



Cities Connecting Children to Nature City Of Austin Implementation Plan Executive Summary

Over the last decade Austin has gained considerable momentum by building a strong and holistic network of organizations, governmental departments, healthcare professionals, and educators dedicated to the idea that children who have regular access to the natural world are healthier, happier, and perform better in school. Austin is at a critical tipping point for success and innovation in this field as evidenced by:

- The Austin Independent School District has established a full-time Sustainability Manager and Outdoor Education Specialist and an Environmental Stewardship Advisory Committee. In the 2016/2017 school year AISD will adopt a policy mandating that all elementary school students receive 30 minutes of unstructured outdoor playtime each day.
- The Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin (CiNCA) has over 40 member organizations and a full-time manager.
- The Parks and Recreation Department has begun to incorporate nature playscape elements into existing playgrounds as they are renovated.
- The newly formed Austin Area School Garden Collaborative has developed a system that allows school cafeterias to serve food grown by students in school gardens.

Historically Austin has battled systemic issues of equitability and residential segregation that have created major barriers to nature access for many children across the city. Austin's Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) planning initiative views the issue of equitable nature access as a deeply complex social problem that no single policy, government department, organization, or program can solve on its own. Therefore, we adopted a Collective Impact approach to guide the creation of an implementation plan that contemplates sustained efforts of city leadership acting in concert across sectors to ensure that every child in Austin has abundant and equitable access to nature.

Austin's CCCN Initiative established a Core Planning Team and six Working Groups with interdepartmental and cross-sectors members. Working Groups researched and identified major gaps, barriers, opportunities, and priorities across several domains, including access, policy, health, education, and programming. The Core Planning Team used this information to inform the strategic planning process and identify a backbone organization, common agenda, shared metrics, mutually reinforcing activities, and a sustainable communications system that will guide the implementation process over several years.

This planning process yielded the following long-term goals:

- Every child has abundant and equitable access to nature at their home, neighborhood, and school.



- Every parent, health professional, and teacher has been exposed to the importance of spending time in nature for a child's healthy development. Every child considers outdoor play a top option in their free time.
- City codes and school curricula allow and encourage kids to play outside in nature more frequently.
- Austin is seen as an innovator and leader in the Children and Nature Movement.
- Kids choose nature.

To achieve these goals we conducted extensive research and mapping to identify areas of Austin with the largest gaps in nature equity. This informed our selection of the areas where priority implementation strategies will be focused.

Priority Strategies include:

- **Greening School Yards:** Creating a new network of "school parks"
- **Citywide Public Awareness Campaign:** Informing residents on the importance of regular nature access for overall healthy development
- **Program and Park Activation:** Creating a comprehensive nature-based program directory and aligning programs with available park space in neighborhoods of need
- **Policy Tracking:** Developing and proposing nature access policy initiatives for inclusion in city development code and department master plans

Over the next three years Austin's Leadership Team will plan and execute these strategies with the help of community partners throughout Austin. Progress and success will be measured by a number of indicators and metrics chosen specifically for each strategy and assessed on a quarterly basis. Proposed metrics include number, frequency, and duration of children's time spent outside in nature; measures of attitudinal change and restorative outcomes, policy implementation, and marketing impressions.

City and industry leadership are thoroughly energized as witnessed by the substantial participation and collaboration seen throughout the CCCN planning process. We are excited to carry this momentum into the implementation process and we look forward to continued collaboration and information sharing with the National League of Cities, the Children & Nature Network, and the cohort cities. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to participate in this planning initiative and look forward to transforming communities and providing rich nature access for all children in Austin.