

Rethinking Education During and Post COVID- 19: The Roles of Nature and Play

Jennifer Schnakenberg
Assistant Director of Education
Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy





**Improving quality of
life for the people of
Pittsburgh**
by restoring the park
system to excellence
in partnership with
government and
community
organizations.

Frick Environmental Center

- Gateway to 600+ acre urban park
- Environmental education programs in partnership with schools
- Public programming
- Neighborhood outreach





**Connecting People
to Nature:**

**Benefits of Nature
mirror**

Benefits of Play



Nature is good for our bodies and our minds

Outdoor play

- Promotes physical activity
- Reduces stress
- Boosts immune system
- Improves attention, mood, and memory
- Helps us to build social and family bonds, feel connected to the world around us, and supports creative play

Nature also supports educational goals

- Promotes inquiry and scientific thinking
- Cross-disciplinary supports integrated teaching & learning
- Builds communication and leadership skills
- Authenticity: interacting with the natural world
- Increases interest and motivation
- Potential for equitable and culturally responsive practice





**How do we continue to
support playful outdoor
learning during COVID-19?**



**Park usership
is up over
100% since
March 2020**



2 Approaches:

**Support & INSPIRE families to
explore outdoors**

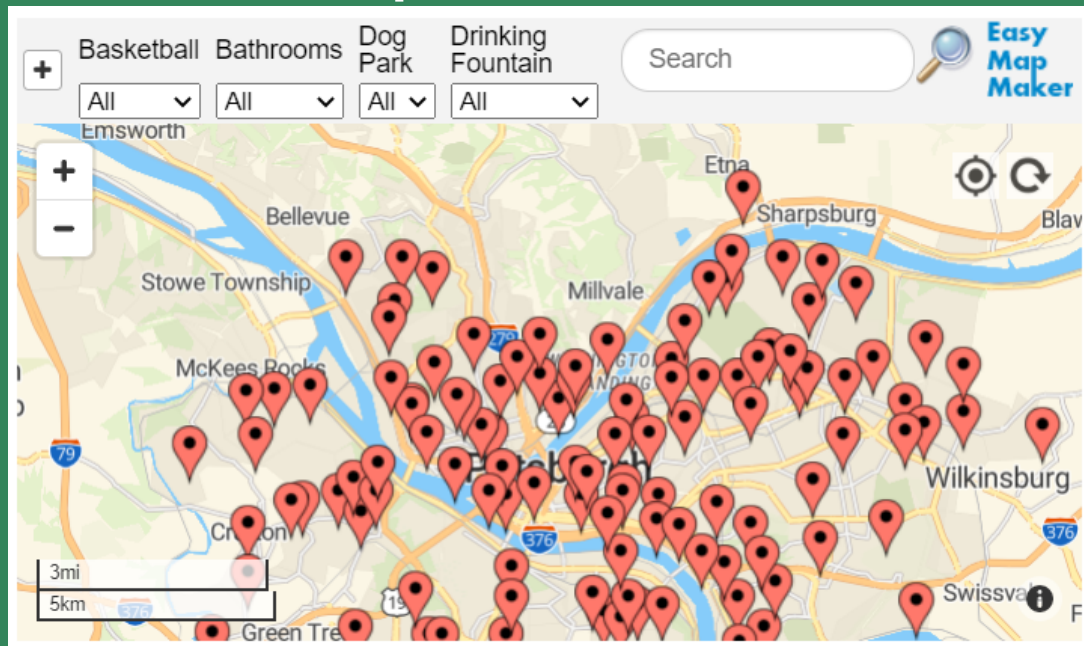
**Provide teachers with
resources, activities, and
connections**

Parks on the Go




Supporting Children & Families – Parks Rx

Park Finder Map – Searchable & Filterable



Fall/Winter Tim Sheet – Full of Links



Fall/Winter 2020-21 Tip Sheet


Fall and winter weather can bring their own set of fun! There are good reasons to make that extra effort to get outdoors in all seasons, such as:

- Staying physically active
- Boosting your immune system
- Being exposed to fresh air
- Getting healthy doses of vitamin D from sunlight

Kids who play outside year-round are shown to be more positive, more creative and more adaptable!

Tips for playing outdoors in fall and winter:

- Bring snacks and water
- Keep moving: think about some activity ideas that will keep kids active and engaged
- Set time limits and take breaks indoors to warm up
 - * Find a park with an indoor facility or play outside close to home
- Dress children in multiple loose layers so they stay dry and warm, and never let them play in extreme cold
 - * Check out this video from Active Kids Club about layering: www.youtube.com/watch?v=McUKYXGLHfs
 - * Looking for assistance with warm clothing, visit: www.projectbundleup.org



Parks Rx fall activity ideas:

Go outside to enjoy the fall leaves. Can you match the fallen leaves to the tree they grew on? Have you ever tried to catch a leaf as it falls to the ground?

Connecting to Parks from Home

Supporting Children & Families Online

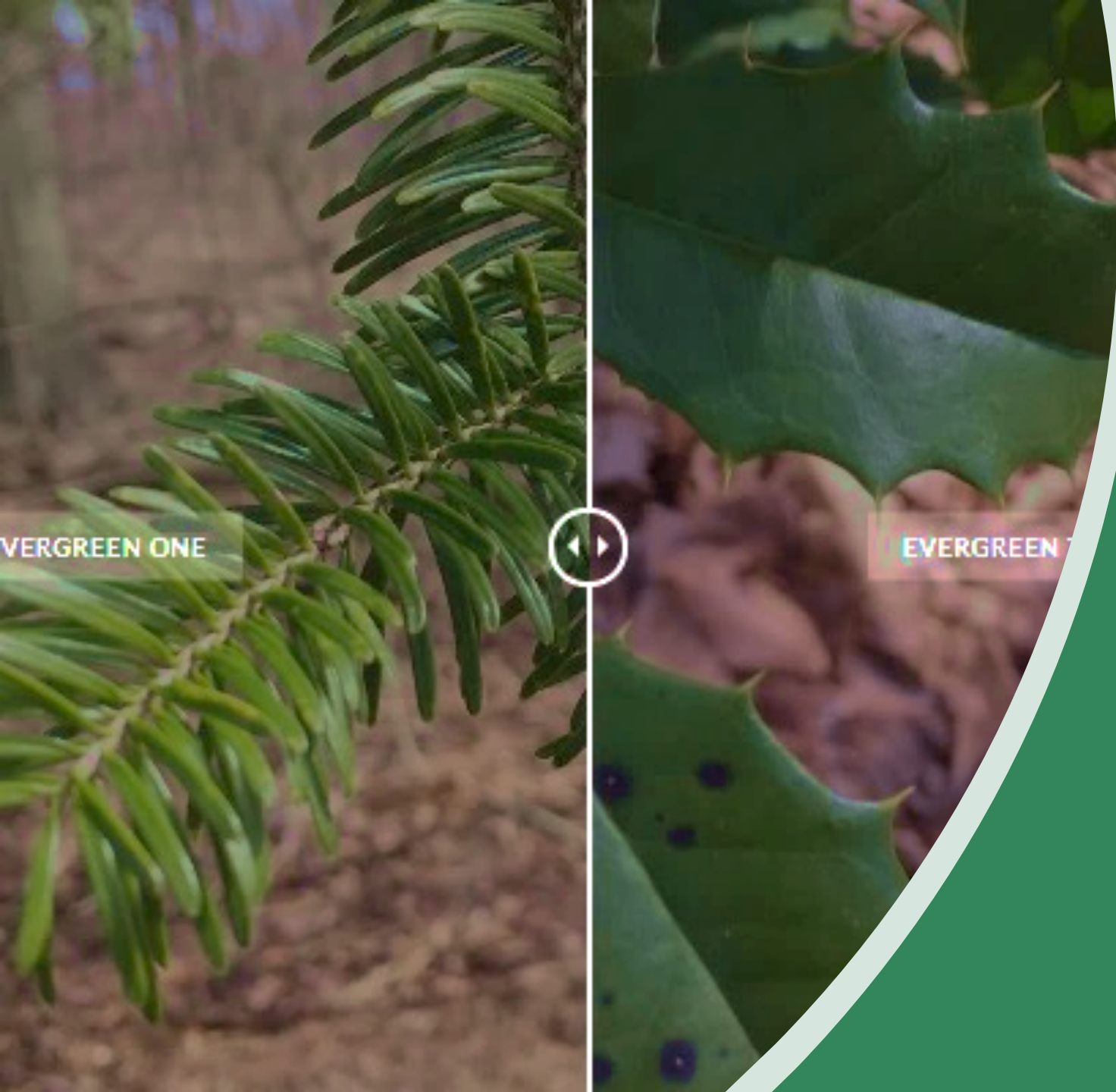
- Curated activities on a theme
- Citizen science opportunities and resources
- Short videos to inspire exploration. Mindfulness, and play





Supporting Children & Families in Person:

- Meet Me in the Park
- Backpack lending program



Supporting Teachers: Virtual Visits

- Personal connection
- Local relevance
- Opportunities to interact and share

Supporting Teachers: Digital Resources

- Our own and curated content
- Local relevance
- Design to inspire further exploration in the real world



What have we learned?

- We CAN have meaningful online interactions with learners
- We CAN create safe in-person programming
- People are hungry for real-world experiences
- Both families and teachers appreciate some scaffolding for real-world exploration, inquiry, and play



