

WHAT IS PLACE-BASED EDUCATION AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

GETTING SMART in partnership with edulInnovation & Teton Science Schools





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#PlaceBasedEd

“Learning & The Power of Place” is a year-long Place-Based Education project with a blog series, social media campaign, podcasts and publications to support implementation. For more information, see <http://www.gettingsmart.com/placebasededucation/>. For all of the blogs in the series, see <http://gettingsmart.com/categories/place-based-education/>

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WHAT IS PLACE-BASED EDUCATION?

We've all experienced the power of place: those moments when we're immersed deeply in experiencing the world around us and what's happening there is real and meaningful. Learning in these moments is organic and visceral. There's much to learn from the places we inhabit — from traveling across the globe to getting out into our own communities. Yet, formal learning experiences that leverage the power of place remain the exception and not the rule.

We hope to change that. Over the years, we've [visited and learned from hundreds of schools](#). We've seen innovations in teaching and learning that feel like a sneak peek into the future. And while we do believe in the potential of technology to personalize learning, we've discovered that technology is not a prerequisite for personalization. In fact, many of our favorite learning environments are innovating through analog means or effectively using limited but deliberate technology.

What are some common characteristics we've noticed about educators in these high-impact [deeper learning](#) models? They prioritize engagement and authenticity. They know how to leverage local assets including parks, public spaces, museums and businesses to power partnerships. They get out into the world for their students and for their own learning. And whether they know it or not, they're living, breathing examples of Place-Based Education.

"This Place-Based Education approach can serve as a framework to connect learning models, increase the power of our educational system and serve as the foundation for a thriving democracy."

- Nate McClennen, [Place-Based Education: Communities as Learning Environments](#)

We set out to learn more about Place-Based Education and to share what we learned.

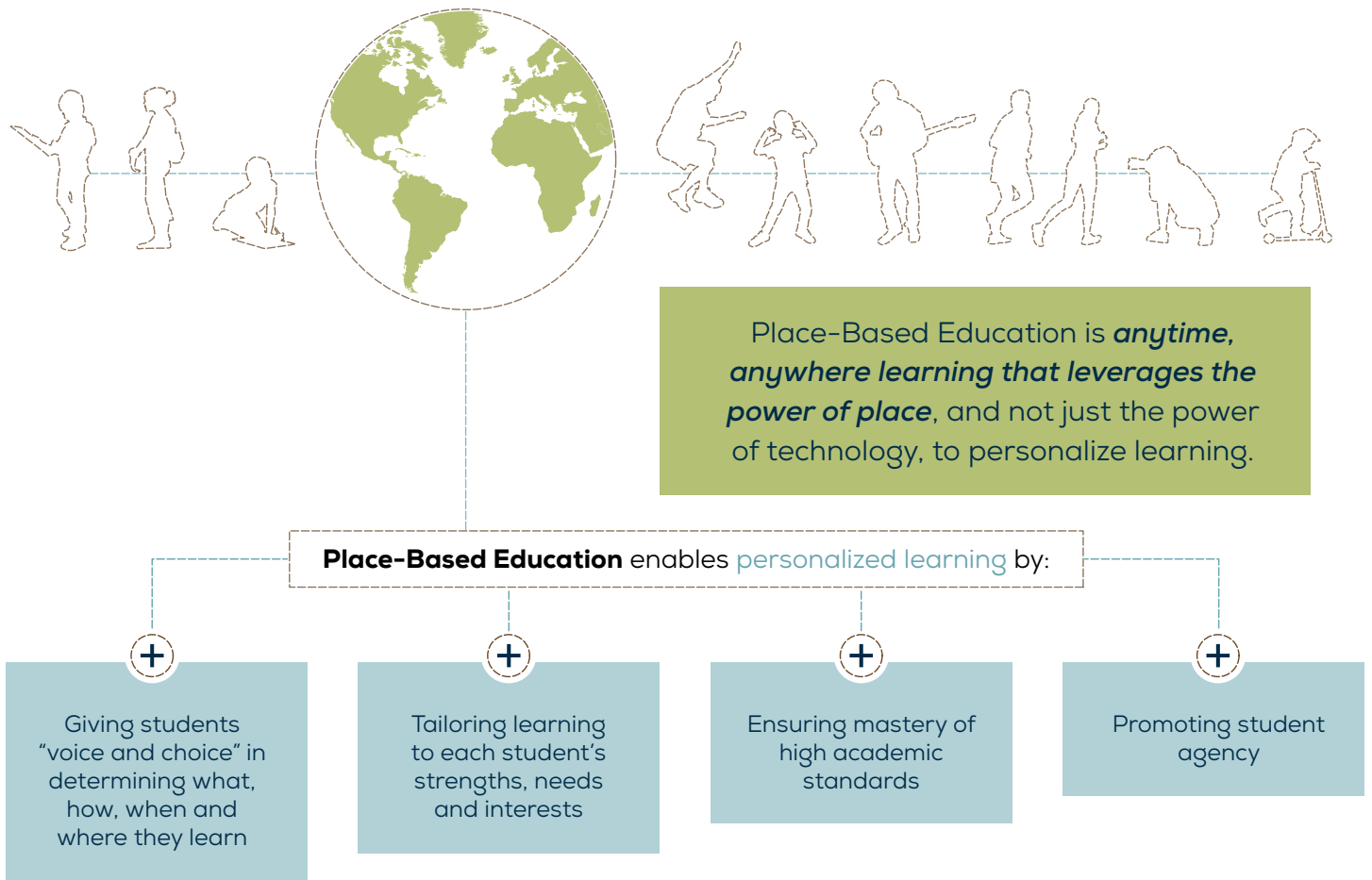
When we launched our research effort into Place-Based Education in July 2016, we began with acknowledgement of the field’s current definition of place-based learning.

Place-Based Education (PBE) is an approach to learning that takes advantage of geography to create authentic, meaningful and engaging personalized learning for students. More specifically, Place-Based Education is defined by the [Center for Place-Based Learning and Community Engagement](#) as an immersive learning experience that “places students in local heritage, cultures, landscapes, opportunities and experiences, and uses these as a foundation for the study of language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum.”

Through our work in partnership with dozens of contributors to the campaign through guest blogs and social media, we arrived at a new definition of Place-Based Education. The new definition situates Place-Based Education inside global conversations about innovative instructional approaches that enable student agency, boost access and opportunity, prioritize deeper learning and personalize learning.

PLACE-BASED EDUCATION (PBE)

connects learning to communities and the world around us.





To truly understand the “power of place,” Carri Schneider shared the voices of students, teachers and leaders in this podcast recorded during her trip to Teton Science Schools. Ready to experience Place-Based Learning? Close your eyes and listen to this “audio field trip” to TSS.

Getting Smart
Podcast. S2:E16
“Experiencing Place-
Based Education
at Teton Science
Schools.” November
28, 2016.

<https://soundcloud.com/getting-smart/experiencing-place-based-education-at-teton-science-schools>



THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF PLACE-BASED LEARNING

Gregory Smith

Scholar Gregory Smith traces the history of Place-Based Education from its roots before formal education through the progressive education movement to natural and environmental education, rural education and critical pedagogy in *The Past, Present and Future of Place-Based Learning*.

“Place- (and community-) based education is nothing new... its focus on the incorporation of local knowledge, skills and issues into the curriculum, involves an effort to restore learning experiences that were once the basis of children’s acculturation and socialization.... In this way, communities could ensure their own sustainability as generations passed on their expertise to young people drawn to continue this work..... Children growing up in pre-19th century America or Europe experienced much the same thing — learning the skills and crafts required of adulthood from their parents, other family members or people they apprenticed..... Much of this was lost as schools came to dominate the lives of young people with the passage of compulsory school attendance laws.”

Smith’s history lesson ends with a promising look at the future of Place-Based Education and its resurgence.

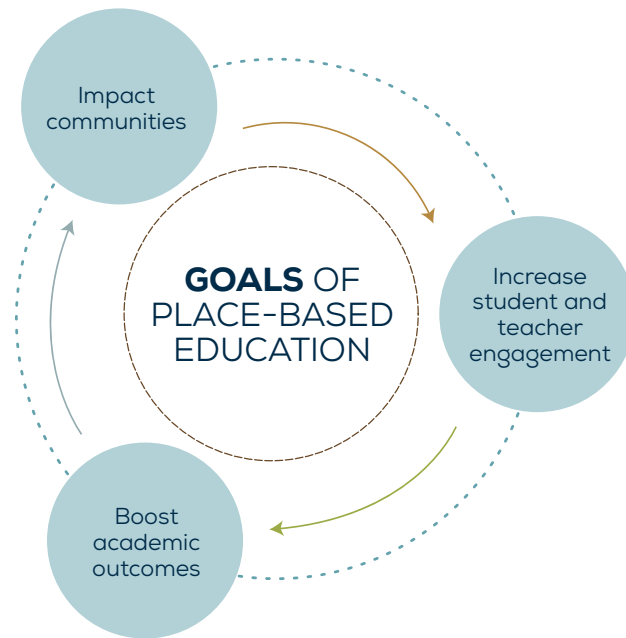
“The growing national interest in project-based learning coupled with the recognition that situating these projects in students’ home communities can deepen their meaning and impact suggests that interest in Place-Based Education could continue to expand in coming decades. As a means to engender among students a sense of affiliation with their home communities and regions, develop problem-solving skills and the ability to collaborate with others, cultivate a sense of responsibility for the natural environment and the people it supports, and instill a recognition of their own capacity to be positive change-makers and leaders, Place-Based Education is proving to be an effective antidote to apathy and alienation..... The environmental and social challenges likely to arise in coming decades will require many people with the kinds of attributes associated with the experience of Place-Based Education.”



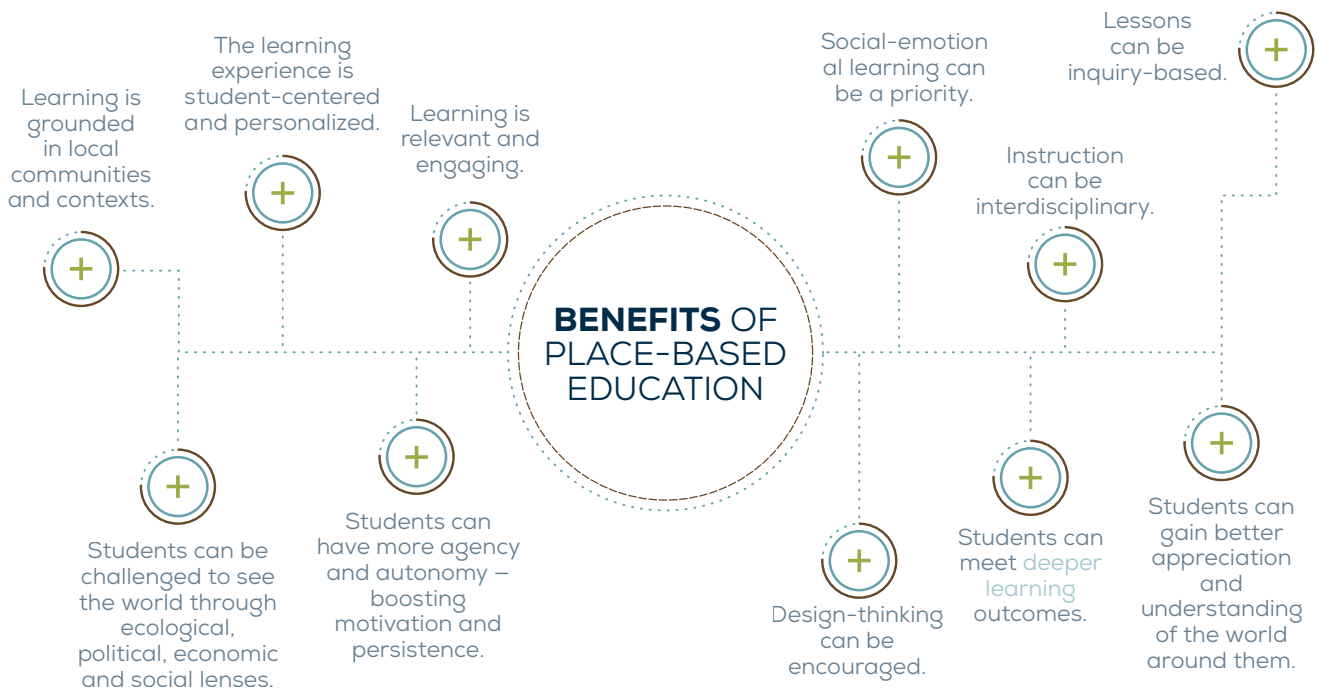
WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PLACE-BASED EDUCATION?

As ecosystems of learning emerge, Place-Based Education sits squarely in the middle of formal and informal education partners, serving as the philosophical connector to all potential learning experiences. Place-Based Education can take many forms ranging from informal to formal learning, from out-of-school individual/family experiences to teacher-led or school-sponsored activities and from one lesson/project/unit/course to a school fully-designed around a Place-Based Education mission. Place-Based Education is a learning strategy that educators can implement in urban, rural and suburban areas. The opportunities are truly endless.”

-Tom Vander Ark, *Genius Loci: Place-Based Education & Why It Matters*



Place-Based Education is an approach that connects learning and communities with the primary goals of increasing student engagement, boosting academic outcomes, impacting communities and promoting understanding of the world around us. In addition to these goals, there are many additional benefits to place-based learning experiences. These benefits can impact students, teachers, families, communities and society.





WHAT DOES PLACE-BASED EDUCATION LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

“Next-gen learning” is a phrase used to describe the “next generation of education” in which the current system oriented around adults is replaced with a system oriented around the needs of learners.

Next Generation Learning

Challenges (NGLC) was founded in 2010 based on the belief that “the experience of students in our schools needs to be more about learning and less about teaching. We all know from learning science and our own experience how powerful experiential, purpose-driven, and authentic learning can be, and yet our schools are not organized around what we know about good learning.”

NGLC defines “next-gen” learning from a learner’s perspective. A student may describe it in this way. Learning is...

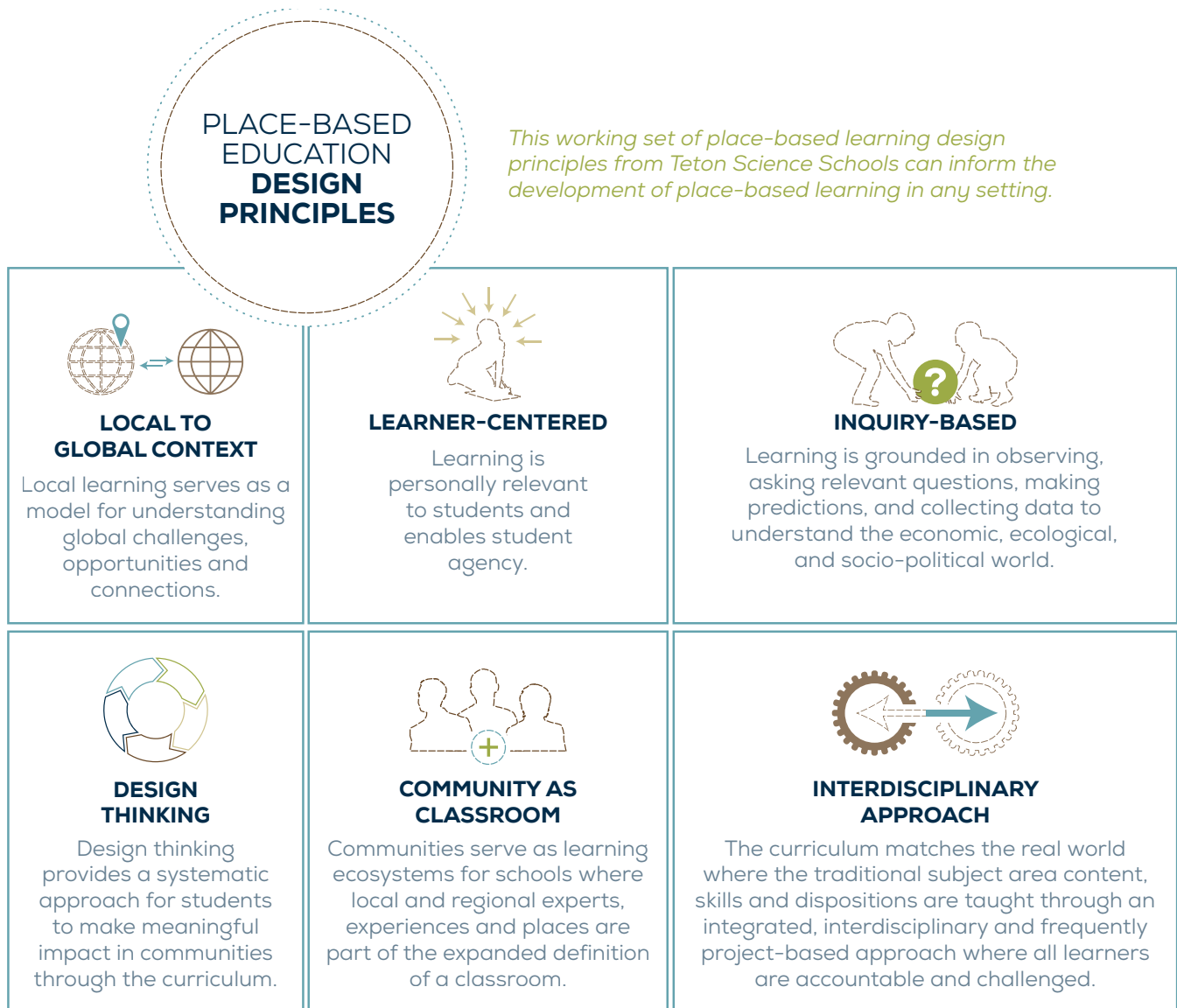
- Personalized to the ways I learn best
- Flexible so that I can try different ways to learn
- Interactive and engaging so that I participate in the learning
- Relevant to the life I’d like to lead
- Organized around my own progress against goals I understand
- Constantly informed by different ways of demonstrating and measuring my progress
- Collaborative with teachers and peers, unlimited by proximity
- Agile and supportive when I need extra help
- Challenging but achievable, with opportunities to become expert in an area of interest
- Available to me as much as it is to every other student

As we approach the era of [next-gen learning](#) and the possibility of place-based learning at the center, it is important to consider that Place-Based Education can be implemented [along a continuum](#). Through inquiry, projects and problems, entrepreneurship, community-centered design and service learning, Place-Based Education offers relevance to students and teachers, infinite pathways to personalization and tools for students to experience agency and a sense of ownership for community sustainability and improvement.

Understanding place begins with understanding self — your role in the community. Definitions of place then expand like concentric rings to classrooms, schools, communities, regions, nations and the world. By adhering to this concentric-rings model, learners see relevance as the

scale moves farther and farther “out.” As place can be interpreted through economic, socio-political, and ecological lenses, so too can the scale be interpreted through these lenses — allowing for deeper transfer, application and understanding of content and skills.

As we begin to reimagine the possibilities of next-gen learning, virtual places can play a role in a student’s understanding and impact in place. The social networks they maintain, the people they follow, and the organizations that they like all connect their local physical places to global digital places. These connections, when used to revitalize and enrich local places, can be beneficial. This is an exciting area that needs further exploration.



The examples over the next several pages capture the diversity of Place-Base Education approaches across rural, urban, suburban areas; in early education, K12 education and higher education; in formal and informal settings; from single lessons to full programs. The next two publications in this series are “quick start implementation guides” that will describe in detail the myriad ways educators can put Place-Based Education into practice — from simple entry points like classroom speakers and field trips to “inside-out” implementation where the entire curriculum is place-based.

PLACE-BASED EDUCATION IN PRACTICE

With next-gen tools and learner-centered approaches, Place-Based Education can sit at the heart of 360° educational ecosystems where learning is seamlessly integrated within community functions, serving as a rich foundation for an informed and participatory democratic society.

The descriptions and examples that follow illustrate how many learning models can be facilitated through, paired with or complemented by Place-Based Education.



PLACE-BASED SCHOOLS

Place-based schools integrate many elements of learner-centered, experiential, deeper learning and project-based schools to leverage local places as a learning ecosystem for students. Through this approach, students develop an understanding of communities and their role in impacting and improving local places.

- [Teton Science Schools](#) is a 50-year-old nonprofit organization in northwest Wyoming and eastern Idaho with Place-Based Education as a core mission. The TSS approach is community-connected, partnership-focused, inquiry and design-based, student-centered and interdisciplinary. See [Communities As Learning Environments, PhotoBlog | Teton Science Schools & The Power of Place-Based Learning](#) and [Podcast | Experiencing Place-Based Education at Teton Science Schools](#) for more information.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING



LEARNER-CENTERED EDUCATION

Viewed as authentic or real-world learning, [problem-based learning \(PBL\)](#) and [experiential learning](#) are used in next-gen learning environments to help students apply the core content they acquire. Through curriculum built on inquiry, project-based learning, internships, service-learning, and entrepreneurial innovation, students directly witness the relevance of academic content and simultaneously develop their skills in critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity.

- [Expeditionary Learning Schools](#) link learning to real-world issues, students engage in projects that yield solutions for audiences beyond the classroom — “real work for real audiences.” (See feature on [Casco Bay High School](#) in Maine and the first [EL charter in NYC](#)).
- Victoria Ryberg shares several examples and videos of experiential, place-based learning from the Green Schools Network in Wisconsin. She describes how place-based opportunities boost [autonomy, mastery and purpose](#) — necessities for motivation.

The [learner-centered paradigm](#) for education functions like a pair of lenses that offers a new way to look at, think about, talk about and act on education. It constitutes a shift of perspective that places every learner at its center, structures the system to build appropriate supports around him or her, and acknowledges the need to adapt and alter to meet the needs of all children.

- Education Reimagined is identifying “[learner-centered pioneers](#)” who are leading a national shift to schools that are learner-centered. [Avalon Charter School](#) and [EPIC Elementary](#) are two that utilize place-based learning through what Education Reimagined refers to as “open-walled” approaches.
- Harmony Public Schools in Texas serve over 30,000 students with a [Learner-Centered STEM](#) model that creates opportunities for students to learn through powerful partnerships with the community, business and industry.




DEEPER LEARNING

In classrooms where [deeper learning](#) is the focus, you find students who are motivated and challenged—who look forward to their next assignment. They apply what they have learned in one subject area to newly encountered situations in another. They can see how their classwork relates to real life. They are gaining an indispensable set of knowledge, skills, and beliefs, including mastery of core academic content, critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, effective communication, self-directed learning, and an academic mindset.

- The [Environmental Charter School \(ECS\)](#) in Pittsburgh promotes deeper learning with powerful questions and applied learning—often in 561 acre [Frick Park](#) next door. ECS believes that connecting student learning to an authentic, place-based experience sets the stage for deeper student learning – which means they are using their knowledge and skills from multiple disciplines in a way that prepares them for real life.

SERVICE LEARNING



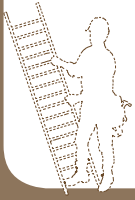
[Service learning](#) is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities. It is often structured by the needs of adults in the community who leverage young people’s time and talent to support a solution. Most public and private high schools have a service learning component. Additionally, there are many nonprofit orgs that provide resources and structures to facilitate these activities.

- [Connects Learning Center \(CLC\)](#) is a next-gen learning environment supporting four districts in Wisconsin. Students are required to volunteer and give back to the community in partnership with community organizations.
- Many schools require service learning. In Seattle Public Schools, students must complete 60 hours of service-learning to graduate. Since 1998, Chicago Public Schools has required that graduate complete 40 hours. These types of requirements are a good entry point for a more developed place-based, service learning approach that is meaningfully integrated within the community.

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

[Project Based Learning](#) is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge.

- The 180+ [New Tech Network \(NTN\)](#) schools share a project-based approach that often leverages local assets and business partnerships. In [Project-Based and Place-Based Learning](#), NTN’s Director of School Leadership explains that “students and educators are often engaged in project-based and place-based learning experiences that leverage partnerships and community assets to make learning authentic and meaningful.” She provides two of countless examples — one that marries world history and world leadership standards with a real-world challenge and a longstanding internship program with a dedicated community partner.



WORK-BASED LEARNING



Many schools are beginning to integrate students into the workplace to understand how school learning is connected to real-world learning. We believe students should graduate high school with a host of work-based experiences such as job shadows, internships and apprenticeships. These opportunities allow students to experience jobs and career opportunities to varying degrees and scales. Partnerships with companies and nonprofit organizations help facilitate this process.

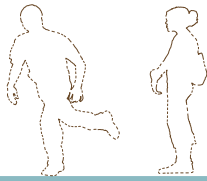
- [CareerWise Colorado](#) and [Denver Public School's CareerConnect](#) are two promising examples of deliberate approaches to work-based learning. The goal for CareerWise is to create over 20,000 apprenticeships for high school students in high-demand occupations over the next ten years.
- [Ohio Career Exploration Internship Program](#) offers at least 20 weeks and 200 hours of career exploration to students 16 to 18 years old or enrolled in Ohio high school grades 11 or 12. Businesses are reimbursed for 50 percent of the intern's wages.
- The [Idaho P-Tech network](#) is 17 rural high schools creating business partnerships for career pathways.
- [Big Picture Learning](#) schools build internships around student interests as a key part of their personalized, project-based learning model. For more on Big Picture Learning, listen to the the podcast interview [Big Picture Learning in the Real World](#) and read the blog from students Iris and Kemberly at Highline Big Picture who describe [10 Big Ideas We Are Learning Through Our High School Internships](#).

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING



[Social and emotional learning](#) (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions. Place-Based Education can inform and enhance social emotional learning.

- Educator Gillian Judson explains the [importance of relationships](#) in Place-Based Education: "If we hope to cultivate students' ecological understanding — an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things and a sense of care/concern for the natural world — then relationships between students and the natural world, and between students' and the knowledge of the curriculum, must be emotionally and imaginatively rich."
- Former teacher Jennifer Pieratt explains that place-based learning helps students to challenge assumptions and [develop empathy](#): "[S]tudents began to see that their assumptions were often incorrect and, more importantly, they began to question those assumptions — where they came from and how they came to be. The takeaway to these interactions was always the same: students realized that we humans have more in common than we don't."



CIVIC LEARNING

Civic learning encourages students to become active citizens by engaging them with issues in their communities and beyond.

- [Earth Force](#) believes that developing a deep sense of place in young people leads to a citizenry that is prepared and willing to contribute to communities for a lifetime. In the blog [Developing a Sense of Place Means a Deeper Connection to Learning](#), Kristen Mueller-Sims explains that Earth Force’s focus on civic engagement “helps learners to become active participants in their communities by conducting balanced research, building strong community partnerships and making decisions as a democratic group.”
- At [Cesar Chavez Public Charter Schools for Public Policy](#) in Washington, D.C., students participate in three-week long policy internships. Senior projects involve a thesis paper and presentation on a public policy issue of interest. The school culture is based on citizenship, honesty, achievement, valor, engagement and zest (CHAVEZ). An example of a Chavez student’s agency is Cedric “Remedy” Harper’s [performance of an original poem](#) at semi-finals for the 2015 D.C. Youth Slam Team at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery.

INFORMAL LEARNING

Informal learning is “anytime, anywhere” learning that happens outside of formal requirements for school, jobs, certification, etc. Informal learning is often driven by our own interests and happens in the context of our normal, everyday lives — making it a perfect match for place-based learning.

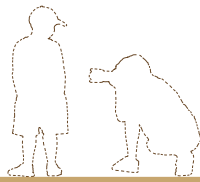
- In [Parenting, Learning and the Power of Place](#), Carri Schneider shares how her family vacation to [Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore](#) revealed powerful lessons in academics and social-emotional learning.
- Liz Wimmer believes that place-based discoveries “etch learning into your brain” and encourages us all to “Think about your life for a moment” and ask “What are your favorite places and what are they teaching you?”
- [Worldschooler Connect](#) is a way for families traveling all over the world to connect with one another. In [Connecting Families Traveling the World’s Classroom](#), father CJ Singer explains, “Worldschooling our kids has been the most rewarding, educational and downright coolest decision we have ever made. We’ve learned that everything we do and see in life is a learning experience.”

ENVIRONMENT AS INTEGRATING CONTEXT

Developed out of the environmental education movement, [Environment as Integrating Context](#) (EIC) is about using a school’s surroundings and community as a framework within which students can construct their own learning, guided by teachers and administrators using proven educational practices.

- Using the EIC approach, [GreenWoods Charter School](#) in Philadelphia improved student outcomes and made strides toward closing the achievement gap. They have two goals: achieving academic excellence and developing environmental stewards. The successful program has served as the basis for others across Pennsylvania.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING



Professional learning, or professional development, is comprised of the activities and experiences that educators participate in to improve their practice, strengthen or expand their knowledge base and grow as professionals. Place-based professional development can be a very powerful way for educators to learn. The third guide in this series will focus on the implementation of place-based professional learning.

- Teacher Helen Ommen shares her reflection in [The Power of Place-Based Professional Learning](#). She enthusiastically explains, “I felt validated, reinvigorated and challenged in both my teaching and my life.... I can’t wait to see what seeds are planted in their little hearts, as well as ideas that come to my mind that I can implement into my teaching in the future.”
- Julia McBride describes place-based [professional learning](#) in the New Tech Network. “The goal,” she explains, “is to create the conditions for school and district leaders to reflect upon and learn to grow their schools as learning organizations in collaboration with Network peers while capitalizing on the local landscape as a learning opportunity. This includes “Excursions” to explore local community-school partnerships, case studies of nearby Network schools and connections with fellow deeper learning Network peers.”



NEW LEARNING MODELS

A number of new learning models are gaining traction in classrooms and communities across the globe. For example, Competency Based Learning transitions away from seat time, in favor of a structure that allows students to progress as they demonstrate mastery of academic content. Competency-based strategies provide flexibility in the way that credit can be earned or awarded. Blended learning leverages technology to afford each student a more personalized learning experience, including increased student control over the time, place, path and/or pace of learning. We’re motivated and encouraged by the myriad possibilities for the deliberate integration of place-based learning with these new learning models from Teton Science Schools and others.

WHERE IS PLACE-BASED LEARNING POSSIBLE?

Place-based learning can truly happen anytime, anywhere — in cities, in parks, in your hometown, on a field trip, in a rural village, in your backyard, in your school. Although this list is by no means exhaustive, it captures the range of possibilities and shows that Place-Based Education is a possibility everywhere.



URBAN SETTINGS



- Supported by [Global Learning Models](#), the [GCE Lab School](#) in Chicago leverages relationships with more than 200 partners to “make the entire city a fertile learning environment” through its [City2Classroom™](#) program. Read more about the Global Learning Models in [Preparing #LifeReady Students: Creating Globally-Sourced, Locally Relevant Curriculum](#).
- [Metro Charter Elementary](#) in rapidly developing downtown LA leverages neighborhood resources – parks, cultural centers, businesses and rich historical sites – to provide meaningful learning opportunities and enhance the experiences for diverse students. Kids take public transit for field trips and visit places like City Hall and Disney Concert Hall.
- [Horace Mann Elementary](#) in Washington DC has food gardens and university partnerships. The entryway includes a garden wall with art that spells out values evident in every room of Horace Mann: adventure, discovery, inspiration and imagination. (Listen to the [podcast](#) about their design principles.)
- One urban school district now has three high schools that partner with community organizations: [Tacoma School of the Arts](#), the [Science and Math Institute](#) and [School of Industrial Design, Engineering and Art](#). At these schools in Washington’s Tacoma School District, students use community resources to [explore their passions](#).
- In [Putting the City at the Heart of Place-Based Education](#), author Daniel Rabuzzi describes how “place” can be different cities or neighborhoods, street corners, ball courts, barber shops, bus stop and parades. Nature too can play a role in urban places, he says, describing the community garden or river winding through the city.
- An [orchard was the result of a brainstorm](#) by five middle school students in Kansas City, Kansas, about a change they wanted to see in their school and community. With the help of a local organization called [The Giving Grove](#), this idea of providing healthy produce spread to five other area schools who joined in planting trees that are expected to give 25,000 pounds of fruit annually.

RURAL AREAS



- The [Rural Schools Collaborative](#) believes in the power of partnerships and Place-Based Education as a way to strengthen the bond between school and community. They highlight a number of [exemplary efforts](#) on rural, place-based learning and provide useful [research](#) and [resources](#) for educators and communities.
- Giving back to communities helps [increase student motivation](#). [Highland Community School District](#) in rural southwestern Wisconsin revamped its structure and curriculum to focus on environmental place-based learning that supports community life. At [Northern Waters Environmental School](#), middle and high school students work with community partners to solve local challenges.
- Students will go to school on a barge at [New Harmony High](#) in Venice, Louisiana. When the school opens in 2018, students will be able to explore their passions, their community and the world with an emphasis on a key issue for the region: coastal restoration.
- Author Anna Luhrmann tells her story of loving Place-Based Education in the natural world of [Grand Teton National Park](#). When she had to leave to finish her studies, she found that the town of [Laramie](#), Wyoming, had a lot to offer place-based learners. She adopted the motto [Every Place is Special or No Place is Special](#).



MUSEUMS & THE ARTS

- At the [New York Hall of Science](#), students and families [design, make and play](#) with technology and other tools and materials. One set of apps called [Noticing Tools](#) helps users notice the math and science around them and opportunities to reshape and remake the world.
- Local museums and theaters are some of the places that help students stay engaged and build civic pride at [Capital Community College](#) in Hartford, Connecticut. When students come [Out of the Classroom, Off the Campus and into the Community](#), they can connect with their community in meaningful ways.
- The museum *is* the school at Michigan's [Grand Rapids Public Museum School](#).
- [E3 Civic High School](#) is housed in the spectacular new San Diego library.
- [Tacoma School of the Arts](#) has active relationships with each of the museums in downtown Tacoma. They are teaching classes at Tacoma Art Museum and the LeMay Car Museum. This year a full-time arts liaison will strengthen relationships between the city, museums and the school.
- [Houston A+ UP](#) was launched three years ago as a small pilot middle school and will expand as a charter network this fall. Every week, A+UP students ride public transit to visit an amazing network of [museum and community partners](#) ([see feature](#)).
- Led by former school superintendent Donna Deeds, [The Museum at Prairiefire](#) partners with Kansas City schools to bring natural history to life. [Listen to a podcast](#) where Deeds describes this regional place-based learning gem and CAPS ([see feature](#)), the work-based initiative she created before joining the museum.

STATE & NATIONAL PARKS



- National parks are currently [America's Best Idea and America's Best Classroom](#). They can be an exciting place for students to learn science, and field trips to them often fuel a lasting connection to the outdoors.
- In [6 Reasons to Work in America's Parks and Forests](#), Bonnie Lathram and Andrew Frishman tout the benefits of working in national parks and forests. Their ideas range from learning "about self" to learning "under duress."
- A city park plays a central role in [Highline School District's Marine Science Technology](#) program. Housed at the Puget Sound Skills Center in the park, [students use the location to learn marine science and skills](#).
- [Eagle Rock](#) is a great small high school in Estes Park, Colorado, that takes full advantage of Rocky Mountain National Park.

COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES



- Students at [Humboldt State University](#) in California are using the nearby Klamath River as a focal point for [A Science Program that Goes Beyond the Lab](#). The aim of the Klamath Connection is to boost the success of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) majors by connecting science, communities and cultural perspectives.
- As director of the Hartford Heritage Project at [Capital Community College](#) in Hartford, Connecticut, Jeffrey Partridge has spent time researching Place-Based Education. One result of his work is [Resources and Quotes on the Power of Place](#), which is a portal to resources for others starting Place-Based Education at the college level.
- Some higher education institutions are succeeding at making Place-Based Education central to their identity. [Higher Ed Approaches to Empowering Students](#) shares the stories of [Guttman Community College](#) in New York City, [Temple University](#) in Philadelphia and [Capital Community College](#) in Hartford, Connecticut.

EARLY EDUCATION



- There are at least a [dozen preschool programs](#) in the Seattle area that have an outdoor focus. Preschoolers at [Fiddleheads Forest School](#) at Seattle's Washington Park Arboretum are outdoors for every minute of their four-hour school day. The outdoor nature-based program focuses on play and exploration. As children engage with the world around them the staff supplements with curriculum to engage their curiosity.
- Another preschool embracing outdoor education is the subject of a blog and podcast: [Outdoor Learning Leads to Curious Students](#). [Riverside Nature School](#) in Charles Town, West Virginia, is a nature-based program inspired by German *Waldkindergarten* schools.

COMMUNITY SPACES



- The [Maritime Discovery Schools](#) is a districtwide place-based initiative in Port Townsend, Washington.
- The [School of Environmental Studies](#), or “Zoo School,” is on the grounds of the [Minnesota Zoo](#) and embraces project-based learning with an environmental theme — a partnership between the city, the school district and zoo. In addition to studies at the zoo, SES students take excursions around the world “to immerse students in new climates, cultures and environmental issues.”
- [Science and Math Institute](#) at Point Defiance Zoo in Tacoma partners with “community resources to change public education, emphasizing creativity and utilizing a fully inclusive model that educates the whole student through shared values of community, empathy, thinking, and balance.”

VIRTUAL EXPERIENCES



- Students at Winton Woods New Tech Network High School near Cincinnati [created virtual reality WWI museum exhibits](#) to immerse other students and teachers in the sights and sounds of war.
- Educators can [Design Interactive Place-Based Learning with Virtual Reality](#) using [ThingLink](#). Students can also tell digital stories about places with ThingLink’s interactive image editor.
- Students at [Parklands College](#) in South Africa used a reality creation tool called [CoSpaces](#) to design a hypothetical eco-city. They [based their virtual eco-cities](#) on an area of Cape Town formerly known as District Six, designing an urban area with a focus on sustainability and food security.

INTERNATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION



- [La Paz Community School](#) in Costa Rica is an incubator for effective [Place-Based Education strategies that promote cross-cultural competence](#) in multilingual and multinational environments. The professional learning community at La Paz commits to focusing on the people and place to create meaningful learning experiences.
- In the Kingdom of Bhutan, in the Himalayas between India and China, [place-based learning with an emphasis on well-being and community health](#) is growing. [Teton Science Schools](#) partners with the Royal Education Council, the Ministry of Education, and the Royal University of Bhutan to expand Place-Based Education there.
- Another preschool embracing outdoor education is the subject of a blog and podcast: [Outdoor Learning Leads to Curious Students](#). [Riverside Nature School](#) in Charles Town, West Virginia, is a nature-based program inspired by German *Waldkindergarten* schools.





Photo Credit: Tony Bacewicz in *Out of the Classroom, Off the Campus and Into the Community* by Jeffrey Partridge

It's never been easier to learn *anything* — *anytime and anywhere*.

For the first time in human history, we have the tools available to provide access to powerful learning experiences to every person on the planet. It's not unusual to hear the phrase “anytime, anywhere learning” applied to everything from early childhood education, K-12 and higher education to informal learning, adult education, career training and professional development, etc. Yet, the definition of “anytime, anywhere” learning is often reduced to mean “anywhere you can get a wifi signal.” While technology continues to act as a powerful enabler of access, this limited tech-centric view of “anytime, anywhere” learning fails to fully acknowledge its potential. The challenges of the modern world will not be addressed by technology alone.

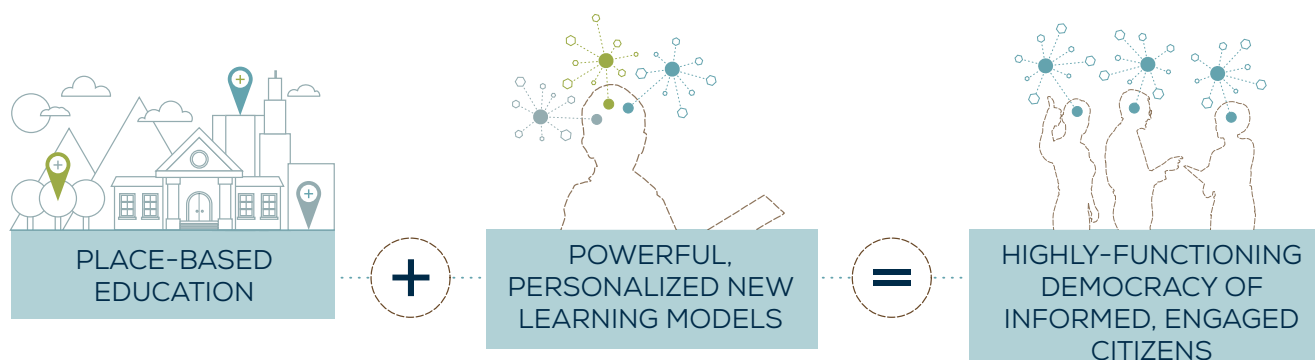
WHY DOES PLACE-BASED EDUCATION MATTER?

“Instead of asking students to wait for 20 years to really understand the ‘why’ behind school, students should spend twenty years as integral and participatory members of learning communities. Imagine a world with Place-Based Education for every child – connecting learning locally, regionally, and ultimately, globally. With multiple opportunities to interact with professionals, design solutions to real challenges, and skills to understand the world through multiple lenses, these students are the citizens the world needs for tomorrow.”

-Nate McClennen, *Place-Based Education: Communities As Learning Environments*

We need learners who graduate with [deeper learning outcomes](#) that include and extend beyond content knowledge. We must transform the system to fully integrate schools and communities that leverage the “power of place” to equip students with the tools and skills they need — through authentic experiences — to collaborate, think critically and solve complex challenges. This is an absolute requirement as we build a modern workforce equipped to thrive in the “[gig economy](#).” We need young people who are invested in their communities and cities to boost both education and employment.

With the emergence of project-based and personalized learning as the next step in school transformation, the time is right to take these approaches one step further by focusing the project and personalized learning on locally, regionally and globally relevant projects. With the increase in student agency, the students gain experience in the application of knowledge, and the community gains a massive resource in the human capital of willing and eager students wanting to improve the long-term health and well-being of the community.



Our exploration into Place-Based Education has revealed that teachers and communities are creating place-based opportunities for students in many different settings. Place-based learning is truly possible anywhere — from the most rural schools to the most urban ones and everywhere in between. We are just beginning to understand the possibilities for implementing and scaling place-based learning with the deliberate intention to boost equity, access and outcomes.

As we included in the [Smart Cities](#) book: “Learning is best formula for promoting economic growth and reducing the crippling effects of poverty.... Schools can serve as the foundation for highly functioning democratic and sustainable communities and societies.”

We believe Place-Based Education offers a path to achieving this goal and invite educators to learn more about Place-Based Education and how they can implement it in their schools, districts and programs.



Photo Credit: Roberta McFarland, [Learning Leadership Skills Outdoors: Place-Based Ed in the Puget Sound](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This overview is the first in a three-part publication series from Getting Smart. For additional publications in the series, including “Quick Start Guide to Implementing Place-Based Education” and “Quick Start Guide to Place-Based Professional Learning,” see <http://www.gettingsmart.com/placebasededucation>. For a collection of all of the contributions to the “Learning & The Power of Place” campaign from educators all over the world, see <http://www.gettingsmart.com/categories/series/place-based-education/>

Check out the hundreds of examples of Place-Based Education in action and share your own using #PlaceBasedEd on social media.

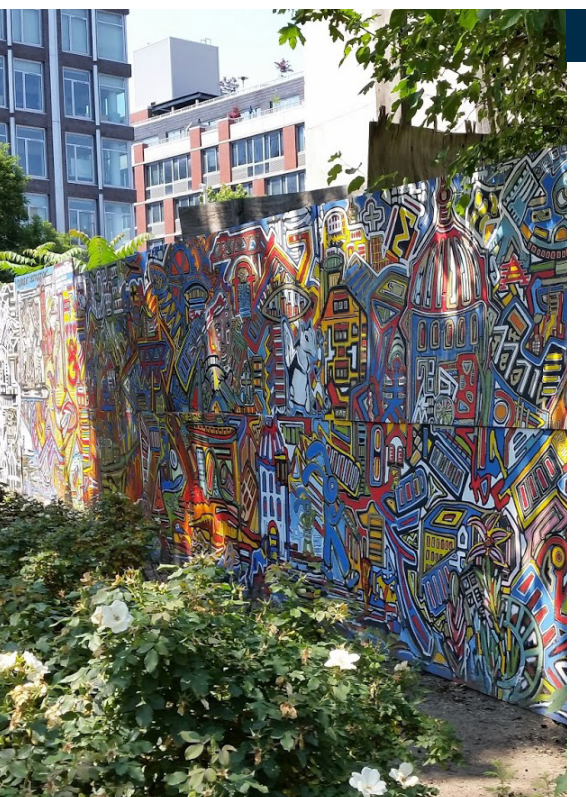


Photo Credit: Daniel Rabuzzi, [Putting the City At The Heart of Learning](#)

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We are grateful for your openness and willingness to share your stories, your insights and your examples to help us reach our goal of raising awareness to the potential of Place-Based Education.

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