

# Outdoor Teaching + Learning

**In-Person Learning Resources for Parents and Caregivers at Chicago Public Schools** — A Resource Created by Healthy Schools Campaign for Parents and Caregivers in Chicago Public Schools

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**HEALTHY SCHOOLS  
CAMPAIGN**

EVERY CHILD DESERVES TO LEARN + THRIVE

# Outdoor Teaching + Learning

The risk of contracting coronavirus diminishes outside. In fact, there is [historic precedent](#) in how schools minimized risk to earlier plagues with outdoor classrooms. Increasing opportunities for outdoor learning can promote the development of the “whole child” while decreasing the risk of COVID-19 spread. Utilizing or repurposing outdoor spaces is a cost-effective way to reduce the burden on indoor classrooms while providing fresh air, hands-on learning opportunities, and the health benefits associated with increased access to nature.

## **What Experts Say**

[Emerging research](#) shows that outdoor gatherings lower risk because wind disperses viral droplets, and sunlight can kill some of the virus. Outdoor spaces prevent the virus from building up in concentrated amounts and being inhaled, which can happen indoors when infected people exhale in a confined space for long stretches of time. Best practices include:

- Utilize outdoor spaces when possible. For every age group from preK through secondary school, utilizing outdoor spaces is a high priority strategy for returning students to schools with physical distancing measures in place. This guidance also applies to meals.
- Moving instruction outdoors is one of the mitigation measures that improves air quality.
- Outdoor areas require normal cleaning, but not disinfection. Do not spray disinfectant on outdoor playgrounds—it is not an efficient use of supplies and is not proven to reduce risk of COVID-19 to the public. High touch surfaces made of plastic or metal, such as grab bars and railings should be cleaned routinely. Cleaning and disinfection of wooden surfaces (play structures, benches, tables) or groundcovers (mulch, sand) is not recommended.
- Hand hygiene should be emphasized before and after use of these spaces.
- Establish and clearly define rules and procedures for outdoor lessons before getting outside.
- Coordinate social distancing movement strategies and staggered schedules for outdoor learning.
- Create a schedule of who will be outdoors and when. Communicate this with teachers, administrators, staff (security), and parents.
- Identify the entrance vs the exit points; use a different door than for recess.

## **What CPS Says**

There is no stance or mention of outdoor learning in CPS’ Reopening plan.

## **Parents and Caregivers Should Know**

Some of the questions you may consider asking your school leaders include:

- Is the school considering utilizing the outdoors for teaching and learning?
- What will the outdoor classroom layout look like, and how much distance will there be between students with a classroom pod?

*The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#), July 2020, [U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [World Health Organization](#) and [Green Schoolyards America](#).*