



Beacon Elementary Outdoor Loose-Parts Kitchen

Last December, Beacon Elementary launched a new area of imagination-based play on their playground called the Outdoor Loose-Parts Kitchen. Beacon kindergarten teacher Mel Joling, who has a background in outdoor classrooms, envisions more opportunities for nature-based play on the playground. Taking her ideas to the entire Beacon staff, they voted as a team to start with a nature-based kitchen area.

Several tables from the DCS garage sale are situated near the playhouses for students to “bake,” “cook” and “serve” meals using wood chips, dirt, sticks and most recently snow. Beacon families generously provided pots, pans, plastic and metal utensils, measuring cups and bowls, cutting boards and plastic play food. Beacon Media Specialist Evelyn Erickson recently provided logs to outline the area boundary, and a local tree company is donating more to finish the border. Items are stored in large plastic containers near the houses for easy student access and clean-up during recess.

Joling says the area will receive a refresh in the spring, complete with new wood chips, for students to continue creating new and delicious concoctions. Beacon Principal, Brooke Stidham, shared the following update with Beacon families soon after the kitchen was launched: *“Students are being so creative in their “menu items,” and collaborative in their play. This type of creative play helps to develop fine motor skills, social engagement, role play, exploration and much more, and keep our children engaged in play for hours (if we could let them)!”*

The next planned addition to the Beacon playground is a collection of milk crates with which students can build whatever their imaginations desire. Until then, happy Beacon students will continue serving up wood chip muffins and snow soup!

