

Good morning Amanda,

Thank you for this thoughtful email. We certainly agree with the importance of outdoor classrooms and agree that they are an integral part of a well-rounded education. Indeed, this includes not only technology & Learning Commons, which help students prepare for future schooling & careers, but also out-door classrooms. We celebrate our outdoor classrooms at every school, and are quite proud of their use across D39. Having grown up on a farm, personally, I can attest to their importance.

I can see why one might be upset about using some of our garden for the new Learning Commons (LC). I have two responses to your concern. First is the easy reply. We fully intend to secure space outside of HMS, as we do at other schools, to assure that square footage isn't diminished. Ok, that is the easy reply.... but here comes our deeper aim.

We see this advancement as a pretty significant opportunity, both for the LC and for the garden. We see, for the first time in D39, the Garden becoming a direct link/extension to the LC. We have been designing the new LC to be contiguous/seamless with the garden. Together, this new space, will be at the very center/heart of HMS! And we have committed additional financial resources to make this happen.

I can envision the entire student body with regular access to these contiguous spaces. In addition, we presently use staff to supervise students use of the LC at lunch time and after school. This is not so for our garden. We rely on volunteers at HMS. With this new vision, having the 2 contiguous spaces, we have yet another opportunity for expanding student programs & access to this garden. We will have professional staff dedicated to this jointly used space.

We are only beginning to tap into the possibilities. We have formed a committee that has already begun to discuss all of the HMS garden opportunity ahead of us.

Thank you again,



**Dr. Ray Lechner**  
Superintendent  
Wilmette Public Schools District 39  
www.wilmette39.org | 847.512.6030

On Oct 15, 2018, at 6:45 PM, Amanda Nugent <[atnugent@gmail.com](mailto:atnugent@gmail.com)> wrote:

To the District Board of Trustees and the Community Review Committee:

I am writing to you to express my concerns and disappointment about the impending plans to eliminate 40% of the Highcrest Outdoor Classroom as part of the renovation project. I have spent the last 9 years, both running and working in the Outdoor Classrooms in District 39, including Highcrest, and I have a deep appreciation for the space and what it brings to the students. I, along with other dedicated, long serving volunteers, have been committed to the success of the OC over the years, and I believe our collective perspective and experience would have been valuable in the planning stages of the renovation, as you assessed the use of the space. I know that plans have already been made to disrupt and eliminate almost half of the HCMS Outdoor Classroom, but I want to take this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts on this incredible resource:

The benefits of outdoor learning and exploration are well documented and cannot be ignored. Studies have shown that just being outside in nature, can increase an individual's creativity, improve focus, and lower their stress and anxiety. This "being in nature" is very different than being outside playing sports, or on playground equipment. It is the open exploration and peace and serenity of quiet, green, and wild places that provide these benefits. At a time when cases of adolescent anxiety and depression are skyrocketing, and kids' time in front of screens is skyrocketing, we need to recognize nature as an essential part of the solution.

I cannot impress upon you enough the feedback we get from the kids and the parents themselves on the importance of these spaces. As leaders in the gardens for the past 10 years, we are approached, almost daily, by kids whose eyes light up upon a new outdoor discovery, or who tell us that the Outdoor Classroom is their favorite place in the school. Every day we witness kids who need the quiet escape from the chaos of the playground and the intensity and stress of the school day. They thank us for providing a serene place where they can observe insects, grow their own vegetables from seeds, work the soil, or simply read a book and escape. We are approached by countless parents, who thank us for what we provide for their kids. These testimonials should be given serious weight as we make plans for the futures of our schools. We see kids every day who not only enjoy the space and the time out there, but who NEED it to help them get through the day.

We have invested amazing amounts of money in our district Learning Commons, and in new technology. That is all well and good. But the powers that be are ignoring the fact that we have had learning commons all along...the Outdoor Classrooms! They are in fact Outdoor Learning Commons. The new District 39 Learning Commons are described as "collaborative spaces where kids can discover, tinker, explore, and learn in new and exciting ways." This perfectly describes our spaces and the intent of our Outdoor Classrooms. They are "spaces where work can be done in small groups or independently; where kids can learn in creative and exciting new ways, through exploration and experimentation; where kids can find places to be comfortable for quiet reflection and work, or collaborate with others in creative and exciting new ways; Where kids tinker, discover, and explore." This is exactly what we have been doing all along in the Outdoor Classrooms! And yet, while the district is investing hundreds of thousands of dollars towards these new inside spaces, our Outdoor Classrooms are left with tiny PTA funded budgets, hit or miss parent volunteers, and a minimal amount of usage by the teachers and their classes.

Outdoor classrooms are becoming more and more popular across the country as the wave of the future, and many schools in the Chicago area are devoting time, space, and resources to these programs. Aside from Outdoor Classrooms being used beneficially during recess, teachers across the country use these spaces to teach dozens of lessons in every grade, from math and technology, to art and English. We believe that for our district to stay ahead of the curve and at the top of the heap, we too, need to invest in our Outdoor Learning Commons.

The strategic Plan of 2015 states very clearly that the administration is committed to increasing their commitment to the Outdoor Classrooms and sustainability. It seems incredibly counter to that statement of intent to decrease their commitment to our OCs by taking away a big chunk of our current outdoor footprint without considering the value of the Outdoor Classroom in its planning. We understand that there is now a conversation about rebuilding the OC somewhere else. But make no mistake, this is not an issue of simply replacing square footage. It is about a commitment of intent. As the district plans to eliminate a portion of our current OC, we believe it is the right time to invest in this commitment to "grow" our Outdoor Learning.

I am deeply saddened by the planned loss of the current beloved space at Highcrest. But I am hopeful that this can be an opportunity for an amazing new start. I strongly encourage the planning committee to consult those with years of experience in the Outdoor Classrooms as they consider options for the new Outdoor Classroom. We are so fortunate to have incredible resources nearby, like the Organic Gardener, Openlands, and The Chicago Botanic Gardens, who can help consult and provide important insight into planning a school garden that is used as an educational tool. This is essential.

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider the importance of the HCMS Outdoor Classroom. I hope the planning committee and the Board will commit to researching the numerous studies on the value of Outdoor Education and nature based learning. I hope you will support plans for a more vigorous commitment to future Outdoor Classrooms, and a stronger commitment to programing and teaching in these fabulous spaces. The possibilities are endless and our community could help lead the future of education if we make the commitment now.

Again, thank you.  
Respectfully,

Amanda Nugent  
Science and Nature Enrichment teacher at McKenzie and Central Schools  
Former District Wide Garden Chair  
Wilmette

Good afternoon Ms. Glennemeier,

I did respond to your email on June 13th. I will resend shortly.

Thank you,

Ray



**Dr. Ray Lechner**  
Superintendent  
Wilmette Public Schools District 39  
www.wilmette39.org | 847.512.6030

Here is the reply I sent you on June 13th. I hope you are able to get this today. Let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks,

Ray



**Dr. Ray Lechner**  
Superintendent  
Wilmette Public Schools District 39  
www.wilmette39.org | 847.512.6030

**From:** Ray Lechner <[lechnerr@wilmette39.org](mailto:lechnerr@wilmette39.org)>

**Subject: Re: Highcrest Outdoor Classroom**

**Date:** June 13, 2018 at 2:08:41 PM CDT

**To:** Karen Glennemeier <[kglennemeier@gmail.com](mailto:kglennemeier@gmail.com)>

Hello Ms Glennemeier,

Thank you for this thoughtful email. We certainly agree with the importance of a well-rounded education. Indeed, this includes not only technology, which helps students prepare for future schooling & careers, but also out-door classrooms. We celebrate our outdoor classrooms at every school, and are quite proud of their use across D39. Having grown up on a farm, I personally can attest to their importance.

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I can envision the entire student body with access to these contiguous spaces, on a very regular basis. In addition, we presently use staff to supervise students use of the LC at lunch time and after school. This is not so for our garden. We rely on volunteers at HMS. With this new vision, having the 2 contiguous spaces, we have yet another opportunity for expanding student programs & access to this garden. We will have professional staff dedicated to this jointly used space.

We are only beginning to tap into the possibilities. We are developing a committee that will begin meeting in the fall to discuss all of the opportunity ahead of us.

Thank you again,

Ray



**Dr. Ray Lechner**  
Superintendent  
Wilmette Public Schools District 39  
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On Oct 12, 2018, at 12:00 PM, Karen Glennemeier <[kglennemeier@gmail.com](mailto:kglennemeier@gmail.com)> wrote:

To the District 39 Board of Trustees:

I sent a note about this last spring and don't remember receiving a response. It may have gotten lost in the shuffle of end-of-school preparations, so I wanted to send another note and respectfully ask for a reply.

I am frustrated and saddened by the recent decision to sacrifice a substantial portion of the Highcrest Outdoor Classroom to make way for the school's new Learning Commons.

There is a great deal of scientific research demonstrating that time spent in nature is truly a transformative learning experience for children. "Vitamin N," as it is called, has been shown to control the symptoms of ADHD, increase the ability to focus, improve mood, reduce stress, and improve impulse control, among many other benefits. All of these factors are critical components of a positive learning environment, and they are issues that severely impact a great number of our students. Huge public resources are devoted to combating them, here and across the country.

The Highcrest Outdoor Classroom represents an as-yet untapped resource with potential educational benefits that are backed by considerable research, and it comes at very low cost. To diminish the size and value of this proven resource seems very short-sighted to me.

I understand that the changes have already been made, but I'm hoping we can use this as an opportunity to learn more about the value of outdoor education for children. I would like to suggest that the Community Review Committee study the value of outdoor, nature-based education for our students along with suggestions for how such education, if warranted by the study, could best be incorporated into the District 39 Curriculum.

I would also appreciate learning from the School Board how the decision to impact the Outdoor Classroom was made.

I would appreciate hearing a response to my concerns.

Respectfully,  
Karen Glennemeier  
Wilmette

Mr. Dawson,

Thank you for sharing these views. They are being acknowledged and recorded.

Ray



**Dr. Ray Lechner**  
Superintendent  
Wilmette Public Schools District 39  
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On Sep 25, 2018, at 2:07 PM, Scott Dawson <[fullcouch@gmail.com](mailto:fullcouch@gmail.com)> wrote:

Dr. Lechner -

I sent this letter to the Board. You need to see it as well. Thank you.

Ever notice how nearly all mass shootings take place in gun free zones?  
Malls, theaters, schools.

Ever think about why?  
Aren't they gun free zones?

Ever thought about why there are never mass shootings at gun shows or at gun ranges? Level playing field.

Are our schools gun free zones? Yes, they are.



Ever think about what this sign that you have all over your doors really tells people?

It tells the good guys that they have to leave their guns at home, right?

Do you think the bad guys will obey those signs? Have they been?

Maybe because they know they have an open season on their targets, right? No resistance, right?

By the time the cavalry arrives the evil has been committed, right?

Did you ever think that the ones who actually obey those signs are the ones we DON'T have to worry about?

Would you agree that there are a few bad people among us? Just a few.

Did you ever think that just one of those few can do an awful lot of damage to us?

Do you think we owe it to ourselves and our children to protect ourselves from those few, that one or two?

Isn't it ok to give ourselves a fighting chance against that one or two?

With that in mind, shouldn't we have armed officers in our schools to give ourselves that fighting chance?

Can't the good people protect themselves against the bad people? We can't just wish this bad stuff away can we?

We need to act, don't we?

Shouldn't we have a level playing field against the bad folks?

Should the good be allowed to fight the bad?

Or is it just that fighting is bad?

Ignore and pretend can generate terrible outcomes.

Courage is the most uncommon of the human traits.

Are you willing to be uncommon and do not what feels good, but what actually does good?

Protect our children and teachers.

Scott Dawson

Daughter at Highcrest  
Son at New Trier