early Education Center
Early Education
Dimensions Early Education (Preschoolers) | Lincoln, NE

Facts

- **Size**: 6,675 square feet
- **Designed**: June 2004
- **Established**: April 2005
- **Location**: Lincoln, NE
Dimensions Early Education (Infant/Toddlers)

Dimensions research consistently demonstrates that close observation skills are strengthened when children spend time in Nature Explore Classrooms. Children who are able to explore the natural world regularly and over time become comfortable seeking new information. As they ask questions, actively explore, compare what they think they know with what they are observing, then reflect on their new assumptions, they become active participants in the process of developing ever-more complex science understandings. This way of learning strengthens critical thinking skills, which is helpful in all areas of learning, not just science.

Facts

Size: 1,930 square feet
Designed: June 2004
Established: April 2005
Location: Lincoln, NE
Lincoln Park Cooperative Nursery School

Facts

Size: 585 square feet
Designed: June 2011
Established: October 2011
Location: Chicago, IL

Location: Chicago, IL
Early Education

Children’s Treehouse Child Development Center | Shepherdstown, WV

Located at the US Fish & Wildlife Service National Conservation Training Center

Facts

Size: 24,600 square feet
Designed: March 2012
Established: June 2012
Location: Shepherdstown, WV
D.A. Quarles Early Child Center | Englewood, NJ

Facts

Size: 10,705 square feet
Designed: June 2014
Established: October 2014
Location: Englewood, NJ

Location: Shepherdstown, WV
Early Education
Abington Friends Preschool | Jenkintown, PA
Abington Friends Preschool

**Facts**

- **Size**: 28,030 square feet
- **Designed**: August 2011
- **Established**: November 2012
- **Location**: Jenkintown, PA
Warren Village Learning Center (Infant/Toddler Space) | Denver, CO

Warren Village is an apartment supporting single parents transitioning from homelessness. Supported by the U.S. Forest Service, the space has been developed as a model for an under-served population in Forest Service Region 2.
Warren Village Learning Center (Preschool Space)

Before

After

Facts

Size: 3,830 square feet
Designed: March 2014
Established: May 2014
Location: Denver, CO
Early Education
Kid Grace Learning Center | Temple, TX

Facts
Size: 7,260 square feet
Designed: July 2013
Established: June 2015
Location: Temple, TX

Sherry Treubus, Child Care Policy and Quality Care Manager for Workforce Solutions of Central Texas, has made a goal of improving the quality of childcare centers for at-risk children by assisting them in getting Nature Explore Classrooms. Workforce Solutions is a government agency that delivers programs and services to enhance employment in the area. Its Child Care Services assists low-income families and works directly with childcare programs. Thanks to Sherry and Workforce Solutions, Central Texas now has a number of beautiful outdoor classrooms such as Kid Grace Learning Center.
Facts

Size: 25,090 square feet
Designed: February 2014
Established: June 2015
Location: Shawnee, KS
Elementary Schools
Gómez Heritage Elementary School | Omaha, NE
Gomez Heritage Elementary School

“Every time I take my students to our outdoor classroom it is a rich experience unlike any other during the school day.”

-Stephanie Carlson-Pruch, Elementary Art Specialist at Gomez Heritage Elementary School

Facts

**Size**: 15,695 square feet  
**Designed**: October 2008  
**Established**: September 2013  
**Location**: Omaha, NE
Alexander Elementary School

Facts

Size: 26,980 square feet
Designed: November 2011
Established: July 2013
Location: Alexander, NY
Nature Centers, Parks & Preserves
Arbor Day Farm | Nebraska City, NE
“A few days after her visit to the Nature Explore Classroom with her three children a mother came up to me and told the following story. The mother related how the oldest of her three children had autism. His condition was severe enough that it was often challenging to find things that she could do with all her children together. She had expected her son would only tolerate being there for maybe twenty minutes, but twenty minutes soon turned into an hour… then one hour turned into two. She commented that, for many people, exploring and playing in the Nature Explore Classroom was a fun way to spend an afternoon. For her family, it became a whole new way to communicate with their son.”

– Susie Wirth, Arbor Day Farm
Nature Centers, Parks & Preserves
The United States National Arboretum | Washington, D.C.

Facts

Size: 10,300 square feet
Designed: April 2008
Established: November 2011
Location: Washington, D.C.
Facts

Size: 15,050 square feet
Designed: February 2015
Established: April 2016
Location: Acworth, GA

Photo Credit: John Creek Photography
Kansas Children’s Discovery Center

Facts

**Size:** 22,300 square feet  
**Designed:** August 2010  
**Established:** June 2012  
**Location:** Topeka, KS
Facts

Size: 19,375 square feet
Designed: June 2011
Established: June 2013
Location: Bowling Green, KY
Smith Memorial Playground & Playhouse has been a treasured destination in PA for more than 100 years, serving over 200,000 children and families annually. Free to the public, visitors come from the entire city, although they have a special commitment to under-resourced families, particularly those in their immediate neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion. The U.S. Forest Service is partnering with Nature Explore to bring outstanding Nature Explore Outdoor Classroom models, such as this project, to under-served communities throughout the country.
Nature Centers, Parks & Preserves
Creston National Fish Hatchery | Kalispell, MT
Creston National Fish Hatchery

“We want to encourage children to put the electronics aside, get outside, and enjoy the natural world around them. With the help of a nature-based classroom they can build anything and be anything. Adults will also experience the rich learning that takes place in a Nature Explore Classroom as we encourage creativity in a natural setting.”  –Evie Bradley, Outdoor Education Coordinator

Facts

Size: 16,200 square feet
Designed: May 2012
Established: September 2012
Location: Kalispell, MT
In partnership with the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) and the U.S. Forest Service, Lone Star Family Health Center was awarded a grant to construct a Nature Explore Classroom at the clinic. The center serves 50,000 highly underprivileged patients a year, which made it a perfect model—reaching a large demographic and a vulnerable population. The main goal of the grant was to allow Lone Star physicians to write prescriptions to get children and families outside into the outdoor classroom and to the nearby parks and forests.
Lone Star Family Health Center will use the constructed space to document the many health benefits of spending time in nature—such as improved blood glucose levels for diabetics, improved concentration, improved social relationships, lower anxiety and negative thoughts, mitigation of dementia, improved vision, lowered blood pressure, improved coordination and reduced mental fatigue. The clinic will also provide other outreach events such as a program on healthy eating, using produce grown in the garden area for community cooking classes.
Health Centers
The SPARK Center | Mattapan, MA

Facts

Size: 22,400 square feet
Designed: March 2010
Established: September 2010
Location: Mattapan, MA
“As we were planning a major expansion of the Child Saving Institute, we knew we wanted to provide enhanced opportunities for our children to play and learn outside. The Director of the Child Development Center introduced the concept of the Nature Explore outdoor classroom during our planning process. At first I was skeptical but as we learned more about the research and evidence of the Nature Explore classrooms, I became convinced it was the best option for the children. From the first day that we opened the classroom, it was clear that this was one of the best decisions we made—the children love the outdoor classroom and the teachers have embraced the concept as a core part of the curriculum.”

–Todd Landry, Former President and CEO of CSI
Botanical Gardens & Arboretums
Bailey Arboretum | Locust Valley, NY
The “Friends of Bailey Arboretum” group reports that they are amazed how the design process helped them all come to consensus and find ways to keep the naturalness of the area in tact while addressing safety, maintenance and sustainability concerns. Most of all, they credit the new space with revitalizing the whole Arboretum, as well as helping their community’s youngest members connect with nature on a regular basis. Clubs, Inc., Society of American Florists, and Woman’s National Farm & Garden Association, U.S. Forest Service and Keep America Beautiful. Children from all over America are now visiting the nature-filled space.
Botanical Gardens & Arboretums
Missouri Botanical Garden | St. Louis, MO
Missouri Botanical Garden

Facts

Size: 9,130 square feet  
Designed: January 2007  
Established: April 2007  
Location: St. Louis, MO
Military Child Development Centers
Hurlburt Air Force Base | Hurlburt Field, FL
“As I watch children play in the outdoor classroom, I witness children's reintroduction to long-term exploratory play, empowering them with a new understanding of cooperation amongst themselves and their peers, and a true satisfaction from the outside world. This reintroduction has proven to improve key concepts in children’s basic understanding of the world around them, reflecting positive impacts on their physical and mental health, and their enjoyment of life in general. Outdoor boundaries are now put aside, returning children to a sense of normality in freedom of play.”

–Catherine Goss, Teacher at Hurlburt Field Air Force Base

**Facts**

**Size:** 6,865 square feet  
**Designed:** May 2009  
**Established:** November 2009  
**Location:** Hurlburt Field, FL
Faith-Based Centers
St. Francis Episcopal Day School | Houston, TX
St. Francis Episcopal Day School

Facts

Size: 14,270 square feet
Designed: January 2010
Established: June 2011
Location: Houston, TX

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life and see if I could not learn what it had to teach and not when I came to die discover that I had not lived.” Henry David Thoreau
Faith-Based Centers
Beth El Congregational Preschool | Phoenix, AZ
Noah’s Ark Christian Preschool and Kindergarten

**Facts**

- **Size:** 13,550 square feet
- **Designed:** June 2010
- **Established:** December 2011
- **Location:** Barrington, IL
Libraries & Museums
Anythink Libraries - Wright Farm | Thornton, CO
Anythink Libraries - Wright Farm

**Facts**

- **Size:** 20,530 square feet
- **Designed:** December 2010
- **Established:** February 2013
- **Location:** Thornton, CO
Middle Country Public Library

Facts

Size: 7,765 square feet
Designed: May 2008
Established: July 2010
Location: Centereach, NY

“The Nature Explorium provides a new and exciting dimension to the library landscape of services. It connects library staff with nature literacy and environmental concerns and engages children in exploration, discovery and multi-sensory learning.”

–Tracy LaStella, Youth Services
Domestic Violence Shelters
Mary Kay Funded Classroom | Los Angeles, CA

Facts

Size: 2,830 square feet
Designed: July 2013
Established: December 2013
Location: Los Angeles, CA
Mary Kay Funded Classroom | Denver, CO

**Facts**

- **Size:** 6,408 square feet
- **Designed:** April 2011
- **Established:** July 2011
- **Location:** Denver, CO

**Before**

**After**
Domestic Violence Shelters
Mary Kay Funded Classrooms | New York, NY

Facts
Size: 2,280-2,650 square feet
Designed: November 2011
Established: March 2012
Location: New York, NY

Before

After

Before

After

Before

After

Before
Mary Kay Funded Classroom | Las Vegas, NV

Facts

- **Size**: 5,565 square feet
- **Designed**: September 2013
- **Established**: February 2014
- **Location**: Las Vegas, NV

After

Before
“It was great having an educator and a landscape architect working in tandem to better understand both our concerns and hopes. The process was inclusive, thoughtful and inspiring. The initial plan was spot on and highly reflective of our collective conversations about how to make our current outdoor space work better for our children. Not only was the plan reflective, but it also pushed our thinking in such good ways.”

-Carlye Nelson-Major, The Philadelphia School

“This consult far exceeded our expectations. Your team is professional and inspiring. I am excited to work with you as this project moves forward.”

-Jen Ferguson, City of Coppell

“The work that your Designer/Educator team did was incredible. I could say that you saved us mountains of work, but really, we never could have come up with the whole package of research, rationales, and an absolutely beautiful classroom.”

-Zibby Andrews, Garrison Forest School
Connecting Children With Nature