



City of Austin

Steve Adler, Mayor

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August 29, 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 by our Core Planning Team and six Working Groups ensures that children's equitable access to nature will be a top priority for the City of Austin and our partners.

The enthusiasm and commitment to this mission was readily apparent throughout the planning process. With representatives from my office and 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

With a focus on greening school yards and creating a new network of school parks, Austin will be able to provide daily access to rich nature environments for tens of thousands of students across the city and strengthen communities with access to new park space. We look forward to the opportunity to contribute to this burgeoning national movement and build a relationship with the school district that is stronger than it has ever been.



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Furthermore participation in the CodeNEXT process and dedication to prioritizing nature access across department master plans bolsters key policy goals in my administration including:

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 2016 Bond election
2. Sustainability and climate resiliency – opportunity to build the environmental stewards of the future through “early and often” childhood connections.
3. Early childhood education - outdoor play builds strong bodies and imaginations and fits well with and reinforces preparation for academics, and
4. Equity and affordability - as Austin seeks to reduce residential segregation, ensuring access to nature for all children can serve as an effective indicator of what we want in every neighborhood.

My administration 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.

City of Austin leadership and representatives from key city departments will recommit to the Core Leadership Team to engage with and guide implementation over the next three years. Participating departments include The Mayor’s Office, City Council, Parks and Recreation Department, Office of Sustainability, Watershed Protection, Transportation, Public Works, Austin Water Utility, Resource Recovery, Health and Human Services and Planning and Zoning.

We look forward to 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,

Steve Adler