

Who Uses the Space Provided for the 2020-2021 School Year: At the George L Catrambone School in Long Branch, our entire school and staff utilize our outdoor space. You can frequently find classes outside conducting a science lesson, enjoying some peaceful and relaxing sounds of nature, reading books, discovering nature, taking a walk, planting, harvesting, cultivating gardens, composting, and so much more. Often staff meetings or PD sessions are offered outside, concerts for families and students (although not this past year due to the pandemic) this is a space that gets used as often as possible. While the majority of the grounds are maintained by the buildings and grounds and custodial departments, students are often outside, weeding, planting, and maintaining the garden spaces.

How Often is it Used?

Outdoor education and play support emotional, behavioral and intellectual development. Studies have shown that students who learn outdoors develop: a sense of self, independence, confidence, creativity, decision-making and problem-solving skills, empathy towards others, motor skills, self-discipline and initiative. For these reasons the outdoor space is open and available throughout the school year at all times for teachers and students to engage in lessons, activities and projects. Classes are out there weekly weather permitting.

How is nature (e.g. natural materials or features) incorporated into the classroom?

While the outdoor classroom is continuing to be expanded on and improved, Nature is the primary feature for the outdoor learning space. We have multiple gardens for children to plant flowers, herbs, and a variety of vegetables. Bird feeders hang from trees to help birds find food and make their homes in our spaces. We have focused greatly on native plants and wildlife this year to enrich our natural biodiversity and provide the food and habitat the native pollinators need for our area. Thanks to a professor at nearby Monmouth University, many native plants were bought and planted around the school, native trees were planted and this will bring homes, and food for the wildlife native to our area thus enriching our outdoor spaces. In addition we have beaches a short 4 block walk from our building. This affords our students the opportunity to expand our outdoor classroom into the beauty of the shore line and all that it offers. With the lifting of many of the CoVid restrictions, these spaces will be used once again next year.

Describe the professional development provided to school personnel related to the utilization of the space, giving dates that the training occurred and indicating which personnel were trained.

Direction on Garden and Outdoor space is open to all staff to use in ways they deem appropriate for their classes. Emails are sent with sign ups to ensure there are an adequate number of classes out at specific times. When activities are planned, times and appropriate guidelines are shared with other staff members so that space is available for all who need it. Outdoor classrooms have been discussed at multiple school green team meetings, and a group of teachers have made plans and guidelines to share with the building as mentioned below.

Some of the procedures we use when utilizing the outdoor classroom on-going space are we developed the following outdoor classroom routines:

- Develop outdoor classroom rules to post in the classroom. (No running. Quiet voices. Touch gently.)
- Establish set procedures for going outdoors.
- Practice collecting clipboards and other tools, lining up, and walking through the halls so students know what is expected and can get ready quickly and quietly.
- Use a different door than students use at recess.
- Using a different door can reinforce the fact that this is class time and help students remember to exhibit the behavior of scientists, writers, artists, or researchers.
- Have an outdoor "gathering spot."

- Designate a gathering area where students go when they first get outside to await initial instructions, and to which they return for a mid-lesson check-in or closing discussion.
- Have a signal for emergency situations.
- Practice it so students know how to return to the building immediately, if needed.
- Students may move around to share what they found with others. Encouraging them to talk to each other about what they find.