

ÉMJS Outdoor Classroom & Ecological Learning Lab

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

- To create a multi-use, sustainable, nature-filled outdoor classroom & ecological learning lab that offer students, teachers, parents and community members a place to play, learn, explore, gather and connect with nature.

WHY DO WE NEED AN OUTDOOR CLASSROOM & ECOLOGICAL LEARNING LAB?

- It will allow teachers to bring learning outside and connect students to nature through hands-on activities.
- It will provide a gathering space for the school community.
- Due to drainage issues, much of our school field cannot be used for large parts of the school year. This project will restore natural ecosystems and habitat on the ÉMJS grounds.

WHAT WILL THE SPACE LOOK LIKE?

The design is a work in progress! The concept plan in this image shows some of the ideas we have come up with so far.

Teachers have also expressed interest in the following:

- A soft natural floor
- Covered space
- Pathways and additional seating and work areas
- Sensory garden
- Opportunities for garden-based learning, exploring environmental issues, student leadership in tending and planting, reciprocity, social emotional learning

Margaret Jenkins School - Outdoor Classroom and Ecological Learning Lab
Concept Plan for Discussion and Brainstorming - Needs, Priorities, Phasing



HOW WILL THIS SPACE DIFFER FROM THE EXISTING SCHOOL GARDEN?

- It will provide a covered seating area for classes to use throughout the school year.
- It will offer students more opportunities for experiential learning.
- Ultimately, this new space will connect with the existing school garden to ensure that all ÉMJS students and our community have access to the benefits of nature, while working to restore natural ecosystems on the ÉMJS grounds.

HOW MUCH WILL THIS PROJECT COST?

- We are working on our budget! We will share a draft soon.
- For reference, similar spaces can cost up to 100K. Existing PAC-supported playspaces at ÉMJS (sandbox area, big kids' playground) have ranged in cost from \$40,000-\$80,000.
- So far, we have raised just over \$64,688 (2022 & 2023 Walk-a-Thons).
- We hope to raise another \$15,000 in our 2024 Walk-a-Thon.

WHAT IS OUR TIMELINE?

- This is a long-term project for ÉMJS PAC and the school!
- We have spent the last 2 years researching outdoor classrooms and green schoolyards, consulting with ÉMJS Admin & staff and SD61 Facilities, and planning what the space could look like.
- In the fall and winter of 2023, we consulted with landscape designers and engineers and have drafted a rough plan which is currently being reviewed by EMJS Admin, Staff and SD 61 Facilities Department.
- We plan to submit final plans to SD61 in the Fall of 2024.
- Once we have final approval and permits, we envision that construction will proceed in 3 phases (likely across 3 school years starting in 2024/25):

Phase 1: Outdoor Classroom

- Construction of covered seating area

Phase 2: Rain Garden & Rainfall Management

- Construction of a rain garden with wetland plantings - a shallow, vegetated basin that collects and absorbs rain and runoff water from Gonzales hill as part of the natural watershed.
- Creating the rain garden will mimic the natural processes that slow, sink, and spread water. This will help avoid flooding on the field and make the field more accessible throughout the school year.

Phase 3: Native Plant Garden

- Planting Indigenous edible and medicinal plants, enhancing the existing Garry Oak meadow, building pathways around the perimeter of the school field.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

- EMJS PAC Exec & Outdoor Classroom Committee
- EMJS Admin & Staff
- SD 61 Facilities
- [Trudi Smith](#) – community member, artist, anthropologist & educator
- [Lehna Malmkvist](#) – community member; Principal, MSc, RPBio of [Swell Environmental Consulting](#)
- If you would like to help with any part of this project or if you have ideas to share, please [email us!](#)

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT THIS PROJECT?

- In 2024, the Walk-A-Thon is our main fundraiser for the Outdoor Classroom & Ecological Learning Lab. You can help your child gather pledges for the event. 95% of funds raised through the Walk-A-Thon will go towards the outdoor classroom; the remaining 5% will be directed towards general PAC initiatives (e.g., so far in 2023/2024, PAC Funds have supported the highly popular DuffleBag Theatre plays (\$1100), chess lessons (\$2810), and contributed 5K to teachers to pay for various class projects not covered by school district funds).
- You can donate to the PAC via [SchoolCash Online](#) – just choose Margaret Jenkins Elementary – PAC as the fund destination.
- Thank you for your support!