

How can schools become an integral link in the open space network?



Noelle Higgins

Concept : Traditionally school grounds have been largely paved impervious surfaces with playgrounds, parking and playfields and education has taken place in the classroom. Integrating neighborhood school properties into an open space network is a solution that many cities have looked at. Chicago (see precedents) is a successful example of this.

This type of program creates opportunity to enhance and educate children (and adults) about the possibilities for developing neighborhood sites into functioning ecological, habitat and learning recreational spaces. Since these sites are currently part of the city's owned real estate, the capital investment needed for improvement, though substantial is minimized.

If these green spaces can be integrated into larger parks system that recognizes ecological function in an urban setting, as a necessary design component. They can contribute to the restoration of native animal and plant communities and urban streams and river systems. In turn they become part of an open space corridors throughout the city.

Functions

Outdoor classrooms- To make learning fun and help children to feel comfortable in the outdoors. This is important to address now because sedentary play appears to contribute to obesity among children.

Edible landscapes- Particularly important because they contribute to food security, especially in lower-income neighborhoods. Helps teaches children about self sufficiency.

Sensory spaces- These are especially useful when working with physical, mental and emotional issues. With all children it addresses sensory lessons that cannot be easily conveyed in classrooms.

Habitat spaces- Important contributor to restoration of local urban ecosystem and stewardship among urban children and adults.

Environmental Learning- especially successful if partnered with local environmental groups who have particular expertise in native species and local resources such as Audubon, Starflower Foundation.

Community & cultural place making- Creates open space in neighborhoods that are established, creates outdoor gathering places, help creates stronger links with community, contributes to property value of adjacent neighborhood.

Stormwater management- creating sites that contribute to the ecological functions, takes pressure off aging infrastructure.

Makes learning Fun.

How? (My 3-legged stool theory)

Vision- Strong leadership at the regional or local level is needed to promote this idea, it makes sense to invest in youth, existing infrastructure and neighborhoods, why not do it all at the same time?

Policy-Develop partnerships between public agencies, non-profits and private agencies so that resources (knowledge, tools, equipment & skills) can be shared. Example- parks department & public schools agencies, Public schools and environmental advocacy groups)

Grassroots Efforts- Investing time and energy in very local improvements helps to improve neighborhood environments and increase property values. This also helps schools to become better neighbors, not just a contributor to increased traffic, noise and sometimes crime.



Precedents

Chicago Public Schools & Chicago Parks District

Campus Park Program -In 1994 Major Daley took control of the School system and began using the schools capital funding to replace pavement with grass and trees in school grounds. This linked adjacent lands with school grounds to create campus like settings.

The Campus Park Program addresses the shortage of parkland in Chicago's neighborhoods by targeting public school grounds for parkland improvements. 100 campus Parks had been built by the end of 2002. Improvements continue to existing schools but now the focus seems to be on new construction. This \$2.6 billion Chicago Public Schools Capital Improvement Program was funded through local taxpayers and businesses and has funded school repair and construction since 1996.

"Thanks to our campus park program, we are tearing up the asphalt and replacing it with grass, trees and shrubbery. We're adding benches and playground equipment. We're turning these spaces into campus parks," said Mayor Daley. "We are creating a mixed-community use, where school children use the parks on weekdays and neighborhood residents use them in the evenings and on weekends."

Major Daly

source: <http://www.cps.k12.il.us/default.htm>



Image source <http://www.glenwoodschool.org/summer.htm>

SCHOOL'S AS GREEN SPACE

Precedents



source: <http://www.seattleschools.org/schools/dearborn/>



source: <http://www.seattleschools.org/schools/dearborn/>

Bibliography

Francis, Mark, 'Urban Open Space', Landscape Architecture Foundation, Island Press, Washington

Garvin, Alexander & Berens, Gayle, Urban Parks and Open Space, Urban Land Institute 1997, Washington.

Guggenheimer, Elinor C., Planning for Parks and Recreation Needs in Urban Areas. Twayne Publishers, 1969, New York.

Harnik, Peter, Inside City Parks, Urban Land Institute, 1997, Washington.

Spirn, Ann Winston. 1984 The Granite Garden: urban Nature and Human Design, Chapter 1, 9-37. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers

Johnson, Bart, R. & Hill Kristina, Ecology & Design, Frameworks for Learning, Island Press, 1998, Washington.

Papers

Martin, Melissa A., Larc 590, 2004, Sustainable Schoolyards: Urban Nature in an Educational Context.

Websites

'Green groups set sights on sustainable schools'

KATHLEEN O'BRIEN

The Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce, May 11, 2004.

<http://www.djc.com/news/en/11154642.html>

<http://www.obrienandco.com/projectnewsindex.htm>

The Edible Schoolyard: Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School website

<http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/homepage.html>

Seattle Public Schools

<http://www.seattleschools.org/area/main/index.dxml>

Boston Schoolyards Initiative website

<http://www.schoolyards.org/>

Chicago Green Campus Initiative

<http://envirocenter.uchicago.edu/gci/>

Dearborn Park Elementary:

<http://www.seattleschools.org/schools/dearborn/>

Islandwood:

<http://www.islandwood.org/programs/school/default.php>