



City of Austin

**Leslie Pool, Council Member
District 7**

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September 16, 2016

Mr. Andrew O. Moore
Director, Youth & Young Adult Connections
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families
National League of Cities
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 550
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mr. Moore,

I am writing to express my support for the City of Austin's Cities Connecting Children to Nature Implementation Plan. The extensive research and highly collaborative strategic planning process conducted over the last six months ensures that children's equitable access to nature will be a top priority for the City of Austin and our partners.

Enthusiasm and commitment to this mission was readily apparent throughout the planning process. With representatives from the Mayor's Office, City Council, ten city departments, two school districts, the University of Texas, Dell Children's Medical School, and dozens of nonprofits, this initiative helped build and strengthen relationships across departments and sectors that had not existed previously.

I firmly believe that these partnerships and the collaborative efforts of the plan will help Austin achieve these long-term outcomes:

1. Every child has abundant & equitable access to nature at their home, neighborhood & school.
2. Every parent, health professional & teacher knows & understands the importance of access to nature for a child's healthy development; and every child considers outdoor play a top option for free time.
3. City codes & school curriculum are designed to allow & encourage kids to play outside in nature more frequently.
4. Austin is seen as an innovator & leader in the Children in Nature Movement.
5. Kids choose nature for discovery and play.

Focusing on greening school yards and creating a new network of school parks will help Austin provide daily access to rich natural environments for tens of thousands of students across the city and strengthen communities with access to new park space. I look forward to the opportunity to contribute to this burgeoning national movement and to strengthen relationships with Austin's schools.

Furthermore, Austin is embarking on a complete rewrite of our Land Development Code, and participation in this CodeNEXT process and dedication to prioritizing nature access across department master plans bolsters key policy goals of my office:

1. Mobility – providing a multi-modal transportation network for families and children to get to their neighborhood school parks is a part of the proposed code rewrite, and the coming 2016 bond election.
2. Sustainability and Climate Resiliency – “early and often” childhood connections to nature build environmental stewards for the future.
3. Early childhood education - building strong bodies and imaginations through outdoor play compliments and reinforces preparation for academics.
4. Equity and Affordability - reducing residential segregation and ensuring access to nature for all children benefits every neighborhood.

My office also endorses the Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights resolution which will be brought before City Council in November. We will also help support the subsequent public awareness campaign surrounding issues of children’s healthy development as it relates to nature connection.

My office looks forward to the implementation process and continued collaboration and information sharing with National League of Cities, the Children & Nature Network, and the six cohort cities as we discover new and better ways for city leadership to institutionalize equitable nature access. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to participate in this planning initiative and look forward making our plan a reality for all children in Austin.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leslie Pool", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Council Member Leslie Pool, District 7