

# Supplemental Resources for the Connect to Nature School Award Application



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## Category 1: Be physically active and play outside every day to grow up healthy.

(Three options must be accomplished)

### **We provide outdoor experiences everyday for all students.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Discourage the elimination of outdoor recess for discipline reasons at your school. Create alternate disciplinary action.

Notes:

- This does not include days when the weather is not ideal.

### **We encourage outside play for our students and their families, provide and communicate ideas, and have developed a recognition program.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Send home monthly ideas via school newsletter or email of quick outside play ideas that families can do. Set up recognition program such as have a bulletin board that families can send in photos to display of their family playing outside.

### **We provide inspiration to experience the outdoors with posters or other mediums in our school and for families.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Poster Source: [Green Schoolyards can Improve Academic Outcomes](#)
- Poster Source: [Did Your Child Play Outside Today?](#)
- Poster Source: [Ohio Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights](#)



## Category 2: Have Access to Safe, Natural Green Spaces in their Community

(Two options must be accomplished)

### **We promote imaginative structured and unstructured play with natural materials.**

Examples/suggestions:

- [Plant a garden with which the children can interact](#)
- Extend playground boundaries to include spaces with bushes and trees
- Provide natural structures for climbing and manipulating.

### **We provide a place on the school campus grounds that encourage spaces for families to use during non-school hours.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Are your playgrounds and natural classrooms open for exploration in the evenings and/or on weekends?
- Suggest additional visits by offering a nature scavenger hunt for families to complete if they come for a visit.

### **Our district and buildings host activities at our community green spaces and other natural resources.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Encouragement of families to participate in programming by your local nature centers and environmental education agencies.
- Partnering with a local agency to offer programming and enrichment to your students and families. This could be at an after school awards program/carnival/open house, a tailored virtual experience, or homework assignments.

Note:

- We understand that all situations and circumstances are different. Please contact the Board if you have any questions about this section. We would also love to hear other suggestions your school has come up with!



## Category 3: Connect with Nature, with free time to Explore the Outdoors

(Two options must be accomplished)

**We provide supplies, materials, equipment and opportunities for all children in the school to explore the outdoors.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Have students engage in a scavenger hunt.
- Use string or hoops to outline a spot in the grass to observe a microhabitat
- Encourage seasonal comparisons in your landscape beds or brush.
- Have nature discovery tools in your library that students can check out and return for recess

Notes:

- This question is three-fold, but please understand that the supplies, materials, and equipment do not necessarily need to be top of the line. Items such as magnifying glasses and insect nets can be helpful. But, a piece of string, cardboard tube binoculars, and a notepad can be perceived by students as all they need to be confident in their explorations.

**We incorporate outdoor experiences in homework assignments.**

Examples/suggestions:

- [Miami County's Nature Quest Program](#)
- Assign the students at least once a week for homework to go outside for 15 minutes and record in their journal pictures or writing of their observations. They could pick the same spot and have a yearly seasonal nature journal.
- For institutions that do not assign homework, encouraging families to spend time together outside through email, flyers, newsletters, or other creative ways will fulfill this benchmark.
- Suggest that families read together outside.

**We will encourage the correlation of technology in the outdoors to experience nature.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Have students use a digital device to capture images outside that they find interesting. Discuss their photos as a group.
- Design a map of the schoolyard as an animal would see it.
- Use Citizen Science apps to upload data. (iNaturalist, eBird, Nestwatch)
- Use identification apps to learn about something new.



## Category 4: Discover the Wonder of Plants and Animals, Large and Small using all Five Senses

(Must accomplish 5 with special encouragement to accomplish the first option)

**Our school has created an outdoor learning area usable by students and teachers and we have completed the survey about this site here...**

Notes:

- For assistance with this section, contact [dhorvath@metroparks.org](mailto:dhorvath@metroparks.org)

**Our Music Program will provide opportunities to listen to the sounds of plants and animals outside and enjoy the natural world concert.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Play ambient sounds from other parts of the world and compare them to the sounds in your green space.

**Our Music Program will utilize songs that encourage a connection with nature.**

Examples/suggestions:

- [Banana Slug String Band](#)
- Chris Rowlands
- Does your Music Department have other suggestions for songs and artists? We would love to hear them!

**Our Art Classes will go outside once a season and make ‘five senses’ maps of our outside environment or other art activity that connects students to nature.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Making art out of natural materials
- Create art with a living thing found in your schoolyard as the inspiration
- Create a habitat or display that can be ‘toured’ by other students in the building about a local animal (ex. Underground)



## CONTINUED: Category 4: Discover the Wonder of Plants and Animals, Large and Small using all Five Senses

(Must accomplish 5 with special encouragement to accomplish the first option)

**Our Physical Education Classes will utilize the outdoors to engage the five senses.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Utilize the five senses in a relay race pertaining to the outdoors.
- Hike around the grounds searching for examples of ways to experience nature
- Divide class into teams and allow for a scavenger hunt of various items or senses

**All teachers provide writing opportunities connecting their experiences with the outdoors**

Examples/suggestions:

- [Nature journaling](#) (this website also has book suggestions)



## Category 5: Explore the Diversity of Ohio's Natural Habitats

(Two options must be accomplished)

**Every grade level in our school goes on a school field trip to a natural environment such as a park, nature center, etc. each year or has lessons outdoors on our school land lab(s).**

Examples/suggestions:

- Contact your county, city, and township park systems or local nature centers for opportunities
- Caesar's Creek State Park

**We send home monthly suggestions of a family excursion to an Ohio natural habitat.**

Examples/suggestions:

- For specific habitat excursions to suggest, contact your local park system or nature center
- MVLNCI Partners and Board Members offer a wealth of opportunities. [Visit our webpage for their contact information.](#)

**We encourage our students to participate in a local park or nature center outdoor program once a month.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Refer to posted activities online or in publications put out by your local park agencies and nature centers.
- Refer to our list of partners. [Visit our webpage for their contact information.](#)



## Category 6: Understand the Patterns and Cycles in Nature

(Two options must be accomplished)

**Our Science curriculum will include a sequenced plan to study different aspects of nature with an emphasis on its importance in every grade level.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Incorporate [Project WILD](#), [Project WET](#), and [Project Learning Tree](#) Lessons/activities into your curriculum.

**We post on social media or website/page a fact or information about patterns and cycles**

Examples/suggestions:

- For ideas on what to post, you can follow [MVLNCI's Facebook Page](#)
- The Children and Nature Network is also a great resource
- Examples of Patterns and Cycles in Nature:
  - Water Cycle
  - Individual Lifecycles for specific wildlife
  - Hibernation
  - Photosynthesis
  - Seasons and Time
  - Rock Cycle
  - Carbon Cycle
  - Decomposition Cycle
  - Lunar Cycle





## Category 7: Experience the Joys of Splashing, Playing, and Swimming in Safe, Clean Lakes and Streams

(Two options must be accomplished)

**We will distribute information about offerings available in our local parks and nature centers that provide access to natural water play.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Contact your county, city, and township park systems or local nature centers for opportunities
- MVLNCI Partners and Board Members offer a wealth of opportunities. [Visit our webpage for their contact information.](#)

**We ensure at least one grade level has a school day field trip that involves creek/river exploration.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Contact your county, city, and township park systems or local nature centers for opportunities. Many offer water exploration field trips.
- MVLNCI Partners and Board Members offer a wealth of opportunities. [Visit our webpage for their contact information.](#)

**We have found another option to enjoy our Ohio surface waters such as splashing in or exploring puddles on the school grounds.**



## Category 8: Be Fully Immersed in Nature by Camping

(Two options must be accomplished)

### **We provide local camping information**

Examples/suggestions:

- Highlight local opportunities for camping by keeping brochures from local campsites on hand for parents to access
- Send an informational email or post to social media local camping information.
- Encourage backyard camping

Notes

- You can do this in conjunction with the second option in this section.

### **We encourage participation in the Great American Campout National Wildlife Federation**

Examples/suggestions:

- [Visit their website for more information](#)



## Category 9: Learn How to Give Back to Nature

(Five options must be accomplished)

### **Our teachers read to students about protecting nature.**

Examples/suggestions:

- The Watcher by Jeanette Winter
- Bee & Me by Alison Jay
- 10 Things I Can Do to Help My World by Melanie Walsh
- The Water Princess by Susan Verde

**We encourage monthly nature focus ideas for students, parents, school staff and our community to give back to and protect nature including recycling, planting seeds/trees/food shrubs, picking up litter etc.**

Examples/suggestions:

- [The Earth Day website has many suggestions](#)
- [Leave No Trace](#)

**We encourage parents to share their nature connection stories from their childhood with their children.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Create 'dinner conversation prompts' to encourage parents to share

**We encourage families to certify their backyards as National Wildlife Federation Backyard Habitat or similar natural habitat certification.**

Examples/suggestions:

- Direct families toward programming that encourages habitat certification
- [Habitat Certification Webpage](#)

**We participate in the Lights Out Miami Valley program to protect birds by eliminating extraneous outdoor lighting during migration season.**

Examples/suggestions:

- [Lights Out Miami Valley](#)



## CONTINUED Category 9: Learn How to Give Back to Nature

(Five options must be accomplished)

### **We participate in a tour and pledge for sustainability at the Montgomery County Environmental Learning Center**

Examples/suggestions:

- [More information on tours](#)

**We are: A) a National Wildlife Federation certified SCHOOLYARD WILDLIFE HABITAT or B) a CERTIFIED WILD SCHOOL SITE certified by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources or C) a Monarch Watch certified MONARCH WAYSTATION site or D) a CERTIFIED NATURE EXPLORE CLASSROOM or E) other similar natural habitat certification; and have our sign posted on school grounds.**

Examples/suggestions:

- [NWF Certified Schoolyards](#)
- [WILD School Sites](#)
- [Monarch Waystations](#)
- [Nature Explore Classrooms](#)