N.E. Miles ECDC

*NatureExplore* Standard One:

Principle 1: The Concept Plan
Principle 2: Required & Supplemental Areas
Principle 9: Personalizing the Design
Principle 1: The Concept Plan
Principle 2:
A. Entry Features

Our outdoor space is completely enclosed by walls or fencing on all sides. It can be accessed from the building office area, all four classrooms, or from the adjacent rear parking lot that has a chain-link fence and gate. To make this entrance more inviting, we made a raised bed with a rosemary hedge and flowers to the exterior side of the fence, inserted green privacy slats, and put in a raised bed with Mexican petunias that bloom all year and stepping stones on the inside.

Our playground is divided into 3 zones and we have established interior “entry” features leading from one area to the next – split rail fences with a Japanese bridge on one side, a cedar arbor on the other, and a white picket fence with arbor leading into the Butterfly garden.
B. Open area for large-motor activities

Our outdoor space is long and narrow; reserving an area big enough for large-motor activities was a challenge. However, this space is large enough for group games, sports play, and activities with props such as a parachute or obstacle course items.
C. Climbing/crawling area

We have 2 climbing structures.

The larger structure is made of wood, with rope ladder, ramp, pole, tunnel, steps, slide, and bridge with 2 elevated covered play decks.

The smaller structure is made of recycled plastic and handicapped accessible. It has 2 slides, “rock” climber, and 4-step platform with crawler spaces.

A third, small and very old climber has been many things over the years but it is beloved by our children and remains a fixture on the playground; presently it is disguised as the “ECDC Carriage Company,” complete with fringed surrey top, as children see horse-drawn touring carriages pass our building several times each day.
D. “Messy Materials” area

Messy materials are an important feature of our children’s outdoor play. A large part of our space is covered with mulch, and children frequently drag or push items from one place to another all across the grounds, or use a heavy-duty wagon or wheelbarrow to transport.

The “home” for stumps, large tree cookies, and other materials that come and go, such as straw bales or piles of bamboo (that we harvest from a nearby campus garden) is a defined space under the larger of our two climbers. It is also fixed with pulleys for hauling items in buckets to the platform above it.

An extension of this area is the close-by Rock Pond, filled with large stones and fossil rocks. Children spend a great deal of time moving, sorting, examining, comparing, and stacking them. A favorite major undertaking several times a year is to remove all the rocks, clean out the leaves and debris, wash all the rocks, and put them back in.
E. Building Area

We do designate considerable indoor space and open-ended time to construction with wooden unit and hollow blocks, so outdoor constructions focus on a large set of weather-proof interlocking recycled plastic blocks that include water channeling modules and a pumping system.

Like messy materials, we have a “home” for storage of these blocks in a corner area bordered by a fence and wall, but children frequently ask to take them out of their designated area to build rambling structures in different areas of the playground.

Smaller blocks are brought outside and used on the table or playhouse floors in the Village area.
F. Nature Art Area

We use our art area both for working with natural materials, and involving the children in visual arts activities. Evidence of the children’s efforts is visible in many forms within the outdoor space (see Principle 9)
G. Music & Movement

This space has room for both permanent installations and bringing outside some of our large collection of portable instruments (lap drums, rain sticks, other rhythm instruments, etc.)

It is planted with native grasses (just getting established at the time of these photos), including sweet grass, a material used for the well-known traditional baskets made and sold in the nearby City Market by descendants of native Gullah.

We are looking forward to developing this area, as it is a favorite for our children.
H. Garden & Pathways

Our plans for gardens are a work-in-progress and we intend to continue to expand opportunities for children to share in the design, construction, and maintenance of our garden spaces.

Our enclosed “Butterfly” garden is used by the four and five year olds and planted two to three times each year, including a milkweed planting to attract migrating monarch butterflies and encourage them to set chrysalides. The two and three year olds have a smaller space for strawberries, tomatoes, beans, and other fast and easy-to-grow plants.

Containers of different sizes are also used for gardening and a vertical herb garden is planned for 2012-2013

All garden spaces are either accessible from outside the space or include pathways for walking through.
I. Gathering Areas

We have several places that provide different kinds of spaces for individuals, small groups, or larger groups to sit, relax, converse, or engage in activities.

Summer 2012 will see the installation of a retractable awning to shade the patio area, where children and teachers gather on the steps and sitting area, and construction of a small sitting wall around the tree and grassy area in our village.

Children sometimes also create temporary spots, like this space that was made by growing pole beans on bamboo to make a “lunchroom”
J. Storage

The outdoor classroom has multiple storage areas and all classrooms open on to the space for easy transport of items like blocks and dramatic play props inside and out.
K. Water Area

The long, awning covered area alongside the classroom doors provides ready access to water (2 faucets & rain water harvesting barrels). Activities for water play include:

- Water table(s)
- Portable modular units with pumping system
- Pools
- Water wall with flexible tubing, funnels, and other “parts” for constructing water channels
- Mud Kitchen (we “import” dirt of different colors from all over the state)
L. Dirt-digging

In addition to the sand area, we have an “Archaeology” spot, designated for digging in the dirt. It is equipped with a metal detector, tools, and containers of different kinds. Because our school is located on a historic property, children actually find artifacts when digging in this spot, which we keep for display and sharing.
M. Sand Area

We have a large covered sandbox that is approximately 2 feet deep and filled with beach sand. The lattice roof and fence slats provide shade on hot days. The canvas cover is custom-fitted to keep pests and animals out of the area at night.
**N. Wheeled-toy area**

Children ride trikes in our Village area that is bordered on all sides with plantings and architectural features including two small playhouses in the style of homes in the historic district of Charleston where our school is located.
O. Swings/dynamic equipment

Our play area includes an installation with two tire swings.

We also have a balance beam and ball hoop.
P. Greenhouse

Our climate allows working/playing outside year round, so we have an open-air potting bench adjacent to the Butterfly garden that is used for germinating seeds, potting, planting, re-potting, recycling, and composting activities.
Principle 9:
Personalizing the design with regional materials & ideas from children & staff.

All plants, trees, and grasses and most stone are native to our coastal region. The Rock Pond contains stones brought from Lake Erie.

We live in a highly visited historic neighborhood of our city and some of our play fixtures are designed to reflect this context, including our 2 “Charleston single house” playhouses, and the “Charleston Carriage Company” climber.

Our outdoor space is personalized with many decorative elements created by the children or community members including:
• Paving stones
• Imprints
• Murals
• Painted benches
• Permanent art installation with rotating themes
• Garden plantings chosen and designed by the children
• 2 birdhouses
• “Peace Pole” in the 8 languages represented across our population in 2012