

The Many Reasons Why Schoolyards Need More Trees!

Tiny Forests

I especially hope the school board will consider planting at least some 'tiny forests' or 'tiny food forests' in school yards.

These densely planted areas contain tall trees, shorter trees, shrubs and plants. Due to the competition, they grow 10 times faster than normal, sequestering far more carbon. They are also havens for wildlife. Tiny food forests are less dense, to allow space for harvesting.

* See more info about tiny forests, plus more links for research, at the end of this document.

I'm here today to ask you to do everything you can to greatly increase the numbers of trees planted in our school yards.

Recently I listened to a radio interview with a researcher by the name of Ming Kuo.

She described herself as someone who considered Nature as "nice" ... but not a necessary component of a decent human life – kind of a nice amenity.

Yet she discovered that people get more stressed if they do not have access to nature. And, where there are more trees, there is less crime.

Ming Kuo's research showed her that giving people more access to nature consistently produces better health, better social functioning, and better psychological functioning.

She now believes that access to nature is a necessity for human health. As essential as food, water and shelter.

Just imagine what a difference adding that necessity to schoolyards could make!

It could mean measurably happier, healthier kids who have fewer conflicts, who get along better with each other and with adults.... Kids who feel more comfortable spending their days in an institution – because trees in the school yard are fulfilling a basic need.

There are many more reasons to plant trees:

- The closer people live to green space, the less likely they are to be sick. This effect was shown to be strongest with children and with people in lower socio-economic groups.

- a Seattle report from 2013 found that residents of poorer neighbourhoods with the least trees tended to "live sicker and die younger" – in fact, 13 years younger than those who lived in wealthy neighbourhoods.

They were more likely to be hospitalized for asthma, and to die of heart disease.

- Trees in schoolyards could help children in inner-city neighbourhoods share some of the healthy benefits of access to nature. And it wouldn't stop there -- those trees would also be benefitting the health and wellbeing of residents in the surrounding community as well.
- Also important, children who attended schools with greener spaces experienced less bullying, and felt a greater sense of safety.
- Studies show that trees have a calming effect on people. They reduce mental fatigue, and they reduce stress.
- In fact, urban planners have been urged to include more trees because of their positive effect on mental health, at a time when many trees – both public and private -- are being removed to allow increasing density of our urban communities.
- Thickly planted trees can reduce sound by up to 50%. So school rooms near busy streets could be noticeably quieter and less stressful.
- Trees planted beside roads reduce air pollution, and can even reduce indoor air pollution in nearby buildings, by as much as half.
- Trees can reduce flooding in streets and in schoolyards.
- Trees reduce the force of wind. Even winter trees with bare branches moderate the force of wind. They can make schoolyards more comfortable for kids to spend time outside.
- I'm sure you'll be interested to hear about one of the most important studies, which was done quite recently. It showed that planting trees (along with reducing deforestation) is by far our best tool to mitigate climate change.

At a time when hundreds of climate scientists around the world have warned us we have maybe 11 years in which to make drastic changes, in order to save the world from catastrophic climate change, we need to plant as many trees as we can.

Please consider how the school board can facilitate this. How can we move ahead to plant more trees at all our schools, for the well-being of our children, our community, and our planet?

Please reply and let me know what steps need to happen in order to help transform schoolyards and provide children with the incredible, essential, and proven benefits of trees.

Thank you very much for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Grace Golightly