

BC3's Children's Creative Learning Center receives national certification as Nature Explore Classroom

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(Butler, PA.) The Children's Creative Learning Center (CCLC) at Butler County Community College has earned national certification as a Nature Explore Classroom from Dimensions Educational Research Foundation and the Arbor Day Foundation.

Green Garden Park, the CCLC's outdoor nature classroom, was funded in part by a \$25,000 grant from The Alcoa Foundation and opened at the beginning of the Fall 2015 semester. The outdoor space was designed by Moore Design Associates and features a gardening area, a slide built into the hillside, a space for music with stationary instruments, and an area to work with natural materials such as dirt, water, and sand.

Butler County Community College now joins a growing network of organizations and institutions that have created effective nature-based outdoor learning environments for children. This network allows for idea-sharing, peer support and continuous development.

"Butler County Community College has shown tremendous leadership in growing the next generation of environmental stewards," said Susie Wirth, Nature Explore Outreach Director. "Their commitment to providing research-based and nature-rich learning offers a wonderful example to educators throughout the country."

Nature Explore Classrooms are part of the Nature Explore program, a collaborative project of the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation developed in response to the growing disconnect between children and nature. Certified Nature Explore Classrooms help fill the void by integrating research-based outdoor learning opportunities into children's daily lives.

The classrooms, which are being developed across the country, offer interactive elements such as musical instruments made of natural materials, garden or pathway areas and natural materials for building and creating art. Children who learn and grow in Certified Nature Explore Classrooms enhance concentration, develop creativity and problem-solving, relieve stress and improve skills in many areas of development.

Outdoor classrooms that are designed according to standards and principles described in Dimensions Educational Research Foundation's Learning With Nature Idea Book are eligible to become certified Nature Explore Classrooms. A new guidebook, *At Home With Nature: Creating Nature Explore Playscapes for Families*, helps parents bring the same research-based approach to learning in nature to their own children at home.

The first Nature Explore Classroom is located in the Tree Adventure attraction at Arbor Day Farm, the Arbor Day Foundation's interactive conservation venue in Nebraska City, Nebraska.

The CCLC at BC3 is a state licensed preschool and childcare center and a Keystone Star 4 facility. The classroom environment is designed to help each child attain optimum growth in the areas of social, emotional, language, cognitive, and physical development. Serving children ages 3 to 6, the CCLC is open to students and employees of BC3 and the community.

About Arbor Day Foundation: Arbor Day Foundation is a million member nonprofit conservation and education organization with the mission to inspire people to plant, nurture and celebrate trees.

About Dimensions Educational Research Foundation: The mission of the non-profit Dimensions Educational Research Foundation is to inspire children, families and educators to connect more deeply with the world around them by providing innovative, research-based programs and resources.