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## Bravo, E. Rivers Elementary



I interviewed, via phone, a parent and the principal from E. Rivers Elementary in the Buckhead section of Atlanta for an article I'm writing and wanted to visit the school myself to see its garden. Just beyond the bustling traffic of Peachtree Street at the Peachtree Battle Shopping Center intersection, I found the school, parked and walked around the back to where there is an enormous green field surrounded by a track and joined by several playgrounds. The noise from Peachtree Street was inaudible, the concrete and cars and buildings already a distant memory. I saw green as far as I could see. And so, apparently, do the children since most of the classrooms have enormous windows overlooking either this scene or two wide, grassed courtyards, one of which contains an outdoor classroom of stumps under the shade of trees, and the garden.

The garden courtyard has garden beds outside every single classroom, plus about twelve raised beds in cedar boxes, with abundant room for students to garden, run, play, and enjoy the outdoors. Fruit trees abound, and butterfly bushes are in full bloom. Recycled plastic lids make colorful, whimsical art, and a hand-painted sign defines the space. Students' families "adopted" the garden for a week at a time this summer, so although school has been out for months, the garden was in beautiful shape.

But that's not all I found at E. Rivers. As I walked toward the other courtyard, I passed an outdoor wildlife path that wound its way down a shady knoll, and I found many sand tables outside classrooms as well. Even the doors were hand-painted to depict a garden scene.

Bravo, E. Rivers. This is the best example I've seen so far in Atlanta of a commitment to incorporating the outdoor space into the learning environment.