

From: [JL Tiggs](#)
To: [Historic District Commission \(Staff\)](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Support for Detroit Waldorf School's Outdoor Classrooms
Date: Monday, May 9, 2022 9:22:47 PM

To Detroit Historic District Commission:

As a lifelong resident of and longtime educator in the City of Detroit, I am writing to express my support for the outdoor classrooms at Detroit Waldorf School to remain permanent structures in support of the school's community and curricula. The classrooms were designed, sited, and built by professionals who hoped to reopen Detroit Waldorf School for a safe return for the fall of 2020--which did happen garnering [local](#) and [national](#) attention. These outdoor classrooms have been invaluable, not only to the health and safety of the school's community, but they also extend the school's emphasis on connecting students to the natural world, and given the condition of our climate and environment, it is imperative that we continue to develop children's interest and investment in learning about the natural world in order to preserve it for the next generations. Additionally, these outdoor classrooms give children in the city of Detroit an experience unlike any other school in the city. The outdoor classrooms encourage children to continue to spend less time in front of screens and more time using their imaginations, inquiring about big questions, and exploring the world around them after school hours.

Because I also have a child who attends the school, I can attest to the impact the outdoor classrooms have on a child's development. My child is excited to go to school and learn in the outdoor classroom and around the school's beautiful outdoor campus. There is constant talk of what they observed in nature, detailed descriptions that come from those observations in the outdoor classrooms, predictions, experimentation, and plans for what will happen next. The outdoor classrooms strengthen just about all of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, but particularly for naturalistic, visual spatial, interpersonal, and kinesthetic learners. Interacting with nature while learning traditional academics provides an interesting backdrop and foreground to learning. There is awe and wonder that are cultivated by learning in these wonderful outdoor spaces. The outdoor classrooms act as laboratories, art studios, theatre stages, writer's workshops, and more.

There is research about the benefits our outdoor learning which includes:

- "Are particularly effective at helping under-resourced, low-income students **perform measurably better** in school." *Note: Detroit Waldorf's Affordable Tuition Program, students come from many different income levels.*
- "Quantitatively **increase student motivation and enthusiasm** to learn
- Markedly **improve classroom behavior** with fewer discipline referrals and related problems
- Help students **concentrate** for longer periods and help mitigate attention deficit problems
- Help students to **learn across disciplines** and make them **better real-world problem solvers**
- Help keep students **engaged in their school work** and make them **less inclined to drop out** of school" *Coyle, K.J. (2010)*

*Coyle, K.J. (2010). *Back to school: Back outside!* National Wildlife Federation. This report summarizes the benefits of outdoor education and provides action ideas, policy recommendations, and additional resources. It's available

at: <http://www.nwf.org/~media/PDFs/Be%20Out%20There/Back%20to%20School%20of%20ull%20report.ashx>

As an educator who has worked in K-12 schools for the last 20 years, I agree with this research and would love to see outdoor learning in outdoor classrooms at every school in our city if there were an opportunity. Detroit Waldorf School community has that opportunity and should be able to maintain it with the outdoor classrooms.

Finally, the outdoor classrooms have become places where the community can come together to safely celebrate including the recent [Storytelling Festival](#) that was developed by the school's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. During this time, the outdoor classrooms served as stages for many community members to share stories to build connections to better understand one another--developing our empathy for one another and emotional intelligence. Given recent socio-political events, these events and skills are necessary for all of us to develop in order to live more harmoniously.

This Historic District Commission has an opportunity to help preserve these unique learning experiences for children in the City of Detroit (and surrounding areas). I support the outdoor classrooms remaining as permanent structures to support the vision and mission of the school and hope that you will as well.

Please feel free to contact me with additional questions.

Sincerely,
Jennifer L. Tiggs, MA Ed.
Detroit Resident
Detroit Waldorf School Parent (4 years)

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