



My name is Elana Mintz, and I'm the founder and executive director of Urban Adventure Squad, a DC-based nonprofit education organization. For ten years, in collaboration with schools and nonprofit partners, we have relentlessly sought funding and support to bring equitable, curriculum-aligned, neighborhood-based outdoor learning programs to public schools and communities across DC.

This year, we're partnering with over two dozen public and public charter schools, including C.W. Harris Elementary School in Ward 7, where we're building a demonstration model for what sustained outdoor learning can look like across the curriculum.

Since 2018, we have competed for and won grants, including from DC government agencies, that have brought nearly half a million dollars into DC's public and public charter schools. We've engaged thousands of children over the years, many of whom are regulars in our programs.

Last week, I walked into C.W. Harris Elementary School to meet my colleague, Randi Jones, and several classes for curriculum-connected outdoor learning, and

saw a young friend. “I remember you,” she said. “We talked about bark and trees.”

Two things were remarkable about this: 1) We’d spent less than an hour with her class 3 months earlier, learning to identify neighborhood trees by their bark, leaves, and seed pods, and 2) at least four more students that day stopped Randi and me to say that they remembered us and what we learned three months earlier.

This isn’t just heartwarming. It’s what the peer-reviewed evidence on outdoor learning shows: in a 2012 Swedish study, 85 high school students learned biology and math as part of an experiment in which some students learned outdoors and others learned indoors.

In interviews five months after the classes, researchers found that students quote “showed a higher degree of long-term knowledge retention. They remembered both activities and contents better than the pupils in the indoor classes.”

Unquote.

A compelling and growing body of evidence demonstrates the effectiveness of equitable outdoor learning, but there is no financial support for it within our school system.

We have never received any money from DC Public Schools or from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education despite the fact that we work every day to support the goals of these agencies, which include educating the whole child and helping students become environmentally literate.

It is time to overturn the harmful idea that academically rigorous learning only takes place indoors. Wouldn't it be amazing if DCPS became the model for other urban school districts, where the common assumption is that outdoor learning isn't possible or even worthwhile?

I invite you to come see for yourself what happens when we ask, What is possible outdoors? and collaborate with teachers and students, who deserve what equitable outdoor learning can give them.

Thank you so much for listening.