

A COMPARISON OF GRANT-FUNDED OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS IN  
RURAL AND NONRURAL MISSOURI SCHOOLS

Catherine F. Wissehr

Dr. Lloyd H. Barrow, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This study addressed the question: *How do outdoor classrooms in rural and nonrural areas of Missouri compare?* Data was collected from applications for state funded grants awarded from 2004-2006 to elementary schools in rural and nonrural areas of Missouri. The funds were awarded to each site to develop or enhance outdoor classrooms (OC) on or adjacent to school property. A sample of the schools that had received funding to develop an OC were visited during the summer and fall of 2008 to determine the level of implementation and ongoing status of their OCs. A checklist of features present at the time of the visit along with photographic documentation served as a second data source. The third data source consisted of questionnaires completed by education consultants from the Missouri Department of Conservation that corresponded to the visited sites.

Qualitative data was obtained from each of the data sources in order to determine 1) what features had been funded, 2) level of implementation, and 3) how each OC had been maintained over time. Quantitative analysis was conducted using independent t-tests and Pearson correlations to analyze data comparing rural and nonrural sites, the features they contained, level of matching funds provided by each district for the development of the site, and the effects of socioeconomic status and school size on the elaborateness of the OCs.

Findings showed no significant quantitative differences in features present in rural and nonrural OCs. The qualitative and quantitative data collected during site visits and responses made by the state conservation education consultants supported the quantitative findings.