

Parent Involvement

AT ITS BEST

by John Campin

Two Schools, Same Vision

I have had the opportunity to design outdoor classrooms at two schools, one as a principal and the other as a parent. After seeing what was accomplished at Gomez Heritage in one year, I wanted to do the same for Plattsmouth Elementary where my own children attend. It is amazing how the vision was the same although the culture and community are different. The first step at both schools was to learn more about the research and present it to the district to gain approval for our projects. After that, the work began with communicating to teachers and parents, bringing all of us together who were interested to start the plan.



Photographs by the author

Most parents speak Spanish at Gomez Heritage in South Omaha, Nebraska; therefore, an interpreter always supports the group. The parent community at Plattsmouth is more rural with all English-speaking parents. Did this matter? Not at all! The vision was the same!

Furthermore, both sets of parents brought the heart and soul to projects when thinking creatively during the design phase. Both sets of parents offered what they could to help make a difference. Whether it was physical labor, donations, connections to businesses for support, or fundraising efforts, both school communities came together to build a place for their children to learn outdoors.

As a Principal, I was very proud to hear and see how the parents at Gomez Heritage worked together at the table, but also in the Outdoor Classroom. As a parent, I was also very proud to watch how the parents worked together in Plattsmouth, to think outside the box, and create a special place for their children. What made this easier for the parents to visualize were the pictures and research I gathered from Nature Explore in Lincoln, Nebraska. Something visual helps all ages learn and grow; parents came up with many ideas for their space.

Both schools are unique in their own ways, but the vision was shared: "Let's work together to create a safe learning environment outside for our children." It doesn't matter what school you are affiliated with and in what community — it is easy to hand over the reins to parents to collaborate and work together, side by side, to make a special place for all children. You just have to give them the opportunity! Have you created a space inside or outside at your school?

If not, get the parents involved!

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