TEXAS CHILDREN IN NATURE NETWORK



12 BEST PRACTICES INDICATORS

for Green Schoolyards

The Best Practice Indicators for Green Schoolyards provide a clear framework for evaluating the quality and potential of outdoor learning and play environments on school campuses. The 12 indicators highlight essential environmental features and design components that, together, create vibrant spaces for learning, exploration, and healthy development. When these elements are in place, a green schoolyard can meaningfully support students' physical and mental well-being, strengthen nutrition education, expand hands-on learning through gardens and nature exploration, and contribute to reforestation, thriving micro-ecosystems, and long-term sustainability across the campus.

























Best Practices Indicators for Green Schoolyards

1. Diverse Engagement Zones
A balanced mix of quiet reflective areas, open gathering spaces, and active play and exploration zones that support a range of student needs and learning styles.



2. Outdoor Learning Environments
Dedicated outdoor classrooms, reading areas, and small-group learning spaces that are accessible throughout the school day.



3. Food-Producing Gardens
A vegetable or edible garden that produces enough seasonal food for student tasting, snacking, or integration into school nutrition programs.

4. Nature Exploration Areas
Wildlife trails, observation zones, ponds, and habitat features that allow students to explore local ecosystems and practice scientific inquiry.

5. Cultural & Art Gardens
Spaces that reflect local culture, art, and community identity, supporting creativity, belonging, and place-based learning.



6. Ample shade throughout all spaces
Ample and reliable shade (trees and structures) in all outdoor spaces including: outdoor learning zones, perimeters of sports fields and play zones, outdoor lunch areas, and group seating areas, to encourage daily outdoor use.

7. Multi-Purpose Pavilion
A flexible, weather-resilient outdoor pavilion for instruction, performances, recess, sports and fitness, family events, and community gatherings.



8. Trail Connectivity
Looping, curvy primary trails that safely connect all learning and play zones, designed for accessibility and exploration.

9. Active Gross Motor Features
A variety of movement-rich elements such as climbing boulders, logs, climbing walls, hills, uneven pathways, and traditional play equipment.



10. Abundant and Diverse Native Vegetation
Sufficient native vegetation (trees, shrubs, vines, and understory plants) that support shade, habitat, and seasonal interest.

11. Daily Use Storage and Structures
Outdoor storage, water access for clean-up, and durable materials that support teachers and students in using the space regularly.



12. Safe Accessible Design & Infrastructure
Clear sightlines, ADA-accessible routes, and a maintenance plan that ensures long-term sustainability and safe daily use.