

# Why Schoolyards Matter

For many children, the schoolyard is the primary public space where well-being, belonging, and development are negotiated every day. Schoolyards hold powerful, but too often unrealized, potential to support unstructured play, physical activity, social connection, access to nature, outdoor learning, and opportunities for sport. Used daily by every child, they are among the most overlooked spaces in our education system.

**Every Child. Every Day.** Schoolyards are one of the most underleveraged assets in education, used daily by every child. Yet rarely designed with attention to students' most fundamental developmental needs.

## The Evidence Is Clear

A growing body of research shows that when schoolyards and recess environments are intentionally designed and supported, they generate meaningful benefits for children, schools, and communities.

- Support mental health, well-being, and belonging
- Strengthen peer relationships and social skills
- Reduce stress, conflict, exclusion, and behavioural challenges
- Provide equitable opportunities for movement and play across ages, abilities, and interests
- Improve engagement, attention, and readiness to learn across the school day
- Expand access to nature, play, and sport, particularly in under-resourced communities

## Why Now?

- Rising concerns related to children's mental health, social disconnection, and physical inactivity
- Growing attention to belonging, peer dynamics, and inclusion
- Increasing climate pressures, including heat, flooding, and access to green space
- Calls for more play, movement, outdoor learning, and well-being without clear guidance on where or how

**A High-Impact Investment.** Few spaces reach all students across age, ability, and background as consistently as the schoolyard. Thoughtful schoolyard investment delivers multiple high-impact returns from a single space—supporting learning, well-being, play, physical activity, sport, equity, and climate resilience.

## A Systemic Opportunity

Despite their importance, schoolyard quality is often shaped by fragmented policy guidance, reliance on parent fundraising, limited professional preparation, and the absence of shared standards. Treating schoolyards as essential infrastructure allows education systems, governments, and funders to align investment with mental health, outdoor play, physical activity, inclusion, and climate priorities, delivering multiple public benefits from a single, everyday space.

**Schoolyards for Thought™** advances knowledge, research, design, and policy to help schools, systems, and partners reimagine schoolyards for the 21st Century.