



# Wilderness Youth Project

Smarter. Healthier. Happier.

Nature connection makes life better for kids. Time in nature makes kids happier and healthier. Wilderness Youth Project connects kids to nature in small groups guided by expert mentors during the school day, after school and in summer.



## School Wellness Summit & Wilderness Youth Project

We believe in a shared movement for children's health & wellness. As educators, you might already know that time spent in nature is restorative, and that everyone benefits from it.

Yet, studies show that on average **kids spend less than 7 minutes a day** playing outside.

**School wellness plans need to include helping students connecting with nature.** Santa Barbara is the perfect backdrop for students from all backgrounds to learn and grow outside.



TRANSFORMING  
SCHOOLS  
INTO CENTERS OF  
HEALTH &  
WELLNESS





## Who is Wilderness Youth Project?

**Wilderness Youth Project began in 1999.**

WYP is a team of expert mentors who love to spend time outdoors. We are made up of caring adults who tend to each child individually. We believe that time in nature is a basic human necessity.

WYP is based on long-term mentoring relationships, so participants may come year-round and for multiple years.

**All children need nature. Not only those of a certain race or economic class or culture or gender or sexual identity or language or set of abilities.**



A photograph of a desert landscape with two people standing on a rocky ridge, looking out over a vast, hazy valley. The sky is clear and blue. The image is partially obscured by a large white circular graphic on the right side of the slide.

## Wilderness Youth Project by the Numbers: Who We Serve

- **1,200+ participants per year**
  - Averaging **65 hours per kid** per year
  - 500 kids come during school day programming
- **70% receive scholarship** based on financial need
- **42%** of participants are **Latinx**
- **8%** of participants with **Disabilities**

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## Wilderness Youth Project takes participants to...

resource-rich locations, such as creeks, beaches, mountain trails, and open spaces in Santa Barbara's abundant front country. The core routines include child-centered exploration, awareness, and the building of naturalist skills. They use a nature-based mentoring curriculum that combines experience in nature with a hands-on learning process. Participants are with WYP many times over the course of a season, deepening connections with themselves, the group, their mentors, and the places they go.



# Wilderness Youth Project Programs



## School Day Programs

- **Bridge to Nature** takes place at 7 local Title 1 Elementary Schools (4th graders go out 1x per month all school year)
- **Partnerships @ Agencies:**
  - Storyteller Children's Center (preschool)
  - Police Activities League (Jr. High + High school)
- **Partnerships @ Housing**
  - People's Self Help Housing x 3 locations
  - Turner Foundation
  - St. George Community Center
- **Community Center Programs**
  - Eastside & Westside

## After School



- 47 weekly after school programs
- Ages 3-18
- 1 x per week all school year
- Carpinteria - Goleta

## Summer



- 705 summer camper spots
- Ages 3-18
- 1 and 2 week camps
- Overnight trips and backpacking
- Carpinteria - Goleta

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## Kids Who Come to Wilderness Youth Project...

- Feel Connected To Nature
- Are Physically And Mentally Healthier
- Have Higher Self-Esteem
- Are More Cooperative With Others
- Are Good Problem-Solvers
- Feel More Capable And Confident
- Are More Creative
- Do Better In School
- Have Good Self-Discipline
- Are Tomorrow's Conservation Leaders



A background image showing a group of people standing on a rocky cliff overlooking a vast, hazy landscape under a clear blue sky. One person is standing with arms raised in a celebratory gesture, while others are crouching or sitting nearby. The foreground shows large, light-colored rocks and some green shrubs.

# The Most Pressing Issue

Experts say that when kids return to campuses, the demand for mental health care will be greater than the available services, as the effects of the coronavirus disruptions cut across societal strata, affecting children throughout California. But schools, the safe havens that provide the only access many children have to mental health care, are ill-prepared to support the magnitude of expected need.

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-05-07/coronavirus-anxiety-children-long-term-mental-health-impacts>



A scenic photograph of a coastal landscape. In the foreground, there are large, light-colored rocks and green shrubs. In the middle ground, two people are standing on a rocky outcrop, looking out over the ocean. A faint rainbow is visible in the sky above the water. The background shows a clear blue sky and distant mountains.

# State of the Kids

## 1. “Santa Barbara Kids these days”: pre-pandemic gaps

- Wealth, Health, Education, Access, Recreation, Achievement, Experience...

## 2. A wedge in the gap

- Learning loss
- Increased depression and anxiety (ACEs)
- Gaps get wider

## 3. Healing and gap-closing

- The work ahead of us all: mitigate learning loss, increase our social and emotional wellness

<https://letsgethealthy.ca.gov/goals/healthy-beginnings/adverse-childhood-experiences/>

A background image showing three people standing on a rocky cliff edge, looking out over a vast, hazy landscape under a clear blue sky. The image is partially obscured by a large white circular graphic on the right side of the slide.

# (Un)Wellness

**The typical child in the United States now spends 90% of the time indoors.** A growing body of evidence suggests that this disconnection may be causing physical, emotional and intellectual deficits in children's learning and development (Kellert, 2015).

The vast majority of adult Americans surveyed note that nature is highly important for their physical health and for their emotional outlook. Most say that being in nature provides them with peace, meaning, and purpose.

**The great majority of the 8–12-year-old children in our study indicate that contact with nature makes them healthier, happier and more creative, and more connected with others.** In short, Americans of all types report that exposure to nature promoted their physical, psychological, and social wellbeing (Kellert, et al. 2017).



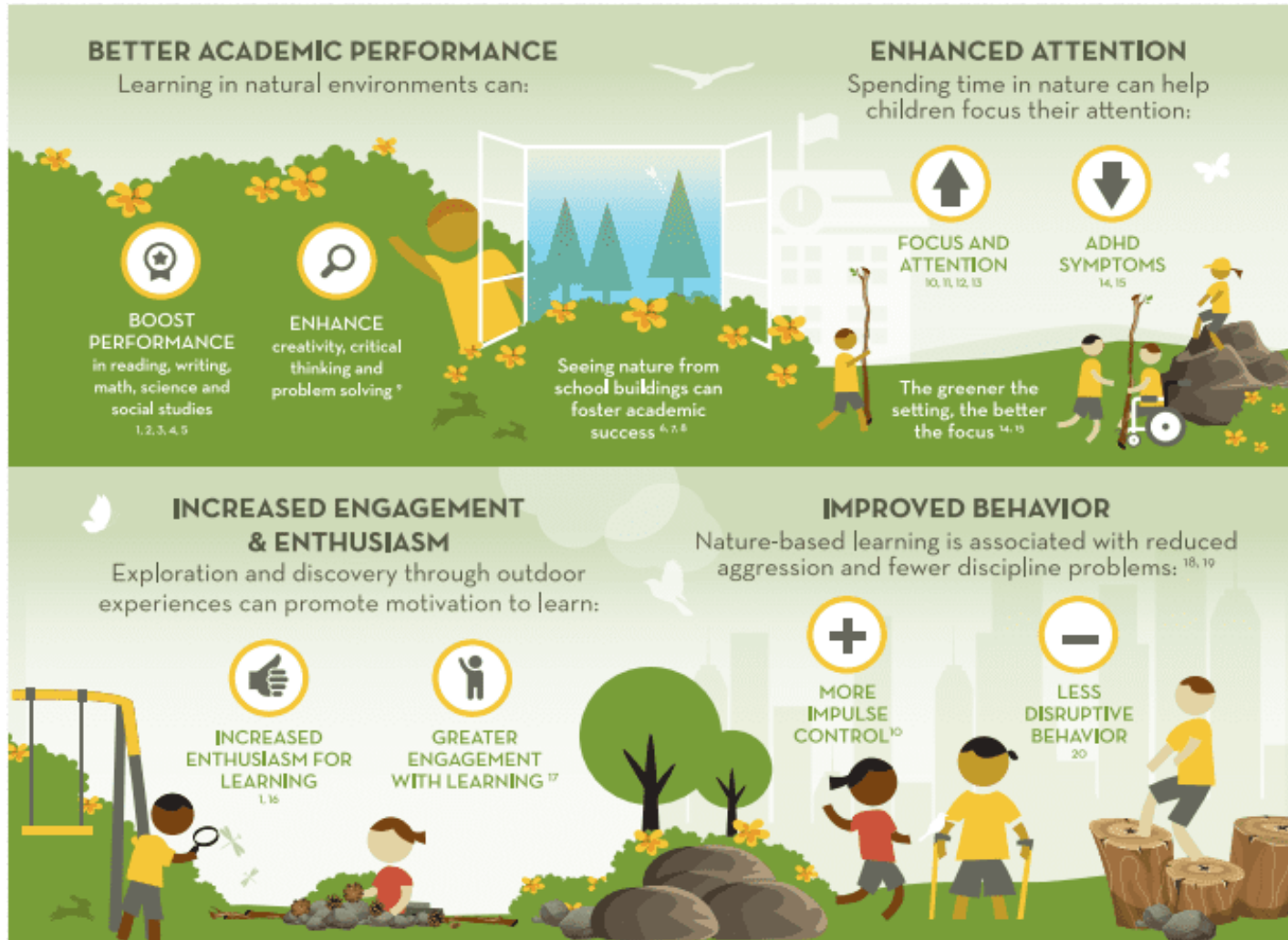
# A Free Effective Solution

Time in nature, even time spent just viewing nature, can:

- **Decrease stress**
- **Improve mood**
- **Restore attention**
- **Promote physical activity**



# Learning in Nature



**“I’m very concerned about the lasting health impacts of prolonged inactivity as a result of this pandemic. Nature Deficit Disorder is a serious risk in our community, even right here in nature-rich Santa Barbara. Wilderness Youth Project provides a powerful antidote. Time in nature with WYP makes kids smarter, healthier and happier.”**

Tony Rogers, M.D.

## Access to Nature Supports Childhood Stress Management

The California Surgeon General added  
**“access to nature”**  
as one of the key ways  
to help "buffer adverse  
childhood experiences."

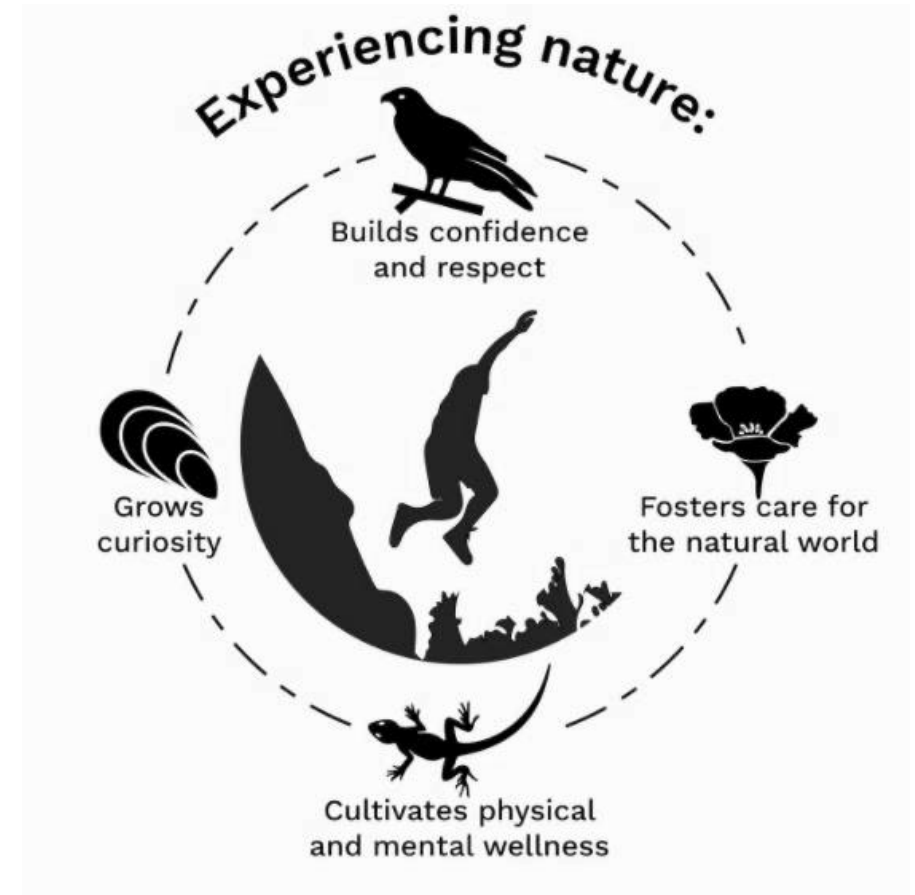


\*Graphic adapted from the "Roadmap to Resilience: The California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health" : <https://osg.ca.gov/sg-report/>



# The Return on Investment in Nature-Based Mentoring

Nature is important to children's development in every major way—intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually and physically.\*



\* (Kellert, 2005) Selected excerpts from Children and Nature Network: [www.childrenandnature.org/research/](http://www.childrenandnature.org/research/)

**There is overwhelming evidence that both active and reflective time spent outdoors counters:**



- Obesity & Diabetes
- Depression & Anxiety
- Stress & Heart Disease

## While at the same time, unstructured social activity in nature continues to support:

- Executive function
- Complex reasoning
- The development of such learning dispositions as:
  - Self-confidence
  - Curiosity
  - Resilience
  - Independence
  - Risk assessment
  - Cooperation



# Educators Agree!

**“Wilderness Youth Project sparks an excitement for learning in students. Over the years, I have seen Wilderness Youth Project transform the lives of students, especially students that have experienced trauma. For many of these students, they are experiencing “success” for the first time in their lives. It has been wonderful to see student self-confidence and motivation to learn transformed as they establish deep relationships with staff, students and nature. This love for learning is what we as educators strive to achieve in all of our children.”**

**Amy Alzina**

Former Principal, Adams Elementary School



# Educators Agree!

**“One reason I believe Adelante is an excellent school is because of our commitment to equity and experiential education especially in STEAM subjects. Wilderness Youth Project helps us to provide a regular, deep connection with the natural world, facilitated by caring guides who support the students' well being and boost their capacity for learning.”**

**Michael Macioce**  
Teacher, Adelante Charter School



# A Partnership of Learning

The Bridge to Nature Program is designed to be in partnership with teachers of SBUSD and our role is to support teacher's goals.

At the juncture of serving one school to six in 2016, and then ten in 2019, WYP has aligned all of its definable activities with NGSS Performance Expectations, grades 3-5, and provided an easily navigable dossier to teachers and principals.

Emphasis on the fourth grade was chosen for WYP's natural alignment with California state standards in both Life Science and Earth System Science.



# Evolution Over Time



As teachers requested support in student literacy, WYP responded by:

- Attending summer seminars in Lucy Calkins' units of study
- Instituting field journals
- Changing circle discussions to match thinking routines such as:
  - Read, reason, respond
  - Connect, challenge, extend
- Providing in class instruction by credentialed teachers relating WYP field trips to literacy goals
- Preparing to enthusiastically integrate SBUSD's META plan.



## **An eye toward the future of learning...**

Schools are facing both short and long term uncertainties. Wilderness Youth Project is uniquely positioned to leverage its outdoor leadership expertise for curricular gain within an SBUSD driven framework.



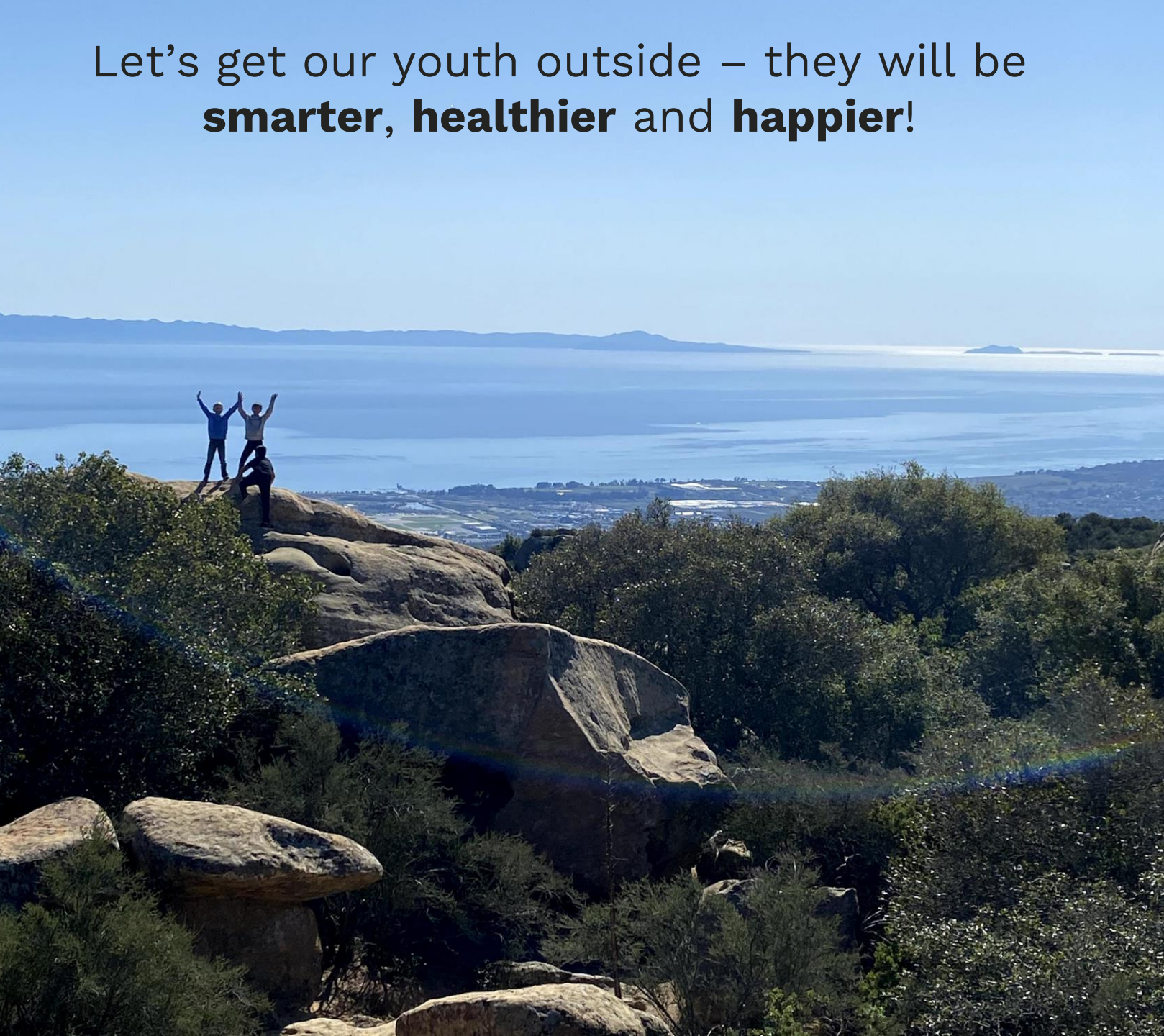
## Never has there been a greater imperative to help kids thrive

- Wilderness Youth Project provides proven and time-tested expertise, supporting students in becoming smarter, healthier and happier.
- Our top priority is to overcome barriers and provide the benefits of mentoring in nature to the students who need us most.
- WYP continues to be agile: we can and will adapt programs to meet the needs of the SBUSD.

# Read More...

- **Who do you imagine in the outdoors?** Alejandra Cortes, Oregon Metro Winter 2021
- **"Nature Deficit Disorder is Really a Thing"** NYTimes Summer 2020
- **"The Case for Outdoor Schooling"** PBS Fall 2020
- **"Look, Don't Touch. The Problem with Environmental Education"** David Sobel, Orion Magazine, July/Aug 2012
- **"What if the Secret to Success is Failure?"** Paul Tough, The New York Times, September 2011
- **"Adelante Charter School's STEM Program Yields High Science Scores"** Sheila Cullen, Noozhawk, September 2013

Let's get our youth outside – they will be  
**smarter, healthier and happier!**



**Learn More &  
Get Involved**



We love our  
Schools + Partners

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