



Good Planning of Schoolyards Impacts Student Grades

A community garden in the schoolyard – an environment for significant learning

Na'ama Lev

The schoolyard is an integral and important aspect of a school's grounds and character. Correct planning of the schoolyard directly influences the school's façade, its atmosphere, and the pupils' cognitive and social development.

In many cases, flawed planning leads to a shortage of green space and equipment and limits options for play and downtime, which can result in tension and arguments. The children become bored, develop aggressive behavior, and have less opportunity for physical, social and cognitive development. A

correctly planned schoolyard creates more options for playing in a safer and healthier environment, fosters positive behavior, personal empowerment, and develops leadership. A suitable schoolyard can also facilitate optimal learning outside the classroom.

JDC-Israel enlisted The Asper Foundation and JNF-UK for a special initiative run by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI). The initiative helps schools re-plan their schoolyard and establish a community garden

within it as an environment for optimal learning.

Landscape architect Galia Hanoch-Roe, who specializes in planning ecological environments in collaboration with the community, carried out unique planning workshops in the schools, in which students, teachers, management staff, parents and neighborhood activists participated. The result: multi-participatory planning of the space suited to the needs of the school and its community. This is a 'green' space of course, which takes the environment into consideration, integrates principles of sustainable development, and encourages environmental habits and values.

The garden is established under the tutelage of SPNI counselor and professionals. The establishing team includes school staff,

students and parents. All partners feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the space being built and they take care to maintain and foster it regularly. In parallel to setting up the garden, the school staff undergoes training by SPNI counselors who show the teachers how to utilize the environment to teach all the subjects being taught by the school: science, language, math, geometry, national history, religious holidays, English and more. For instance: a green wall was used to teach fractions and elevated wooden flower boxes were used in geometry to teach the volume of a three-dimensional shape.

Three schools in the south of the country – *HaDekel* in Ashkelon, *Yitzhak Sadeh* in Dimona and *Efraim Ben David* in Kiryat Gat – have already taken the plunge and the difference can be felt at all levels.

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This article was published in the 2015 edition of *Landscape Architecture*, a magazine that focuses on topics relating to the design of outdoor public spaces, landmarks and structures. The magazine is distributed to members of the Israeli Association of Landscape Architects.



Top page and above: establishing a community garden in *HaDekef* school in Ashkelon

Below: the *Efraim Ben David* school in Kiryat Gat – before and after

