Kinard's Outdoor Learning Center Vision 2017

To invest in a more robust learning environment for students is to invest in our future. If we want to initiate educational reform and societal change we must drastically shift our teaching approaches and our financial investment strategies. Marketing experts have long known that it's not the mind, but the heart, that offers the most potent pathway to shifting behavior. We cannot expect those in our community to initiate real change for something they do not love. Too often schools, business, entrepreneurs, and community leaders make the mistake of investing in short-term, technical fixes to make progress towards a healthier society and environment.

Our vison shifts the investment towards our youth. We want to help our students develop an empathy and passion for the natural world. By educating our kids in new and innovative ways, we are confident that they will grow up to make more informed decisions for a healthier society, a stronger economy, and a thriving environment. As the future business owners, government officials, and community members who will create lasting change in our world, we fundamentally believe that the greatest natural resource is the minds of our children. Please join us in making our vision a reality.

On the following pages you will find an initial plan for what our vision has to offer.

Current Reality **vs.** **Our Vision**

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As students enter our new Outdoor Learning Center, we want them to feel like they have been transported into a whole new world. A world in which they feel inspired, healthy, and creative.

One important aspect of any outdoor space is a garden. To plant a garden is to believe in the future. It's important for our students to interact with the process of where food comes from and to make connections to a sustainable community that centers around home grown vegetables.

Of course, learning about energy cycles of food requires learning about compost too. We have traditionally composted between 20-30 thousand pounds of food waste every year in our cafeteria.

However, recent utility changes have limited our capacity to compost effectively at Kinard. By building on-site infrastructure for composting in our own backyard, we would be liberated from long term utility bills. This would also help to keep our energy local, reduce our carbon footprint, and allow our peers to roll up their sleeves to learn how to create healthy, nutrient-rich soil.

In addition, as we establish our new garden area, a **second phase project** would be to install a small greenhouse. This would allow us to utilize our compost to grow seedlings throughout the winter months. Our long-term goal is to have the ability to grow food year-round so that the learning doesn't stop just because the weather changes in the fall and winter.

A few additional angles of our garden and compost area vision

With all of this interactive, hands-on learning in the garden, we will also need to build some utility space for tools, cleaning, and organization. This space would include a wash bay area near an already existing water valve attached to the school plumbing. This area will also include a shed and a natural wood conference table to interact with the "art of composting and gardening".

While gardening and composting are great applications for STEM subjects, we have also designed this outdoor learning center to have something for everyone. This amphitheater classroom area is intended to accommodate a large set of students from any content area class in the school. This space will encourage teachers in math, English, history, art, PE, music, and world language classes to break the mold of the traditional classroom setting and engage in a natural landscape for learning.

In the spirit of creating a flexible and inter-connected space that fosters multiple pockets of learning at the same time, a walking path will guide students into different breakout zones without interrupting the focus of another class that may also be utilizing the space. Our goal is to create a variety of flowing areas. This would allow for small pockets of reflective dialogue, quiet book nooks, and other collaborative break out zones.

In partnership with local garden centers, we also hope to create the feeling of a small forest zone that is full of biodiversity and privacy from the street-side traffic. If designed appropriately, these plants, shrubs and trees would provide a dual-purpose opportunity to educate our students on the importance of native species, how to encourage pollinators, and would reflect the natural ecosystems that make Northern Colorado special.

Another important aspect of a robust outdoor learning center is a space where students can unlock their creative potential. An outdoor kitchen lab space will allow students to complete the food system cycle - from farm to table. Students will be able to tinker with plants, herbs, solar ovens, bike blenders, and more to prepare innovate culinary creations.

While we want to inspire an innovative new vision, we also want to be practical. Below you will see a plan outlining some project phases that we wish to implement over the course of the next 1-3 years.

Phase 0 – Our Current Reality: The initial landscape with the few items we already have ready built or have in our possession (compost tumbles, green cone, composting signs, outdoor chalk boards, tools, and solar ovens)

Phase 1 – Initial Preparations and Hardscapes: Re-grading the ground, removing irrigation heads, hardscape landscaping with breeze stone paths, river rock wash bays, wooden log seating areas, and larger boulders set in low grade spots to retain drainage patterns away from the building. In addition, we would purchase lumber and other materials to begin construction of garden beds/boxes - utilizing our technology curriculum and wood shop tools.

Phase 2 – Install Garden, Compost, and Outdoor Amphitheatre: Construct garden, install drip lines and irrigation, build large scale compost boxes, increase seating capacity and break-out zones for collaborative outdoor classrooms.

Phase 3 – Continue to Build Capacity: Plant native/approved plant and tree species for privacy and new learning mediums, build new natural tables/benches, install a basic outdoor kitchen counter top and pergola.

Phase 4 – Install New Structural Aspects: Buy or build a small shed, more complex garden beds, rainwater collection system, more infrastructure in our outdoor kitchen, pergolas and archways.

Phase 5 – Install Greenhouse: Buy or build a small, walk-in greenhouse.