MAKE HAY IN MAY
FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN FOR NATURE EXPLORE PLAYGROUND
The goal of this project is to incorporate nature as an integral, joyful part of children’s daily learning by building a Nature Explore Outdoor Classroom.
“Early experiences with the natural world have been positively linked to the sense of wonder. This way of knowing, if recognized and honored, can serve as a life-long source of joy and enrichment, as well as an impetus or motivation, for further learning.” - Ruth A. Wilson

As developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky taught years ago, children’s learning takes place best as part of caring relationships with adults and with other children. Adults who themselves delight in experiencing the natural world and understand the rich learning that can take place in natural outdoor spaces will greatly aid children’s healthy growth and development. Field testing and research shows great benefits across the curriculum for children who explore well-designed outdoor spaces with nurturing adults. Educators and families who encourage children to master new challenges, develop increasingly complex skills, and closely observe and appreciate the natural world will give children gifts that will last a lifetime. Outdoor time will come to be seen as more than “recess”, and will instead be viewed as an invaluable part of each day’s learning activities. Adults and children will delight in sharing the wonder and awe that nature can inspire in each of us, no matter our age or where we live.

The Nature Explore Classroom provides many opportunities for children’s learning and development. The outdoor classroom supports learning that is focused upon the whole child, encouraging them to learn in multiple ways. Children will be able to use their minds and their five senses as they explore the outdoor environment. These experiences will support development of problem solving and observation skills, creativity, and gross motor skills to name a few. Children will likewise have the opportunity to develop social skills and hands on learning while being encouraged to develop emotionally balanced attitudes to the natural world.

The outdoor classroom will also be an important place for teachers to learn and develop expertise in teaching in outdoor environments. Teachers will have the opportunity to learn as the children do, through hands on experiences. These experiences in outdoor education and play will have impact for their practice of teaching and for the children they teach. The outdoor classroom can also serve as an important place for research concerning outdoor play and learning for young children. In all these ways, the Nature Explore Classroom provides many different forms of support for children’s and adult learning and development.
Research shows that nature offers one of the best classrooms for whole learning, allowing children to engage all of their senses.

Children will be provided the opportunity to develop an appreciation for nature and learn to value the diverse experiences available to them outdoors.

Children who have regular contact with nature become deeper learners.

Children who have regular contact with nature experience a more complete whole-person development.

An outdoor classroom works exceptionally well in supporting children’s learning in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); as well as language/literacy, the arts and social/emotional development.

Application of research-based, field-tested design principles to create these nature-rich outdoor spaces.

Families and teacher education candidates will experience a quality early learning outdoor environment that will provide them with opportunities to learn about how to create learning experiences for children outdoors.

WHY?
WOULD YOU PLEASE CONSIDER SUPPORTING ONE OF THESE OUTDOOR LEARNING CENTERS?

$3,000 SPONSOR LEVEL

CLIMBING/CRAWLING AREA
An area where children can crawl through and/or climb up designated elements. Looking at the world through multiple perspectives (gazing down from up high, or peering through a hollow log, for example) strengthens children’s thinking in ways that support mathematical and visual-spatial skills.

MESSY MATERIALS AREA
An area covered with wood chips or mulch where children can dig, carry heavy objects such as sections of tree stumps, and explore other “messy” materials from time-to-time like bales of hay or pumpkins. A well-designed “messy materials” area can encourage children to use their imaginations, experiment with a variety of natural objects, practice carrying heavy objects, and feel a sense of accomplishment and personal mastery over the environment.

BUILDING AREA
A hard-surfaced area where children can build with natural wooden blocks. Building with blocks provides many chances to strengthen visual-spatial, mathematical, and abstract thinking. Providing blocks outdoors that are different from the typical blocks found inside classrooms gives children a chance to experiment in new ways.

NATURE ART AREA
An area where children can use materials from nature to create patterns and works of art. This is also a place where materials that encourage children to sketch, such as clipboards and paper, might be stored. As children work with natural materials such sticks, pine cones, or leaves, and arrange them into patterns or pictures, they develop close observation skills, classification skills, and a sense of appreciation for the beauty of the natural world.

MUSIC & MOVEMENT AREA
An area where children can experiment with making music and creating expressive movement. Outdoor music and movement areas provide a place in children’s lives where they are able to make music and dance in an unstructured way, allowing for improvisation and creativity.
GARDEN AREA
An area where children can experience planting and harvesting flowers and vegetables, and a pathway for children to walk that takes them through a variety of low grasses, flowers, and/or bushes. Interacting with natural vegetation helps children connect with the wonders of nature, learn about natural systems and seasons, and develop keen observation skills.

WATER AREA
An area where children can safely experiment with water and its properties. Hands-on activities allow children to experience and change the flow of water, observe water currents, discover that some objects sink and others float, or predict whether a leaf will be propelled down a waterway faster than a feather.

DIRT-DIGGING AREA
An area where children can dig directly into soil. Experiencing the rich feeling and aroma of soil can be calming and beneficial to children. Working with dirt gives children a chance to experience a texture that is different from sand. In digging areas, children may also have the chance to discover insects or earthworms in the soil.

SAND AREA
An area for experimentation with sand. Working with sand provides a different tactile experience than working with dirt (soil). Sand areas provide ideal settings for positive social interaction.

WHEELED TOY AREA
A separate space for children to ride small wheeled toys away from the flow of the rest of the outdoor classroom, which gives them another chance to use large muscles.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!
Checks should be made out to the UND Foundation, with UCLC Playground in the memo section.

Checks can be mailed to:
UND Foundation
3501 University Ave, Stop 8157
Grand Forks, ND 58202

All gifts are tax deductible.

CONTACT
JoAnne Yearwood
joanne.yearwood@UND.edu
701.777.3947
“I appreciate how communicative the teachers and staff have been. I feel like they are real partners in the care and development of my child. My son clearly feels happy and safe at UCLC and is excited to go to school each day.”