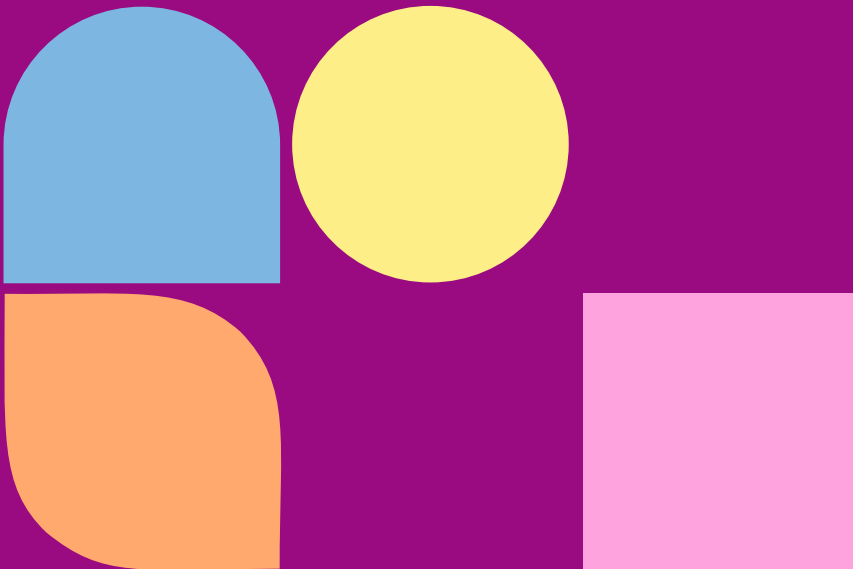




PARTICIPATORY DESIGN ACTIVITY SERIES
DOTMOCRACY

"If you could have the best school ground ever, one that's good for people and the planet, what would be in it?"



Details

This activity invites students to share their ideas in a democratic and participatory way. It helps educators understand what students are drawn to and what inspires them. By offering a creative medium for expression, students (and educators) can explore what would make their school ground a better place for play, learning, comfort, nature connection, and climate resilience.

Category: Data Collection

Grades: K–8 with modifications specific to each age group.

Summary: Students learn what a climate-ready school is and explore what is possible on a school ground by reviewing a curated set of images. Using coloured stickers/dots, they vote for their favourite features and design elements.

Materials:

- Dotmocracy Image Kit – Printed images
- Small stickers/dots
- Sticky notes
- Index cards





Students will:

- Explore the design of outdoor spaces by building on what they created in the **Window of Wishes** activity.
- Learn what makes a school ground climate-ready and imagine how they want their own grounds to look and feel.
- Use observation skills to explore images of school ground features and design possibilities.
- Reflect on what excites and interests them most using simple decision-making strategies.
- Follow multi-step instructions to review and respond to images.
- Strengthen fine motor skills by placing small stickers on selected images.

Step 1. Prepare for Dotmocracy: Exploring Student Perspectives

Before beginning the dotmocracy activity, invite students into a conversation about how they currently experience the school grounds. This helps them recognize the strengths and challenges of the space and learn from one another how different outdoor areas influence their play and learning.

Strengths and Challenges of the School Grounds

Sample guiding questions:

- What do you love about your school grounds? Why?
- What do you not enjoy? Why?
- What do you usually do when you go outside to play?
- How does that change at different times of the year?
- What would you like to be able to do outside that you can't do now?
- How could our school grounds become more interesting or enjoyable?



Tip: Encourage students to focus on what they want to *do* and imagine how a specific feature or element could support that activity.

Imagine a Climate-Ready School Ground

Introduce the idea of a climate-ready school ground—one that welcomes people of all ages and abilities, supports birds and butterflies, absorbs rainwater, provides shade, keeps us cool on hot days, and offers inspiring places to learn, play, and connect with nature and each other.

You can frame the activity with a simple goal statement, such as:

“We’re imagining a school ground that is climate-resilient and helps both people and the planet—where nature and people flourish together, where we stay cool during hot days, and where the space feels welcoming, safe, playful, and fun to explore.”

Refer to supporting resources such as:

[Climate Ready Schools Through the Eyes of Students](#)

[Climate Ready Schools Look Book](#)

[Climate Ready Schools – 5 Design Principles](#)

Step 2. Begin the Dotmocracy

Post the image cards on the wall. Give each participant the same number of stickers/dots - roughly equal to about a quarter of the total number of options available.

Explain that everyone will now explore the images to vote for the ideas they love most.



Step 3. Dot the Images

Invite students to look at all the images and place **one sticker/dot per image** on the ones they like best. Educators can participate, too.

Participants may write additional thoughts on sticky notes (one idea per note) to explain why they chose certain images. Educators can support younger children by writing down their ideas.

Going Deeper with the Learning

Invite a few students to share why they voted the way they did. These reflections can be shared with the school ground project team.

Step 4. Count & Reflect

Count the stickers/dots on each image. The images with the most dots reflect the features and ideas that resonated most with participants.

Ask students:

- What did you notice about other people's choices?
- Why do you think certain images received a lot of stickers/dots?



Tips for Using Dotmocracy

- Encourage students to think about their own interests, and not just what their friends are including.
- Ask students to review all options and plan their dots before sticking them. This can reduce the bandwagon and encourage more independent voting.
- Be clear on whether students can vote more than once on a single option.
- Provide dots in two different shapes for both positive and negative. This will allow you to see which ideas have opposition.
- Ask students to place the stickers around the border of the image, or on a separate sheet of paper attached to the picture, so they don't cover the image for everyone.
- Have someone monitor the process to ensure no one's adding extra dots, peeling off dots or moving dots.

Extend the Dreaming:

Try our Model-Making activity (link) to continue building ideas.

Additional Resources

For outdoor, nature-connected learning materials:

https://evergreen.ca/resource-hub/umbrella_resources/outdoor-classroom-resources/

For more information on Climate-Ready Schools:

https://evergreen.ca/resource-hub/umbrella_resources/climate-ready-schools-resources/

