



A Collaborative Project of  
Arbor Day Foundation and  
Dimensions Educational Research Foundation

## Project Summary

Kennebec Valley Community College

### Provided by:

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Nature Explore Classroom Designer

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Nature Explore Education Specialist

**November 11, 2013**

Dear Kennebec Valley Community College Team,

The Nature Explore Program is a joint effort of Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation in collaboration with organizations such as Keep America Beautiful, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, American Society of Landscape Architects, and many others who are committed to re-connecting children with nature. Schools, early childhood programs, nature centers, arboretums, zoos, parks, and other public spaces are creating Nature Explore Classrooms throughout the nation. The growing network on Certified Nature Explore Classrooms can be viewed at [natureexplore.org](http://natureexplore.org)

The attached concept plan has been developed based on field-tested, research-based principles for creating effective spaces that support children's interactions with the natural world. (See page 5 in the *Learning With Nature Idea Book*.) The plan also incorporates many wonderful ideas from your team.

The entire space is divided into distinct activity areas. By providing a complete mix of activities, children with a variety of needs and learning styles are engaged. By keeping areas separated, behavioral issues are reduced. Children are free to take materials from area to area, and to combine materials in interesting ways, but benefit from having predictable places to store and find distinct types of materials.

We recommend that when you are ready to begin building, you create at least a portion of each activity area initially. You can plan to begin simply, with one or two items in each area at first. More items can certainly be added to each area over time, **but creating all recommended areas and providing at least one experience for children in each area is important to do before beginning to use your space.**

The *Implementation Guide*, which was provided to you during your design consultation, explains in depth the areas found on your concept plan. This includes valuable information about how to create your Nature Explore Classroom. We recommend that you study it carefully.

In addition to the information in the *Implementation Guide*, these are a few noteworthy features unique to your space:

- Placing an informational sign at the entrance that leads to your outdoor classroom playspace will help orient and inform visitors. For way finding ease, signage could include information about distance from the playspace to the other locations at Kennebec Valley Community College (KVCC).
- Due to the topography of the space, you may want to consider utilizing a stabilizer solution with the crushed stone. Consult with a local professional for options.
- Consider matching the entrance arbor with a similar architectural look of the post and beam design of the Early Childhood Education Lab School; perhaps, recycling a few timbers from the building project.
- The main entrance to the Early Childhood Education Lab School will be at the backside of the building, providing direct access to the playspace. Plant the hillside facing this space with native species. Consider a stone pathway through the space, with a potential “large stone” resting spot within the plant material.
- Creek access will be maintained with a gate at the side of the building. Future investigation into a bridge for the creek would provide more opportunities for explorations and curricular connections.
- Create flexibility for seating with stump seats, benches or logs in the “Gathering Area” to accommodate playgroups and practicum students, assuring that seats exist for both adult and child-sized bodies.
- Make a connection between the outdoor classroom and the Farm by planting diverse fruit trees and other appropriate plants along the north and east perimeters that will create occasions for inquiry, investigation - inspiring visitors to walk to the farm to explore and learn more. Vegetation will act as a buffer from the main road. When choosing plants and determining layout, ensure that a clear view from the classroom in the main building is maintained as the plants mature and grow.
- Planting a “water garden” will be a fabulous way to address the saturated turf on the edge of the “Open Area”. Throughout the space, vegetation that has high water tolerance will work best.
- In the design of the platform structure consider taking inspiration from the oak trees and the Early Childhood Education Lab School design. A stepping stump trail could be placed meandering through “Climbing and Crawling” with consideration for fall zone specifications.

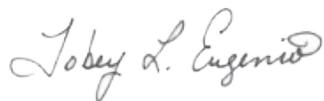
- Extended use and access of other natural spaces on the property, like the Farm, river, and hiking trails will be heightened with a focus on identifying one or two elements that are successful in the playspace and replicate them throughout the property. Continuity of signage and repetition of elements will be an asset.
- With an effort to ensure, great opportunities for discovery all year round, the space has been designed to have easy access from paths with ample space in the “Open Area” for snow piles and sledding.
- The space should be edged with fencing and low plantings with the exception of the entrances and back side of the space along the pathway. Suggestion of using a New England styled split rail fence was made. Future consideration to fence in the whole area can be made, if needed.
- A critter corner can be added outside the left of the backdoor entrance creating space to store visiting creatures from the farm for programming.
- Continue to engage the expertise of faculty at KVCC, to create your outdoor classroom.
- For future programming, involve all departments including energy, to plan gardens and playspaces. Sample models of solar panels, wind turbines or other alternative energy sources were discussed as a potential tool to educate both child and adult visitors to the space.

Congratulations on beginning this journey. Please feel free to contact us with questions or needs. We want to support you in your admirable efforts to bring more of the joys of natural connections to the lives of children and families.

Warm Regards,



Jeff Lindstrom  
*Nature Explore Senior Classroom Designer*



Tobey L. Eugenio  
*Nature Explore Education Specialist*



### A ENTRY

- CONTEXTUAL ARBOR (PHOTO 1)
- ADDITIONAL SIGNAGE AS APPROPRIATE
- CRUSHED STONE FLOORING
- ACCENT PLANTINGS

### B SMALL GATHERING AREA

- CRUSHED STONE SURFACE
- AT-EASE BENCHES (2)

### C MUSIC & MOVEMENT AREA

- WINGED CHIME (INSTALLED)(3)
- MARIMBA (INSTALLED)
- ACCESSIBLE STAGE FROM WOOD/COMPOSITE DECKING (4)
- CRUSHED STONE FLOORING
- ANCHORED NATURAL LOGS FOR SEATING
- ORNAMENTAL/FRUIT TREE GROVE ALONG PATHWAY

### D WATER AREA

- HAND-ACTIVATED WATER PUMP
- SUBSURFACE WELL FOR STORAGE
- STONE STEPPERS
- PERMEABLE PEA GRAVEL SURROUNDING

### E GARDEN/AG AREA

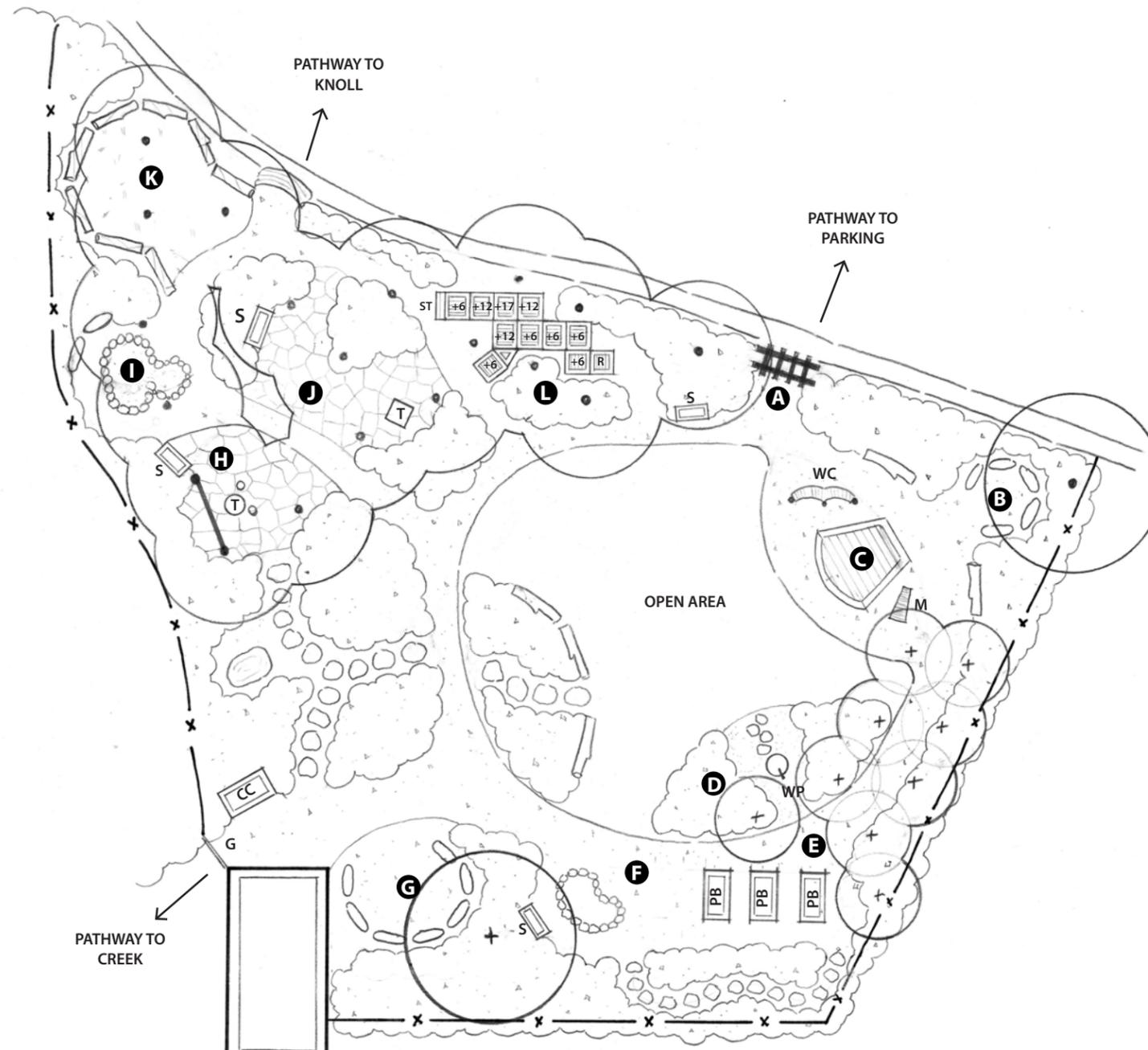
- IN-GROUND OR RAISED PLANTER BEDS (5)
- VARIETY OF PLANT MATERIAL (CROPS)
- CRUSHED STONE SURFACING SURROUNDING

### F DIRT DIGGING AREA

- IN-GROUND STONE BORDER (6)
- STORAGE UNIT
- LOOSE FRIABLE SOIL
- VARIETY OF LONG AND SHORT-HANDLED TOOLS

### G GATHERING AREA

- AT-EASE BENCHES - SEATING FOR 20+
- ENGINEERED WOOD FIBER FLOORING



### H NATURE ART AREA

- NATURE ART TABLE (7)
- DISPLAY STRING OR ART EASEL BETWEEN TREES
- STEPPING STONES THROUGH PLANT MATERIAL (8)
- LARGE OUTCROPPING STONE AS DESTINATION
- STORAGE UNIT
- LOCAL REGIONAL FLAGSTONE FLOORING
- VARIETY OF NATURE ART MATERIALS

### I SAND AREA

- VERTICAL STUMPS BORDERING "UPPER" BED
- IN-GROUND STONE BORDERING "LOWER" BED
- AT-EASE BENCHES
- VARIETY OF DIGGING/SAND TOOLS
- CRUSHED STONE FLOORING SURROUNDING
- SHARED STORAGE WITH NATURE ART

### J BUILDING AREA

- LOCAL/REGIONAL FLAGSTONE FLOORING
- VARIETY OF BUILDING BLOCKS/MATERIALS
- DISCOVERY TABLE (9)
- STORAGE UNIT

### K MESSY MATERIALS AREA

- ANCHORED, NATURAL LOGS AT PERIMETER
- RETAIN EXISTING TREES
- ENGINEERED WOOD FIBER FLOORING
- GIANT TREE COOKIES/LOOSE PARTS (10)

### L CLIMBING AREA

- 5'x5' SQ. PLATFORMS AT VARIOUS HEIGHTS (11)
- RAMP AND STAIR ACCESS
- EXTEND VERTICALS, ADD HORIZONTALS
- TREE HOUSE FABRIC
- SHARED STORAGE WITH MUSIC & MOVEMENT

### LEGEND

|                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| B - BENCH         | S - STORAGE       |
| CC - CHICKEN COOP | PB - PLANTER BED  |
| G - GATE          | WC - WINGED CHIME |
| M - MARIMBA       | WP - WATER PUMP   |
| ST - STEPS        | R - RAMP          |





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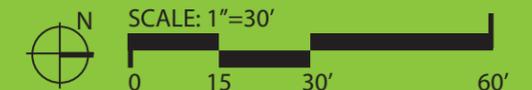
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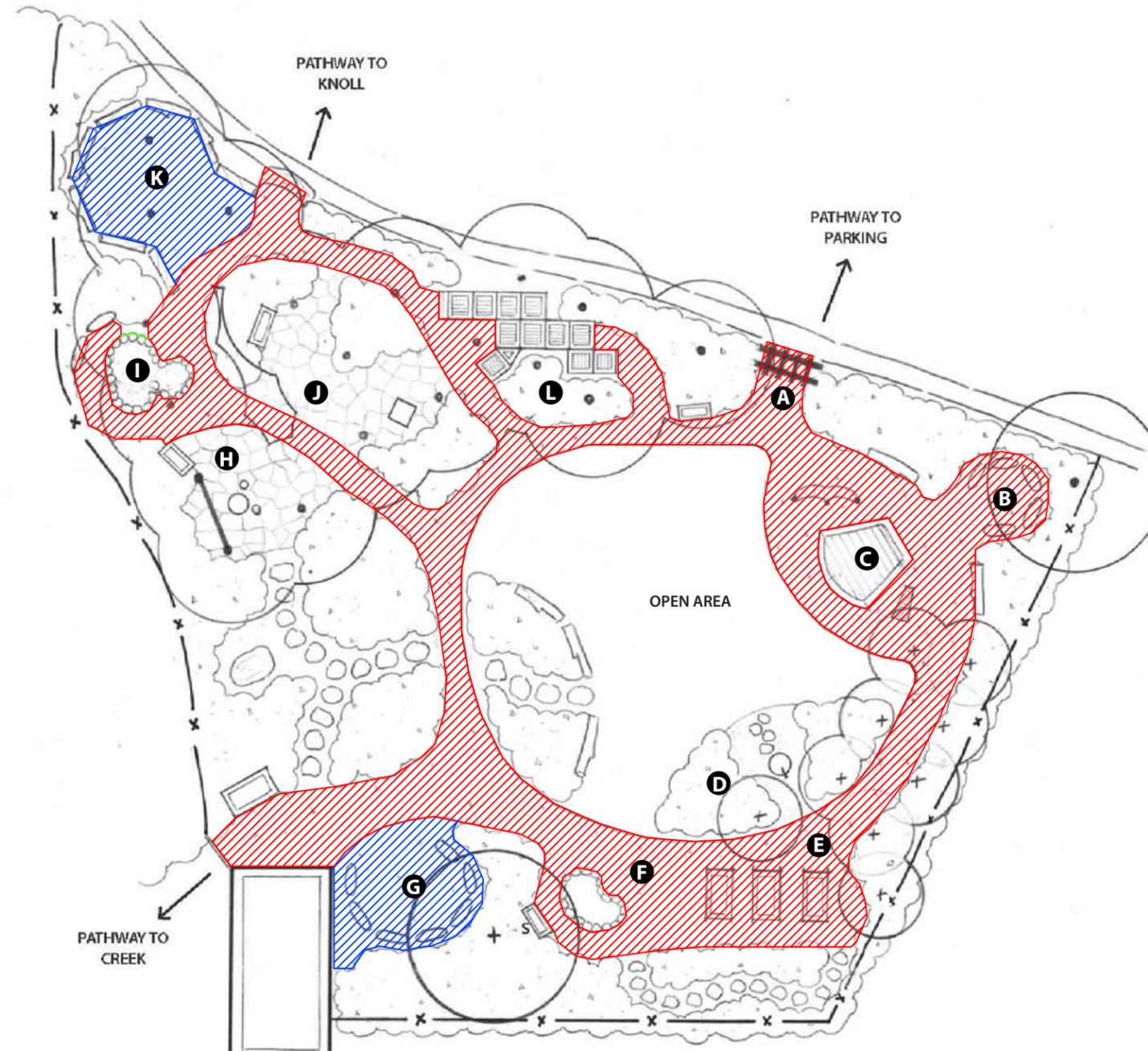
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- A ENTRY**
  - +/- 6,900 SF OF CRUSHED STONE @ 3" DEPTH (+/- 64 CY)
- B SMALL GATHERING AREA**
- C MUSIC & MOVEMENT AREA**
  - +/- 240 SF OF DECKING
- D WATER AREA**
  - +/- 275 SF OF PEA GRAVEL @ APPROPRIATE DEPTH
- E GARDEN/AG AREA**
- F DIRT DIGGING AREA**
  - +/- 40 LF OF NATURAL STONE BORDER
  - +/- 98 SF OF FRIABLE SOIL @ 12" DEPTH (3.5 CY)
- G GATHERING AREA**
  - +/- 685 SF OF EWF @ 4" DEPTH (8.5 CY)



- H NATURE ART AREA**
  - +/- 635 SF OF LOCAL/REGIONAL FLAGSTONE
- I SAND AREA**
  - +/- 55 LF OF NATURAL STONE BORDER
  - +/- 150 SF OF SAND (+/- 5.5 CY)
- J BUILDING AREA**
  - +/- 765 SF OF LOCAL/REGIONAL FLAGSTONE
- K MESSY MATERIALS AREA**
  - +/- 790 SF OF EWF @ 12" DEPTH (29 CY)
- L CLIMBING AREA**
  - +/- 285 SF OF DECKING FOR PLATFORMS

- ADDITIONAL QUANTITIES**
- +/- 6,900 SF OF CRUSHED STONE @ 3" DEPTH (+/- 64 CY) (IN RED)
  - +/- 11,500 SF OF PLANT MATERIAL

**NOTES:**

- SEE NATURE EXPLORE IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE AND CONCEPT PLAN FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.

- APPROXIMATE QUANTITIES ARE FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE AND HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED FOR COST ESTIMATION, NOT CONSTRUCTION. VERIFY WITH A LICENSED CONTRACTOR BEFORE ORDERING MATERIALS

**LEGEND**

SF - SQUARE FEET  
 CY - CUBIC YARDS  
 EWF - ENGINEERED WOOD FIBER  
 LF - LINEAR FEET

