



Students from Enos Garcia Elementary School Gather with Senator Heinrich.

LIVING SCHOOLYARDS ACT

For many kids, the closest outdoor space is not a national or even city park. It is the school campus right outside their classroom door. In many cities and towns, the local school district is the largest land manager. The way they manage their outdoor spaces directly affects their students' daily experiences, their mental and physical health, and their long-term academic success.

The Living Schoolyards Act of 2023, introduced by U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), a former outdoor educator, will provide grants to schools and districts to transform their schoolyards into dynamic outdoor learning environments. The bill will enable schools to re-envision their outdoor school grounds with the goal of providing more hands-on learning opportunities, strengthening local ecological systems, and giving every single child a place where they can learn and play outside.

The legislation establishes Outdoor Learning Spaces Grants and Living Schoolyards Projects. Outdoor Learning Spaces Grants will allow schools or districts to create outdoor classrooms and learning spaces. Schools will be able to use these funds to install canopies, tents, open-sided structures, electricity, generators, furniture, storage, wi-fi nodes and charging stations, outdoor food and distribution facilities, gardens, and weather-related clothing.

Before



After



Golestan Education, El Cerrito, California



The Living Schoolyards Projects will be designed through a two-step process for school districts to apply for these grants through the U.S. Department of Education:

- 1) **During the planning grant phase**, school districts will develop a master plan to turn all or some of their school yards into Living Schoolyard Projects. This process must involve community input and factor in ecological goals, educational and health outcomes for students, and relevant community partners.
- 2) **In the implementation phase**, school districts will build the Living Schoolyards and offer professional development to educators to help them incorporate the outdoor spaces into their teaching.

Living Schoolyards accomplish a number of important goals including:

- Growing healthy foods, trees, and pollinator plants
- Conserving water, creating wildlife habitat, and increasing climate resilience.
- Providing children with opportunities to observe objects found in nature, document season's changes, and conduct outdoor experiments.
- Improving mental health and the ability to pay attention for children and adults.
- Displaying items students find in nature, such as leaves, seeds, and fruits.
- Creating space for students to prepare skits, plays, murals, drawings, and sculptures that celebrate nature, including its animals, plants, and landscapes.



Students from Gaithersburg Elementary School in Maryland visiting the nearby Constitution Gardens Park.