



Alabama Outdoor Classroom Program

Site Evaluation: Assessing & Mapping your Site



When surveying your campus for an Outdoor Classroom project site(s), bring a map of the school along with a camera and review the following:

- Location, Location, Location! How far will the Outdoor Classroom be from the school building?**
Most importantly, try to choose a site such as an unused courtyard that is close to the school building and is easily accessible to a great number of classes to reduce travel time and maximize activity time.

- Where do you want to develop your Outdoor Classroom? Mark this area on your site map.**

Potential Location #1: _____

Potential Location #2: _____

Potential Location #3: _____

- Investigate your school’s building rules. Mark any places on your map that you are restricted from utilizing due to school rules.**

- Are there any future construction plans for your campus? Mark any places on your map that you are restricted from utilizing due to future development.**

- What features currently exist on the site? (trees, shrubs, water, drains, buildings, sidewalks, etc) Mark these areas on your site map.**

- Where are the underground cables, wires, and pipes that need to be avoided?** Contact your local school system Buildings and Maintenance Supervisor to verify where any underground hazards or utility lines are located so that they can be avoided.

Underground Utilities: _____

- Directional orientation (N, S, E, W)?** Note the directional orientation (north, south, east and west) on your map to help determine which areas will receive the most sun and wind exposure.

- How much sunlight does your outdoor classroom area receive each season? At what time of day?**
Note how much sun exposure your potential outdoor classroom area(s) receives and at what time of day to help determine what types of plants to include. Southern or western exposures tend to receive the most sunlight and afternoon heat, whereas northern or northeastern exposures receive the least.

Sunlight Exposure: _____

- Does your school grounds have any issues with erosion or drainage?** Avoid areas with erosion or drainage problems unless it is an area where the problem can be remediated by installing French drains or a rain garden. Contact your local Natural Resource Conservation Service office for suggestions.

Erosion/Drainage Issues: _____

- What is the size of your site?** Take measurements of the potential site(s) with your students.



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- Where are your water sources?** Look for spigots, downspouts and sprinklers for watering your plants. Identify nearby streams, wetlands or ponds for aquatic activities with students. Mark these on your map.

Water Sources: _____

- Where is your electrical source?** Look for outdoor electrical outlets in case you need access to electricity for an activity or a learning station (such as the pump on a pond). Mark these on your map.

Electrical Source: _____

- What is your soil quality and type?** (wet/dry, acidic/alkaline, clay/sandy/silt/rocky, etc.) Contact your local ACES office or garden supply center for information and tools on how to conduct a soil test to help you determine the types of plants and trees that can grow in your outdoor site.

Soil Quality: _____

Soil Type: _____

- Which watershed does your school grounds drain into?** Map the watershed around your school including where run-off from buildings and paved areas collect and which areas drain quickly or are very dry. Visit the ACES website at www.aces.edu/waterquality/themes/watershed.htm to help you identify the watershed in which your school is located.

Local Watershed: _____

- What are the topographical features of the site?** Note the elevation and slope. For example, hills and rises may provide a good location for an amphitheater, but may not be easily accessible; whereas, low areas may collect water and remain “mucky,” making them ideal for an artificial wetland or bog garden.

Topographical Features: _____

- What are the geological features of the site?** Research the geological characteristics found in your county; and, if possible, collect and identify different types of rocks around your school grounds. Also, keep in mind that the presence of rocky soil may impact your ability to grow certain plants and trees or to construct certain outdoor classroom components.

Geological Features: _____

- Which direction does the wind typically travel and how much wind exposure does your potential outdoor classroom site receive?** If needed, plant evergreens to help protect your outdoor classroom area from potentially high winds. Note the weather typically travels from west to east across Alabama.

Wind Exposure: _____



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- Do you have students with special needs? Does this site allow for wheelchair accessibility?** Make sure that your outdoor classroom site is accessible to all students.

Special Needs Accessibility: _____

- Where is the common foot traffic?** Avoid areas that contain foot paths utilized by students, teachers, and the community, or formalize the path with a walkway to direct the traffic through the outdoor classroom site without disturbing it.

Foot Traffic: _____

- What should be removed?** If possible, identify and remove all non-native, invasive plants and replace them with natives.

Non-native, Invasive Plants that should be removed: _____

- What should be left alone?** Sometimes you can develop your outdoor classroom area(s) around features that already exist on your campus, which will help you save time and money, such as:

Classroom Seating (gazebo or benches): _____

Natural Areas (pond, forest or meadow): _____

Wildlife Habitat (brush piles or native plants): _____

Other: _____

- Do you have any safety concerns regarding litter, vandalism, security, or health hazards?** Identify any potential sources for litter, vandalism, or safety concerns (such as poison ivy, bee hives or busy streets) around your outdoor classroom site. See the Alabama Outdoor Classroom Planning Guide for a full list of Vandalism Reduction Tips.

Litter/Vandalism Issues: _____

Potential Safety Concerns: _____

- What is adjacent to the site?** Note the land use on adjacent properties. Neighbors who also manage their property for wildlife can be beneficial, whereas businesses may create danger zones or loud noise.

Neighbors: _____

**Don't forget to take photos as you survey your campus so you can remember how it "used to look."*

The Alabama Outdoor Classroom Program is a partnership between:



*Alabama Cooperative
Extension System*



Alabama Wildlife Federation
www.alabamawildlife.org/classrooms/



*Alabama Department of
Conservation & Natural Resources*