Learning by Nature: Nature Parks

The Learning by Nature initiative is a partnership between the Vancouver School Board (VSB) and the BC Parks Foundation that creates outdoor learning spaces where students can connect with nature, learn through experience, and develop lifelong stewardship values.

Program Overview

Background

BC Parks Foundation - Learning by Nature Initiative

The BC Parks Foundation's Learning by Nature initiative is a province-wide program that supports students in connecting with, learning about, and enhancing nature on their school grounds. Through outdoor learning spaces, habitat restoration, biodiversity projects, and student-led environmental action, the program helps transform school grounds into living classrooms that foster environmental stewardship, well-being, and place-based learning. Learning by Nature is delivered through partnerships among governments, school districts, Indigenous communities, and private-sector supporters, with a long-term vision of connecting every school in British Columbia to nature and conservation action.



Students at Vancouver Technical Secondary's school garden

The initiative is funded through a collaborative public-private partnership led by the BC Parks Foundation (BCPF), with support from the Government of Canada through the Climate Action and Awareness Fund, the Province of British Columbia, proceeds from the BC Parks License Plate Program, and contributions from private-sector and philanthropic partners.

VSB Founding School District Member

BC Parks Foundation - Learning by Nature Initiative

In 2024, the VSB officially signed on to the Learning by Nature initiative as one of five founding school districts. The first initiative was the Spark Grant program, which saw $60,000 in funding distributed to approximately 20 schools to undertake work that would increase biodiversity and enhance student leadership.

Following the success of the Spark Grant program, Learning by Nature launched its Nature Park funding stream, supporting the creation of transformative nature-based learning environments on school grounds designed to increase biodiversity, strengthen student connection to nature, and provide dedicated areas for outdoor education.

These initiatives contribute meaningfully to VSB's Environmental Sustainability Plan objective to "support and improve outdoor focused spaces and activities at schools."

Sir Wilfred Grenfell Elementary

Vancouver School Board



Nature Park at Sir Wilfred Grenfell Elementary

Project Background

Situated in Vancouver's Renfrew-Collingwood area, and within the Still Creek basin, Grenfell Elementary was the first VSB site selected to receive a Learning by Nature "Nature Park," and the first complete project within the provincial initiative.

The project was integrated with the school's seismic upgrade program, allowing site preparation work to be completed efficiently while minimizing additional disruption and cost. Grenfell was also a strong candidate due to the school community's longstanding commitment to outdoor learning and its active efforts to enhance outdoor education opportunities.

Project Highlights

Site Area: 1,500 m²

Total Project Budget: $180,000

Stewardship Fund: $20,000 (anticipated)

Project Timeline: 10 months

Budget Breakdown:

- **Design:** $30,000
- **Site Preparation:** $46,000
- **Furnishings and Features:** $42,000
- **Trees and Planting:** $60,000



Nature Park Landscape Site Plan

Sir Wilfred Grenfell Elementary

Vancouver School Board

Student Co-Design

A key feature of the Learning by Nature program is its emphasis on student and staff participation in the design process. Through a collaborative co-design workshop, students, educators, VSB staff, project consultants, and representatives from partner organizations worked together to develop a shared vision for the space. The resulting design reflects the priorities and aspirations of the school community while supporting outdoor learning, environmental stewardship, and student well-being.



Students participating in the engagement sessions

Installation and Features

Construction of the Nature Park was completed in Spring 2026 alongside the school's seismic upgrades. Students and staff began using the space when they returned to school in September 2026.

Developed on the footprint of a former portable building, the approximately 1,500 m² Nature Park includes:

- Outdoor gathering circle with log seating and teaching area
- Outdoor activity tables and seating
- Raised garden beds and gardening infrastructure
- Mud kitchens for nature-based play and learning
- Eleven newly planted trees and extensive native planting including over 1,000 shrubs, perennials, and ground covers
- Accessible spaces supporting outdoor education, biodiversity, and student engagement



Outdoor classroom featuring chalkboard and timber seating logs