

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

CITIES  
CONNECTING  
CHILDREN TO  
NATURE | AUSTIN



Cities  
Connecting  
Children to  
Nature  
AUSTIN, TX

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partners



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**About Us**

# CCCN National



Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) is a national initiative that seeks to create more equitable and abundant access to nature in cities through a partnership between The National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families and the Children & Nature Network. CCCN supports robust citywide action plans to implement policy, develop new partnerships, amplify nature-based programming, and create more equitable nature access.

# CCCN Austin: Our Evolution

2016

Austin receives  
strategic  
planning &  
implementation  
**grant from  
CCCN**

2017

City adopts  
**Children's  
Outdoor Bill of  
Rights** & begins  
collection of  
nature deficient  
area data

2018

**Focus** on Outdoor  
Learning  
Environments (OLE!),  
Green School Parks,  
Youth Leadership &  
Nature Play  
strategies

2020

Five focal  
strategies with  
addition of  
**Nature Smart  
Libraries**

# City Goals

## Strategic Direction 2023

Meeting Health & Environment, Culture &  
Lifelong Learning Outcomes

### PARD Long Range Plan

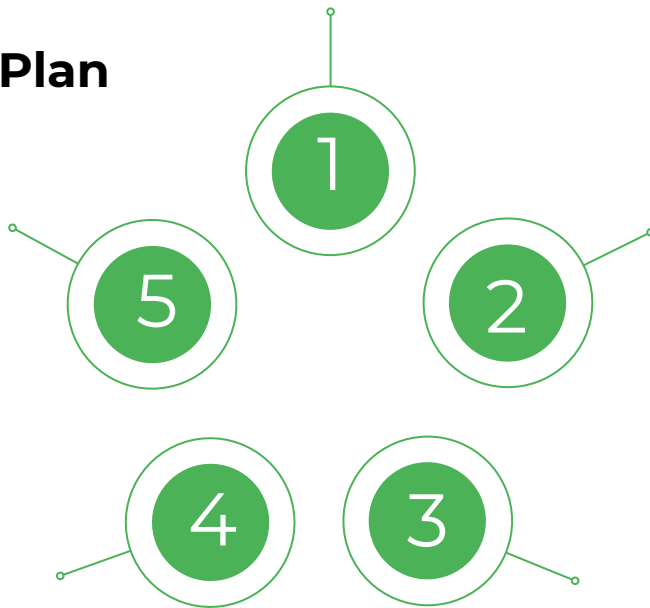
Increasing park and  
nature access,  
activating spaces

### Imagine Austin

Creating complete  
communities through livable  
and sustainable places

**Other City Depts**  
Aligning with Public Health,  
Watershed Protection,  
Transportation Dept. goals

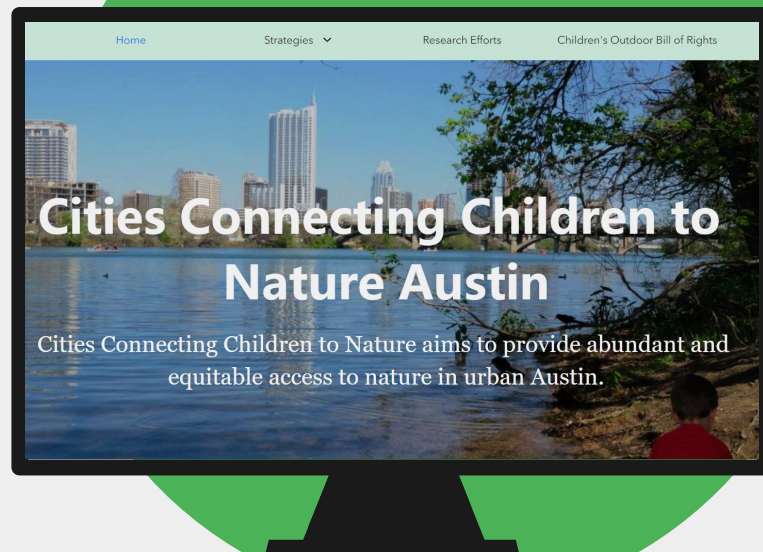
**Climate Equity Plan**  
Helping to create green job  
pathways, carbon reduction,  
and healthy natural systems



# Our Website

The new CCCN Austin Story Map has interactive features for each of our five strategies.

Maps also display the locations of our Green School Park, OLE!, and Nature Play sites.





# \$252,526

Leveraged for CCCN efforts in FY21





02

**COBOR**

# Austin Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights

- The Parks and Recreation Department, along with dozens of partner organizations, created the Austin Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights (COBOR) in 2016
- In 2017, Austin City Council unanimously voted to pass the COBOR with the support of more than 1,000 citizens, key partners such as Austin Independent School District, and Mayor Steve Adler.
- We believe Austin has a vested interest in ensuring all children in our city have the opportunity to connect with the natural world and help create the next generation of environmental stewards who will conserve Austin's quality outdoor space.

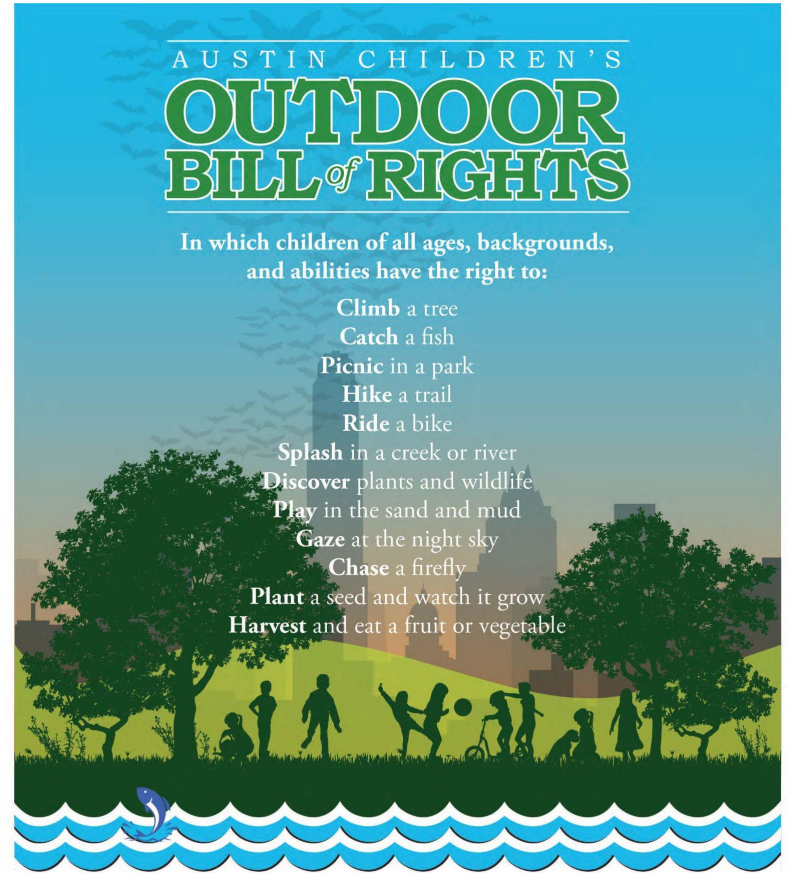
# Our Results

108

2021 Signatures

1,544

Total Signatures



Understanding that research shows children who learn and play in nature are healthier, happier and perform better in school, we enthusiastically support this Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights.

Learn more at [www.austintexas.gov/ccn](http://www.austintexas.gov/ccn)





03

## **Our Strategies**

# Our Strategies

1

**Youth Leadership**

2

**Green School Parks**

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**Outdoor Learning Environments  
(OLE!) Austin**

4

**Nature Smart Libraries**

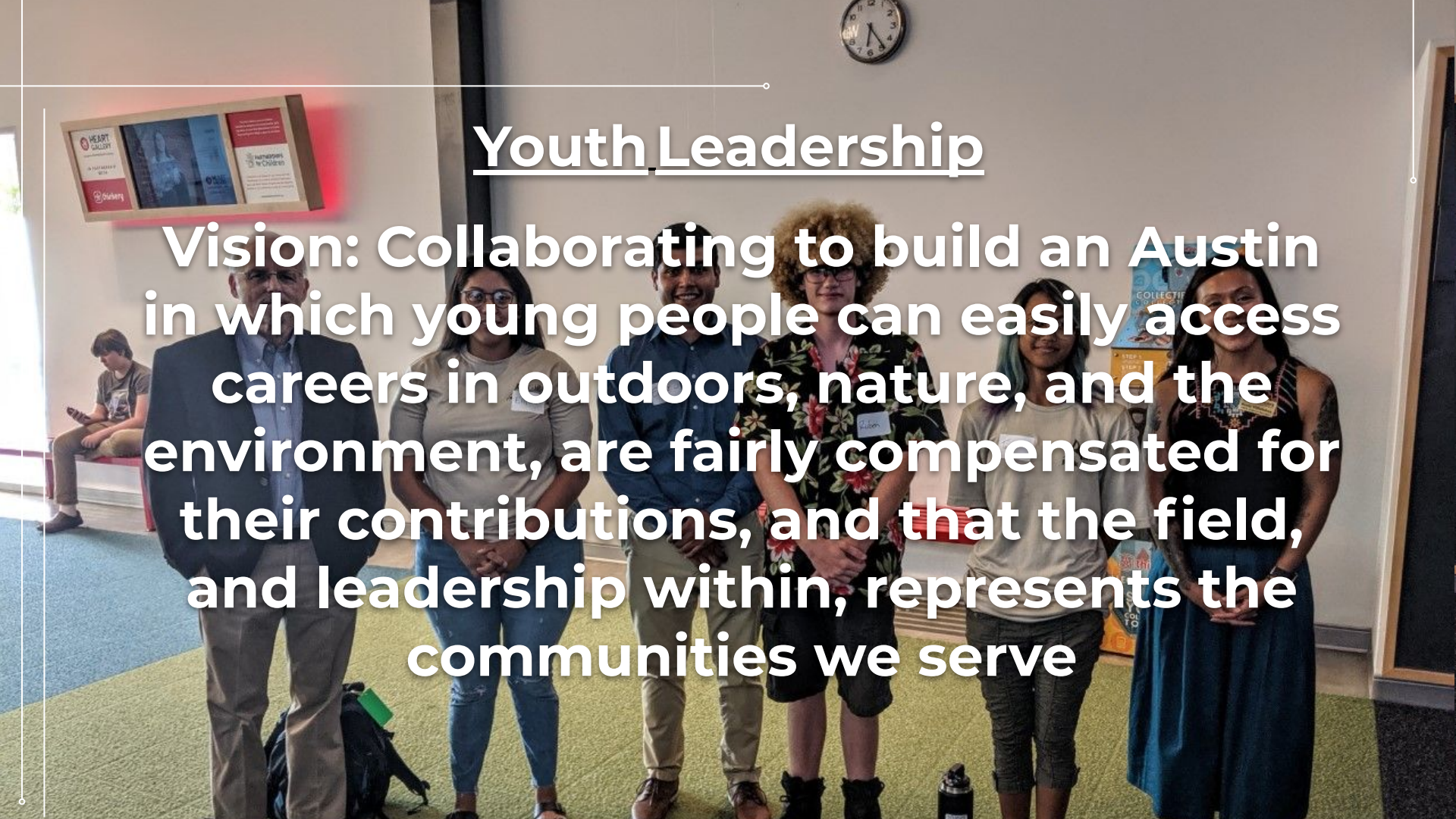
5

**Nature Play**



## Youth Leadership

**Vision: Collaborating to build an Austin in which young people can easily access careers in outdoors, nature, and the environment, are fairly compensated for their contributions, and that the field, and leadership within, represents the communities we serve**



# YOUTH LEADERSHIP

- Newest tri-chair member is a youth
- Continued co-facilitation of meetings with youth
- Awarded \$10,000 through C&NN as a part of the Youth Development Cohort; the majority of funding will go towards compensating youth to participate in monthly meetings, events & other opportunities.
- Youth members were accepted to present at the Texas Children in Nature Summit in Fort Worth. They will be creating a youth driven presentation & supporting as many youth as possible to attend & present at the event.



A group of seven people, including students and adults, are standing in a schoolyard. The ground is covered with dark brown soil and numerous tree stumps of various sizes, suggesting a recent tree removal or a new planting area. In the background, there is a brick building with large windows and a blue roofline. The people are wearing casual clothing and face masks. The text "Green School Parks" is overlaid on the image in a white, sans-serif font, underlined.

## Green School Parks

**Vision: Create a network of school parks that provide schools and the surrounding community the opportunity to learn from, steward and play in nature**

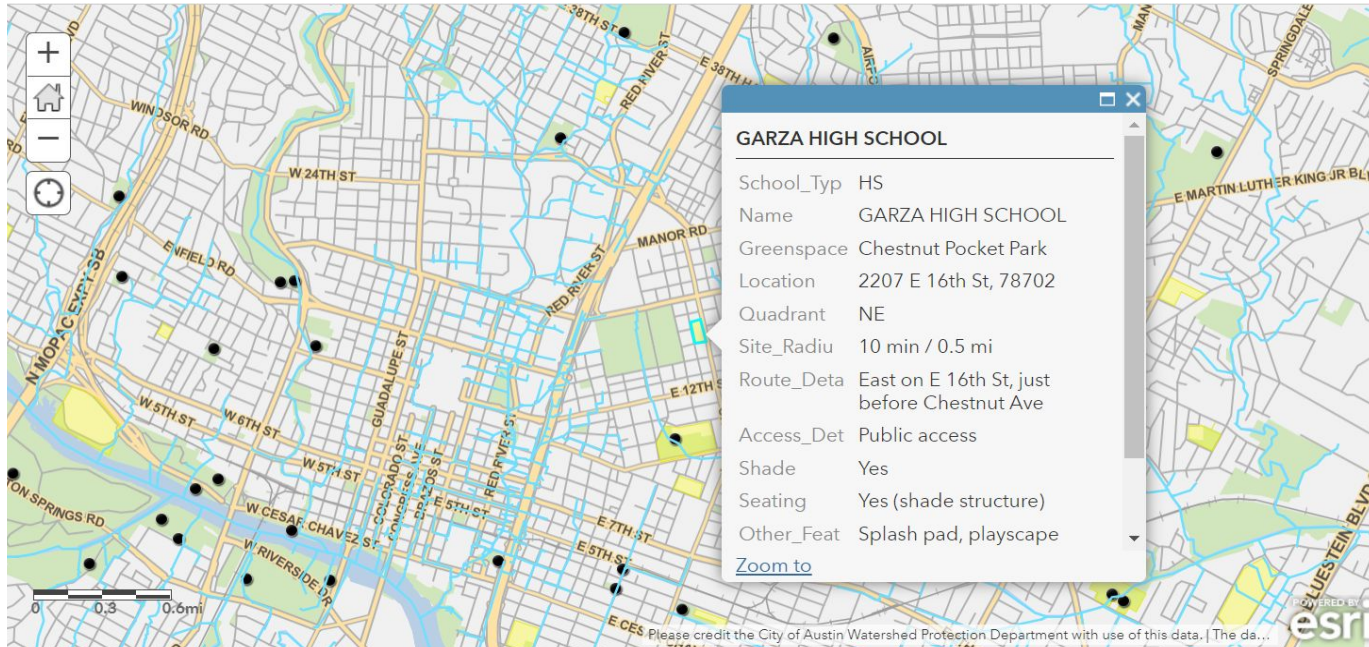


# GREEN SCHOOL PARKS

- Map created that shows all Green School Park locations
- Outdoor classrooms installed at six joint use campuses (Pickle, Odom, Cook, Andrews, Pecan Springs and Oak Springs) in partnership with Austin Parks Foundation and Austin ISD as COVID-19 response effort
- Green Administrator Cohort developed in partnership with EcoRise and Austin ISD to support green campus initiatives
- Completed year two of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant, studying the impact of green infrastructure installed as part of the GSP program. New conclusions include:
  - COVID-19 pandemic associated with a 46% and 62% decrease in the number of girls and boys at joint-use parks
  - During COVID-19 pandemic, 60.6% of girls and 73.6% of boys were not social distancing, and 91.8% of the time no children wore masks

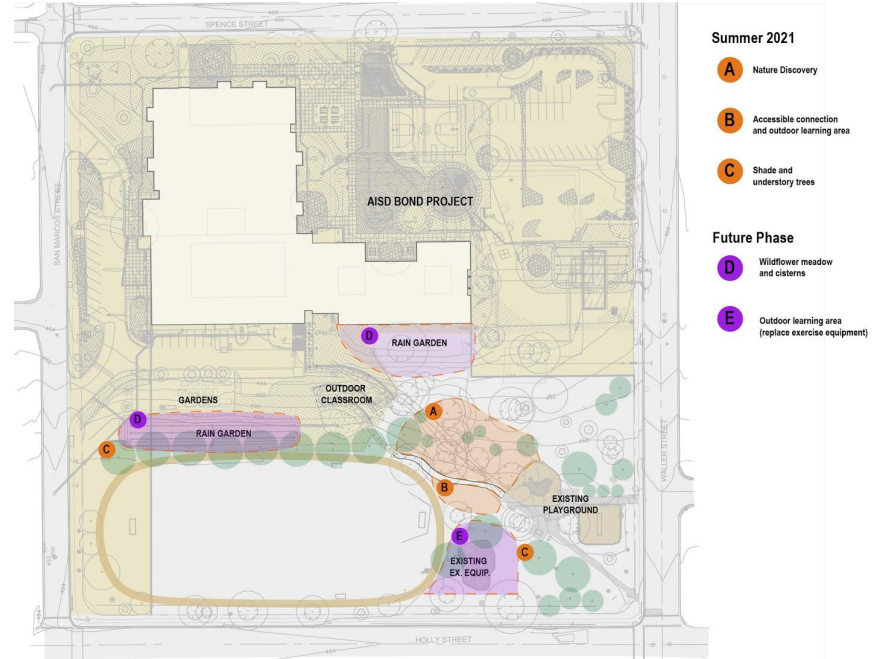
# Walkable Greenspace Map

Map created that shows nearby walkable nature spaces for AISD campuses as a COVID-19 response effort, an effort highlighted in Green Schoolyards America website.



# Sanchez Green School Park Design

Based on community engagement conducted for Sanchez Green School Park, a preliminary design was created for the space.



## Summer 2021

- A** Nature Discovery
- B** Accessible connection and outdoor learning area
- C** Shade and understory trees

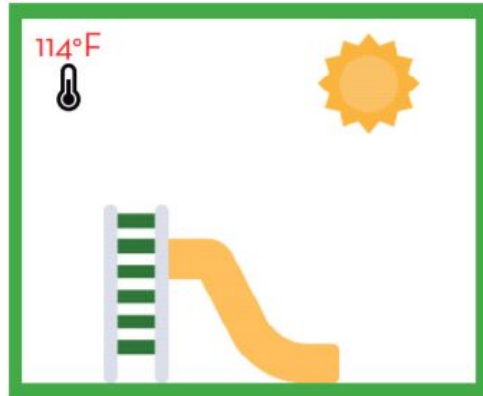
## Future Phase

- D** Wildflower meadow and cisterns
- E** Outdoor learning area (replace exercise equipment)

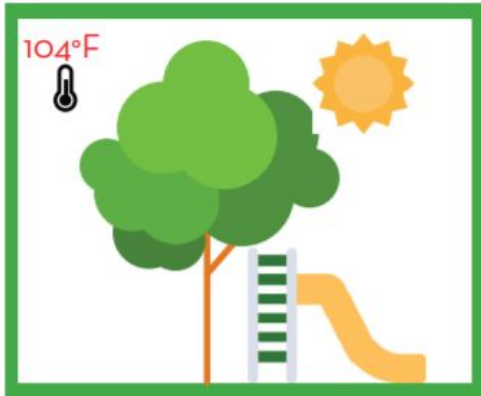
# Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Grant - Initial Findings

Maximum heat index reached at sites within Barrington School Park, September 16-30 2019

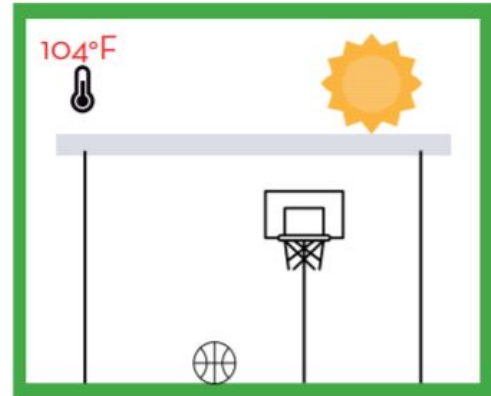
**Playground  
without Shade:**



**Playground  
under Tree Shade:**



**Basketball Court  
under Shade Structure:**





An aerial photograph of a landscaped outdoor area. In the upper left, there is a yellow canopy structure. To the right, a building with a blue roof is visible. The area is filled with green trees and a winding path. The text is overlaid on the image.

# Outdoor Learning Environments (OLE!) Austin

**Vision: Improve outdoor spaces at  
childcare centers to enable  
zero-to-five-year-olds to be active, learn  
in nature, and develop motor skills**

Cassel Landscape Architects, LLP |

BERGSTROM TECH CENTER OLE - COA / CCI

# OUTDOOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS (OLE!) AUSTIN

- Created map to display all existing and planned OLE! Austin sites
- Conducted research with University of Texas undergraduate student on effectiveness of Growing Up WILD workshops
- Created child friendly native plants of Texas flyer that details what qualifies a plant to be a child friendly plant, shows photos of common examples, and provides chart with names and sensory qualities of each common plant found in Texas



# Child Friendly Native Plants Flyer



Outdoor learning environments (OLEs) stimulate the diversity of children's play experience and contribute to healthy development. Plants offers a variety of experiences and discoveries by stimulating their senses, providing loose parts for creative play, and encouraging children to crawl, jump, and tunnel as they connect to the natural cycles around them.

This flyer is intended to help parents, educators, and designers select plants that can be used to enhance learning experiences in OLEs, schoolyard classrooms, and backyards. The plants highlighted are approved for childcare licensure and balance qualities that engage children with plant selection and care practicalities.



## Child Friendly Native Plants of Texas

- Sensory:** Create a rich sensory experience by incorporating varied textures, scents, colors, and sounds
- Interaction & Movement:** Establishes secret places to hide and exciting pathways to investigate, while drawing children into the space with the movement of waving grasses and the flight of butterflies
- Building Materials:** Provides countless materials and loose parts to incorporate into creative play and create structures for exploration or relaxation
- Easy Care:** Low maintenance needs or low water requirements
- Durability:** Tolerates environmental conditions, losing parts, or physically capable of regenerating under rough treatment



OLE! Texas is an initiative of the Texas Department of State Health Services in partnership with other state agencies, universities, and organizations across Texas. For more information and a full partner listing, visit [dshs.texas.gov/ole](https://dshs.texas.gov/ole).

Texas Nursery & Landscape Association - Landscape Guide: [nlaonline.org/best-of-texas-landscape-guide](https://nlaonline.org/best-of-texas-landscape-guide)  
Texas Parks and Wildlife - Teaching children outdoors: [tpwd.texas.gov/education/resources/parents-and-teachers](https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/resources/parents-and-teachers)  
Texas Department of Agriculture - Farm Fresh Challenge resources: [squaremeals.org/farmfreshchallenge/texasarmfresh](https://squaremeals.org/farmfreshchallenge/texasarmfresh)  
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center - Dig Deeper: [wildflower.org/project/outdoor-learning-environments](https://wildflower.org/project/outdoor-learning-environments)

This list is intended to provide general information only. OLE! Texas partners disclaim any liability or responsibility for any allergies, toxicity, fire, or injurious effect that any person or animal may suffer as a result of the information herein. For information or concerns about the toxicity of plants, contact the local Poison Control Center in your area. [www.asap.org](https://www.asap.org)



Child Friendly Native Plants		Sensory	Interaction & Movement	Building Materials	Easy Care	Durability
Common Name	Scientific Name					
<b>ANNUALS</b>						
Bee Balm	<i>Monarda didyma</i>	T, V, S, E	P	X		C
Purslane	<i>Portulaca oleracea</i>	V	P	X	X	H, P
<b>PERENNIALS</b>						
Gregg's Mistflower	<i>Conoclinium greggii</i>	T, V	B			
Lance-leaved Coreopsis	<i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>	V	Play, P, H, B	X	X	H, D
Turk's Cap	<i>Malvaviscus arboreus</i>	V, E	P, H	X		H, D, P
Jerusalem Sage	<i>Phlomis fruticosa</i>	T, V, S	P	X	X	D, DR
Autumn Sage	<i>Salvia greggii</i>	T, V, S, E	P, H		X	H, D, HT
Mexican Bush Sage	<i>Salvia leucantha</i>	T, V, S	P, H	X	X	H, P
Gold Star Esperanza	<i>Tecoma stans</i>	T, V, S	Hide, P, H		X	
<b>GRASSES</b>						
Inland Sea Oats	<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	T, V, H	M	X	X	S, P
Gulf Muhly	<i>Muhlenbergia capillaris</i>	T, V, H	Hide, High M	X	X	H, D
Mexican Feathergrass	<i>Nassella tenuissima</i>	T, V	High M	X		D, DR, Cn
Little Bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	T, V	Maze edging	X	X	
<b>VINE/GROUND COVER</b>						
Crossvine	<i>Bignonia capreolata</i>	V	H	X	X	HT
Fragfruit	<i>Phyla nodiflora</i>	T, V		X	X	HT, Cn
<b>SHRUBS/TREES</b>						
American Beautyberry	<i>Callicarpa americana</i>	V	Play, S	X	X	S
Red Yucca	<i>Hesperaloe parviflora</i>	T, V, H	P	X	X	D, Cn
Texas Sage	<i>Leucophyllum frutescens</i>	V, S	Play	X	X	H, D
Redbud	<i>Cercis canadensis</i>	V	Hide, H, B, S	X	X	
Texas Persimmon	<i>Diospyros texana</i>	T, V, E	Play/Hide, P	X	X	H, D
Little Gem Magnolia	<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>	T, S	Play/Hide			
Bur Oak	<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>	T, V	Sit under	X		D

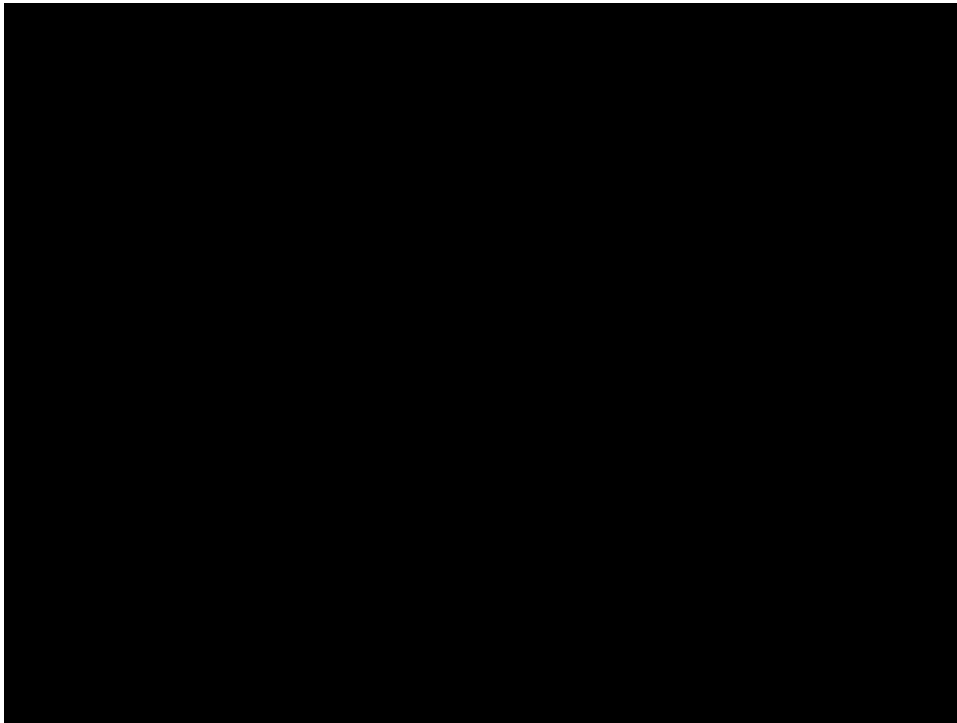
Sensory: T - Touch, V - Visual, S - Smell, H - Hearing, E - Edible

Movement from Wildlife: P - Pollinators, H - Hummingbirds, B - Butterflies, S - Songbirds

Durable: Tolerance for C - Cold, H - Heat, D - Drought, P - Picking, HT - High traffic, S - Shade, DR - Deer resistant, Cn - Container

# Bergstrom Tech Center OLE! Site

Austin Public Health Bergstrom-Tech childcare center designed to meet OLE! principles.







## Nature Smart Libraries

**Vision: Foster connections to nature through stories, experiences, and resources to promote curiosity and environmental literacy**

# NATURE SMART LIBRARIES

- Completed Natureness Intersectionality Inventory across the Library System to identify nature-readiness and needs to support nature-based programming.
- Used demographic data and community assessments to identify priority neighborhoods in which to focus initial Nature Smart Library efforts.
- Introduced nature-based programming content for youth.
- Implemented Seed Library Program across the System.
- Piloted Story Walks installation at select libraries.



A photograph of a nature play area. In the foreground, several large, flat-topped tree stumps are scattered on a dirt ground. In the background, a large pile of logs and branches is stacked up, resembling a teepee. The area is surrounded by tall trees with green foliage. The sky is overcast.

## Nature Play

**Vision: Activate greenspaces through  
nature play programming and  
installation of nature play spaces across  
the city**

# NATURE PLAY

- PARD's first official Nature Play Space opened at Walnut Creek Metro Park, including the Fairy Pavilion, re-homed from the Wildflower Center's Fortlandia exhibit.
- Helped coordinate installation of additional Fortlandia exhibits at Austin Nature & Science Center and the Hike and Bike trail.
- Developed a procurement process for securing and storing large logs and tree pieces for nature play installations and programming.
- Created Nature Play Guidelines to assist the design, installation, maintenance, and management of nature play spaces.
- Developed final design for MLK Station nature play space based on community engagement efforts.
- Created map to display all existing, planned, and temporary nature play spaces.



# Nature Days at Walnut Creek

Site activation at the new Walnut Creek Metro Park nature playground is taking place with Earth Native Wilderness School hosting four free public nature events.





04

**Our Team**

# Meet the Team



**Melody Alcazar**

Program Coordinator,  
CCCN Austin



**Julia Hill**

Program Coordinator,  
CCCN Austin

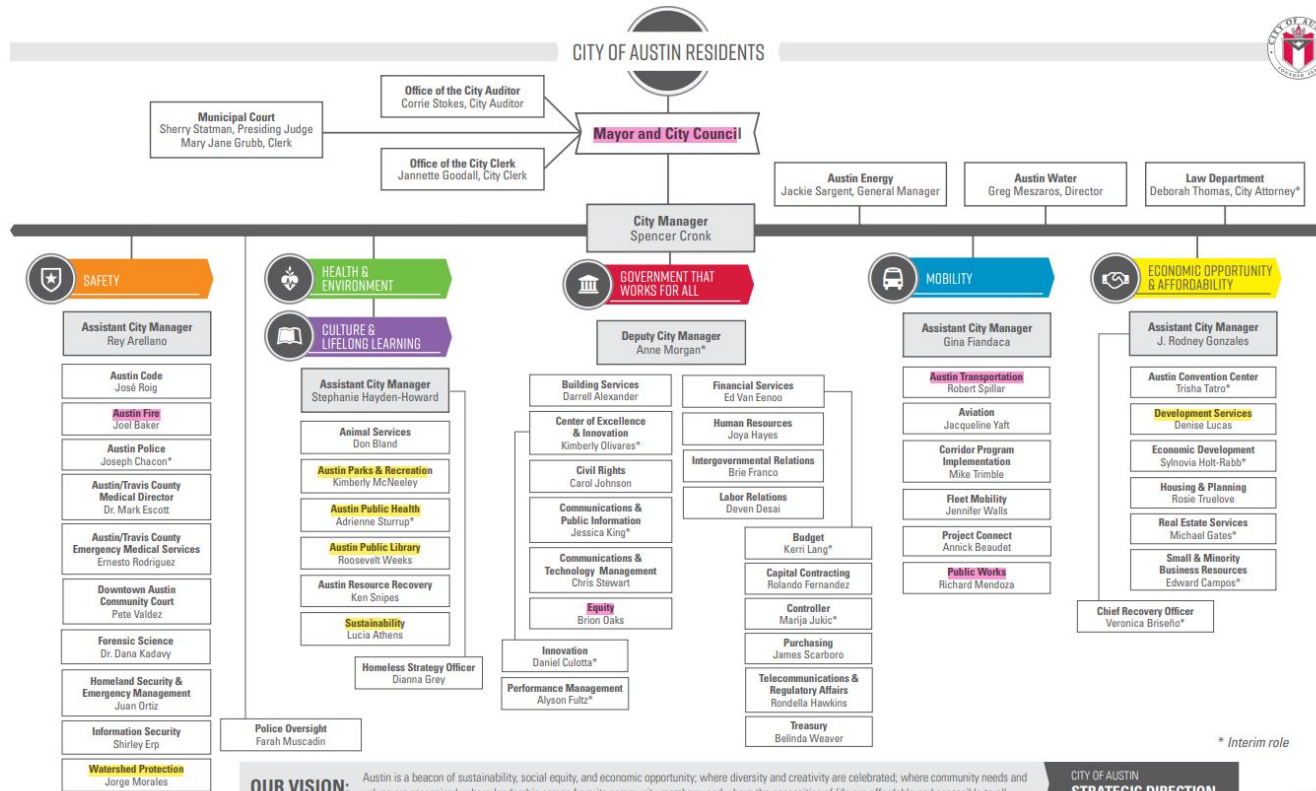


**Sarah Kennedy**

AmeriCorps VISTA, Park  
Planning, Austin Parks  
& Recreation Dept.



# City Partners





# Local Partners



PARTNERS FOR EDUCATION,  
AGRICULTURE & SUSTAINABILITY



**AUSTIN  
PARKS  
FOUNDATION**



# Connect with Us

<http://austintexas.gov/CCCN>

**Do you have any  
questions?**

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- julia.hill@austintexas.gov



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