



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2017.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Louisa County

Program Title: Outdoor Classroom Program

Program Category: Parks and Recreation

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Christian R. Goodwin

Title: County Administrator

Department: Administration

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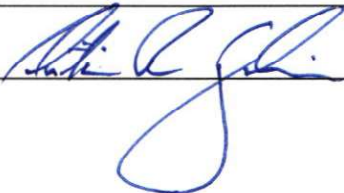
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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Christian R. Goodwin

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 



THE COUNTY OF LOUISA

2017 Virginia Association of Counties - Achievement Award Submission

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM PROGRAM

A partnership between Louisa County Public Schools, nonprofit entities, and area businesses to fund and construct Virginia's first Nature Explore certified classroom, a hands on learning experience where children benefit from knowledge gained in nature.



OVERVIEW

For years, education has been driven by preparation for standardized tests. With a changing focus from the Virginia Department of Education which prioritizes life skills, Louisa County is broadening focus beyond the test. Students learn in a variety of ways, and the Outdoor Classroom helps us meet



each student where he or she is and push them to his or her next level. Research indicates that children who learn in high-quality outdoor classroom spaces show greater creativity and problem-solving skills, better concentration, and a heightened ability to manage stress in healthy ways.

Introduction

Louisa County Public Schools, worked with area businesses and nonprofits to design and construct Moss Nuckols Elementary School's (MNES) Outdoor Classroom. The space transformed the school's courtyard area into a thriving, nature-based area where students flourish in a hands-on environment.

Partnerships, Implementation, and Staffing

The project took shape under the direction of MNES art teacher Lauren Wade. Ms. Wade and several other instructors wanted to upgrade the school's outdoor area, and researched a number of options. They found The Nature Explore Group, a Nebraska-based collaboration between the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Education Research Foundation which supports efforts that connect children with nature. Dominion Energy and the William A. Cooke Foundation provided critical funding for the project. Numerous local businesses and contractors (such as Faulconer Construction, Luck Stone, ITAC, Virginia Vermiculite, Spring Hill Nursery, Better Living, Foxwood and Orange Madison Co-Op/Southern States of Louisa) donated time and labor to the effort, which also benefited from assistance by our High School Turf Management Program's students.

Results

The Outdoor Classroom is regularly used and particularly impactful at MNES. First, it builds on the school's extensive School Garden program (the recipient of a 2016 VACo Achievement Award). The gardens, which feature raised beds producing vegetables that supply the school's cafeteria, have been an amazing success. The gardens function as outdoor Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) labs, and another element of that program has brought the benefits back inside the building, as students try vegetables that they have grown and learn to appreciate nutrition in new ways. The new Outdoor Classroom is located adjacent to the growing MNES garden, and builds on the existing project by creating a nexus for outdoor learning and play.



MNES is the school division's primary school for providing additional services for students with autism, another reason the program is such a wonderful fit for the school. These students are engaged through the Outdoor Classroom's kinesthetic learning opportunities, the bright colors and sounds, and the imagination at work. While we believe this new space will benefit all MNES students, students with autism may in fact benefit the most.



The Outdoor Classroom is a space that is used by individual classes or grade levels to take learning outside. With more than a dozen different station activities, students engage with nature and instruction, allowing their imaginations to come to life.

CONCLUSION

The Outdoor Classroom program has been a complete success for the students of Louisa County. It broadens student horizons and allows for critical hands-instruction in an environment that allows



learning in nature. Critical private sector resources (funding, construction efforts, and various materials) were utilized, further enhancing the results. The project's articulation with the already-successful School Gardens program is beneficial, and the space provides thriving environment that fully engages our students and their learning needs.

