

Why Schoolyards Matter

Reframing Schoolyards as Essential Educational Infrastructure

Schoolyards are where children spend a significant portion of their school day. They are central to play, movement, social connection, and restoration—yet they remain one of the most overlooked spaces in education systems.

The Evidence Is Clear

High-quality schoolyards and recess environments strengthen mental health, belonging, and peer relationships; reduce conflict, exclusion, and behavioural challenges; support physical activity across abilities and ages; improve readiness to learn; and advance equity, particularly in under-resourced communities.

When schoolyards are poorly designed or unsupported, they can instead become sites of loneliness, exclusion, and inequitable access to play and movement.

A Systems Problem — and a Systems Opportunity

Schoolyard quality is often shaped by inconsistent policy guidance, reliance on parent fundraising, limited professional preparation for staff, and the absence of design standards or evaluation tools. This creates patchworks of opportunity rather than equitable access.

Treating schoolyards as essential infrastructure allows education systems to align schoolyard investment with mental health, physical activity, inclusion, and climate priorities—ensuring sustainable, high-quality environments for all students.

Our Role

Schoolyards for Thought advances research, design, and policy to help education systems reimagine schoolyards as inclusive, climate-ready spaces that support the whole child.

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