

South San Francisco High South San Francisco Unified School District



Green Building and Grounds, Land-Based Ecosystems

Mid-Level

Campus, Curriculum, and Community



This year two forces for change came together in South San Francisco High School to collaborate on a project to create more outdoor learning space at the school that simultaneously create native habitat and help provide more options for students and teachers to gather safely as they return to campus:

1. Rhonda Clements - U.S. History, Health and World Geography teacher, SMCOE Solutionary Teacher Fellow, and SSFHS Earth Club mentor
2. Finley Lique and Rachell Le - 2019-2020 Youth Climate Ambassador Program Graduates, and SSFHS Earth Club members

Together with the other members of the SSFHS Earth Club, and utilizing technical assistance from SMCOE's Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative, they developed plans for an outdoor learning space that included more equitable access to outdoor learning, provide a space for social and emotional nurturing, as well as as restore native habitat.

The project has taken a tremendous amount of persistence, and advocacy, as well as coordination with community based partners from a variety of stakeholders: students, faculty, administrators, parents, alumni, and the business community. Part of the process was getting permission for the project, another part was securing funding for implementation, and a final part included making a plan for ongoing development and maintenance of the site. Start-up funding came from both the district and a grant from Peninsula Clean Energy. And the SSFHS Earth Club will raise funds to support the ongoing development and maintenance of the site.

This project has helped Earth Club students learn about the complexities of getting a project through the various phases and how hard it can be to get traction and be change agents in a district that has no outdoor learning plan. The district has learned a lot about their own responsibility and role in supporting projects of this nature, as well as shifted their institutional mindset on the importance of investing in outdoor learning.

Approved at the end of May, the district will begin construction over the summer providing a safe outdoor activity that will allow students to socialize and contribute to their school community, while simultaneously creating something new and exciting for when they return to campus. Faculty and facilities staff have voiced their support, and have committed to taking part in the site's construction (i.e. plan to remove the sod to provide a graded decomposed granite surface so the area is accessible to more students), as well as bring students out to use the space in the fall once it is complete. Learning plans include inspiration from SMCOE's [Outdoor Learning and Play Strategies](#) and [Environmental/Climate Trauma Informed Practices Strategies](#), and include lessons on social and emotional well-being, and opportunities for learning about native flora/fauna, the importance of pollinators, urban farming, watersheds, and sustainable environmental practices.