



The New York State Office of Religious and Independent Schools

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Upstate PDRC – All NYS Regions North of NYC
RESOURCE CENTER (PDRC)

Outdoor Learning: A Quick Guide

Look for more Quick Guides on the
Upstate PDRC website:

<https://www.nysed-soris-upstate-pdrc.org/>

Goals of this Guide

What is Outdoor Learning?

Why is this model being explored for adapting in-person instruction?

How can New York state independent schools implement elements of outdoor education in their programs?

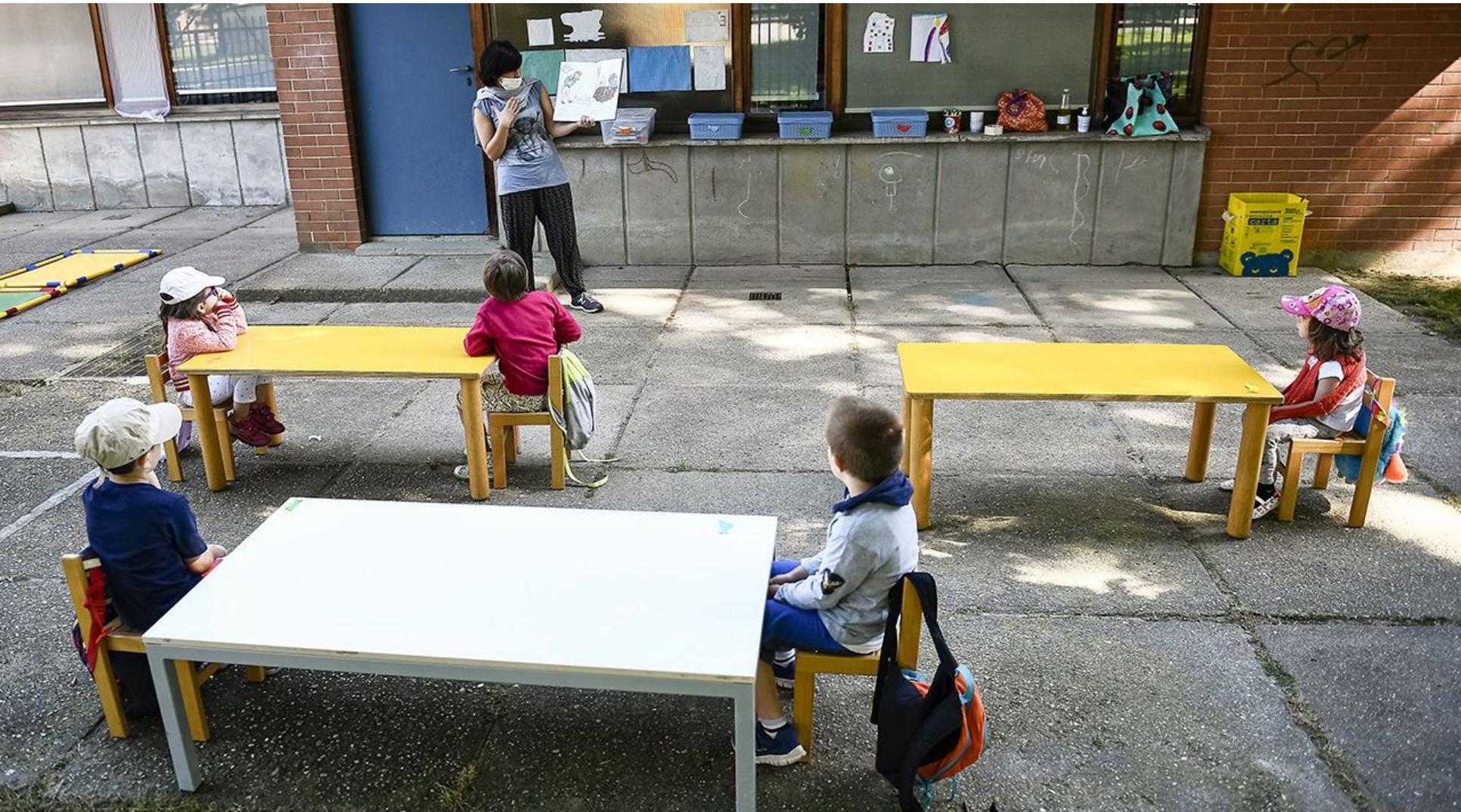




New York State
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Knowledge > Skill > Opportunity



MI  **MEASUREMENT**
INCORPORATED



In Turin, Italy, a teacher reads to students in a makeshift outdoor classroom. NICOLÒ CAMPO/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES



How do we represent fractions?

1/2
1/4
1/8
1/16
1/32
1/64
1/128
1/256

1/2
1/4
1/8
1/16
1/32
1/64
1/128
1/256

1/2
1/4
1/8
1/16
1/32
1/64
1/128
1/256









What outdoor learning is **not**...

Outdoor learning is not the same things as *Outdoor Education* or *Environmental Education*.

Outdoor Education programs are not the regular school day simply adapted to be outside. They are specific programs with goals, missions and staff training that reflect their programs.

Here's an example: West Coast N.E.S.T.

https://www.westcoastnest.org/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwpNr4BRDYARIsAADlx9ySbI3KTrH2574pQdgJ-kjrKH-CyERwOeuha4i4AOJcN4V9fJSxJeNMaAtwnEALw_wcB

Outdoor learning in the context of reopening amid pandemic

Some of the practical measures that schools are considering include:

- Staggering the start and close of the school day
- Staggering mealtimes
- **Moving classes to temporary spaces or outdoors**
- Holding school in shifts, to reduce class size
- Creating “pods” of students and teachers
- Cancelling assemblies, sporting events and other crowd activities

SEE: [Recovering, Rebuilding, and Renewing: The Spirit of New York's Schools - Reopening Guidance](#)

Guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics

For every age group from PreK-secondary school, the AAP recommends that schools **“Utilize outdoor spaces when possible,”** as a high priority strategy for returning students to schools with physical distancing measures in place. This guidance also applies to meals.

For secondary school students, the AAP additionally recommends “Particular avoidance of close physical proximity in cases of increased exhalation (singing, exercise); **these activities are likely safest outdoors and spread out.”**

SEE: [COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry](#)

A combination of practices

“When *Science* looked at reopening strategies from South Africa to Finland to Israel, some encouraging patterns emerged. Together, they suggest a combination of **keeping student groups small** and **requiring masks** and **some social distancing** helps keep schools and communities safe, and that younger children rarely spread the virus to one another or bring it home. But opening safely, experts agree, isn’t just about the adjustments a school makes. **It’s also about how much virus is circulating in the community**, which affects the likelihood that students and staff will bring COVID-19 into their classrooms.”--American Association for the Advancement of Science

SEE [School openings across globe suggest ways to keep coronavirus at bay, despite outbreaks](#)

Current distancing guidelines

Outdoor classrooms would help school leaders create instructional space to provide in-person instruction now that social distancing guidelines (July 2020) call for :

- at least six feet of space between people or
- fewer than 11 persons in a room
- fresh air and ventilation (transmission from coronavirus is less likely outdoors than indoors)
- wear cloth covering over the mouth and nose

SEE: CDC [Considerations for Schools](#)

Framing the “time and space” problem

"School districts have a time and space problem—with **so many hours** in the school day and **so many square feet inside** the school buildings. They are trying to get as many kids as possible in the buildings, and they are coming up with solutions that address the problem from the perspective of reducing the amount of **time** that kids are in school—with staggered schedules, year-round schedules, etc.—within the amount of space that they have.

We are trying to help the schools think about working with that other variable and increasing the amount of space that's available... **the higher-quality space outdoors, with better ventilation, fresh air, more opportunity for social distancing.**"

--Craig Strang, the associate director of teaching and learning at the Lawrence Hall of Science at the University of California, Berkeley

SEE [Outdoor Classrooms in the Age of COVID-19: Pros and Cons](#)

SEE SEE: Research Spotlight on Year-Round Education

(NEA) <http://www.nea.org/tools/17057.htm#:~:text=The%20most%20popular%20form%20of,and%20the%2090%2D30%20plans.>

Elements of outdoor learning

Using the outdoor spaces in and around a school for teaching subjects usually taught indoors....

Increasing time spent outside....

Re-imagining the school day to include some periods of classroom time to facilitate blended learning and remote learning...

Re-imagining core content delivery through projects that can extend from home to school and back again...



Capturing the benefits of nature's classroom

SEL/Mental Health

Recognition that we should start the school year out with trauma-informed practices and mental health supports that access to nature can provide-- according to research:

SEE [The Surprising Benefits of Teaching a Class Outside](#)

SEE <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/why-time-outdoors-crucial-your-health-even-during-coronavirus-pandemic>

Place-based education

PBE immerses students in local heritage, cultures, landscapes, opportunities and experiences, using these as a foundation for the study of language arts, math, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum. PBE emphasizes learning through participation in service projects for the school and community.

SEE <https://promiseofplace.org/>

Observation/nature studies/experiential science

SEE <https://www.edutopia.org/article/using-outdoors-teach-stem>

SEE <http://stemteachingtools.org/assets/landscapes/STEM-Teaching-Tool-20-Outdoor-Play-and-Investigations.pdf>

SEE <https://teachmag.com/archives/10644>

Advice for lesson planning

- Go outdoors for a reason.
- Integrate everything.
- Embrace the opportunity for developing critical thinking.
- Incorporate student choice for motivation and personalization.

SEE [Out Teach: Teaching outside during COVID-19](#)

SEE Free outdoor learning activities developed by Out Teach

<https://edu.workbencheducation.com/search?contentChannel=35&contentType=%5B%22lessons%22%5D>



Denmark's *udeskole* and others

SEE [Towards an understanding of udeskole: education outside the classroom in a Danish context](#)

SEE “Split Classes, Outdoor Lessons: What Denmark Can Teach England About Reopening Schools”

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/may/17/denmark-can-teach-england-safe-reopening-of-schools-covid-19>

“...a working method where parts of the everyday life in school is moved out of the classroom – into the local environment. Udeskole implies regular activities outside the classroom. The working method gives the pupils the opportunity to use their bodies and senses in learning activities in the real world in order to obtain personal and concrete experiences. Udeskole allows room for academic activities, communication, social interaction, experience, spontaneity, play, curiosity and fantasy. Udeskole is about activating all the school subjects in an integrated training where activities out-of-doors and indoors are closely linked together. The pupils learn in an authentic context: that is, they learn about nature in nature, about society in the society and about the local environment in the local environment” <https://www.naer.edu.tw/ezfiles/0/1000/img/67/Denmark.pdf>

SEE [4 Countries who are Championing Outdoor Learning \(and why we should be doing the same\) | Latest News](#)

Any plans for moving learning outside have to be:

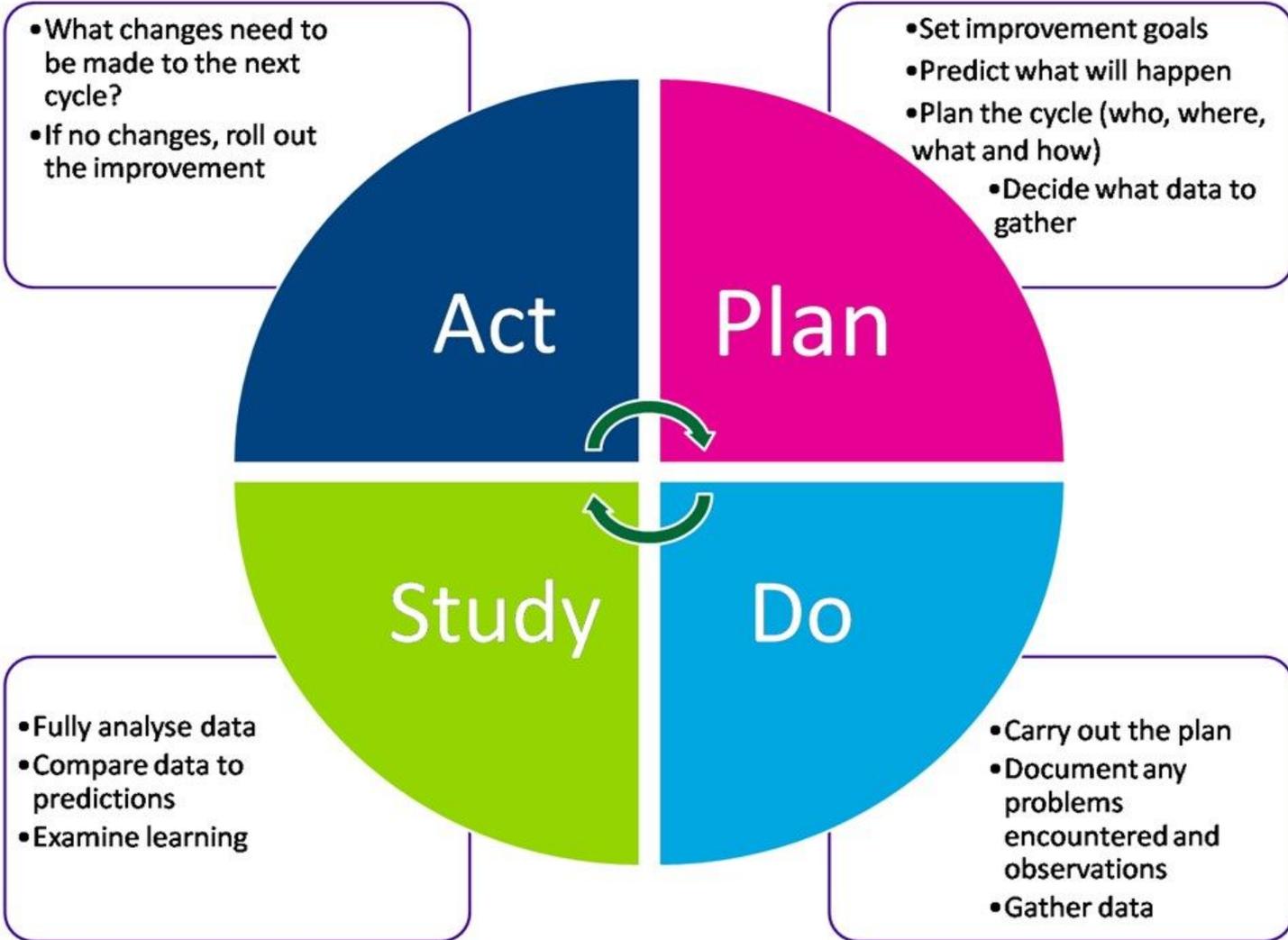
Responsive...to public safety, the national economy and the educational needs of American children

Intentional...two-way communication, widespread buy-in, strategic

Studied: feasibility, sustainability, effectiveness, safety

Adapted: to local conditions and resources

SEE: Implementation guidance <https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/module-5/introduction>



Plans in development

Green Schoolyards America:

[National Covid-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative — Reopen Schools by Moving Classes Outside](#)

Tools for planning infrastructure: [Outdoor Infrastructure](#)

Coming soon: Strategies for outdoor learning



Green Schoolyards America is fiscally sponsored by Earth Island Institute, a 501(c)(3) **nonprofit** organization. The Upstate PDRC does not represent Green Schoolyards America.

So there you have it...



Thank you and stay tuned



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The Upstate PDRC exists to serve the professional development needs of New York state's religious and independent schools. We would like to hear from you what professional development topics and sessions would be most beneficial. Use the 1:1 Support Request on our website to stay in touch.

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