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For Immediate Release

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More at Four and Head Start Break Ground on New Outdoor Classroom

WINSTON-SALEM, NC— The first phase of a plan to create a new outdoor learning environment for pre-k and kindergarten children is taking place at Middle Fork Elementary School.

What makes this outdoor learning environment unique is that it is being developed as a habitat garden for both children and wildlife. The plan includes space for running and playing ball, climbing structures, pathways for trikes and scooters, small hills for climbing and rolling. In addition, many different types of native plants, trees and shrubs will set the stage for children and teachers to interact with nature on the school yard. The concept here is “school as a garden” designed by Ginny Sullivan, from Learning by the Yard.

“A high quality outdoor learning environment offers much more than manufactured playground equipment,” said Janet McGinnis, an educational consultant for More at Four and Co-author of the *Preschool Outdoor Environment Measurement Scale (POEMS)*. “The outdoors is a living educational resource. It is an extension of the classroom that offers many opportunities for children to learn about themselves, each other, and the natural world.”

Katie Mann, the teacher for the More at Four pre-k class is taking advantage of the transformation outside the classroom by incorporating the day to day changes in planning activities with the children. “Each day the children talk about the changes happening outside and I write what they say on a chart. This is a great opportunity to encourage language and learn new concepts,” said Mann. “The designer and installers who are working on the outdoor space have included the children in the process by showing them the drawing of what it will look like when it’s done. One of the children said she thought it would look like a zoo.”

Brenda Herman, the principal at Middle Fork, had this to say about the new outdoor classroom, “The magnitude of what the Middle Fork students will learn and gain from this gift to us will last a very long time. It ties in so well with our school theme of discovery.....what better way to get young children tuned into the excitement of lifelong learning and discovery than spending time with their teachers and classmates in such a natural and inspiring outdoor classroom.”

The first phase of the project is scheduled for completion in December and being funded by Head Start, in collaboration with More at Four, and Middle Fork Elementary School. Learning by the Yard, Grounds for Play, and Pace Concrete are responsible for designing and installing the play structures, intricate winding pathways, and gardens.



For more information, please contact Jenny Whitley, More at Four Program Coordinator, Smart Start of Forsyth County, 725-6011 or jennyw@smartstart-fc.org.

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