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Phipps Debuts Sustainable SEED Classroom as Model of Innovation for Pittsburgh Region

One of two healthier, non-toxic modular classroom environments in the U.S. comes to Pa.

Pittsburgh, Pa. — [Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens](#) is unveiling **one of the nation's first sustainable, modular classrooms**. Developed by the [SEED \(Sustainable Education Every Day\) Collaborative](#), the [SEED Classroom](#), built to [Living Building Challenge™](#) standards and made possible by the generous support of the Rita McGinley Foundation, will feature non-toxic materials, generate its own energy, and recycle water on site. Fabricated locally by [EcoCraft Homes](#), it is **one of only two of its kind in the U.S.** and will model how classrooms of the future can be built to maximize student wellness and potential. The building shows what healthy spaces look like for kids and will call attention to the importance of providing healthy learning environments for children.

Approximately 260,000 modular classrooms are in use across the country. Providing schools with a quick solution for expansion, they are commonly cited for the potential health risks they pose due to:

- Inadequate ventilation
- High levels of toxins, such as formaldehyde, flame retardants, phthalates and volatile organic compounds
- Mold, excess moisture and musty odors
- Inadequate lighting

Research suggests a correlation between access to nature and human health. Phipps aims to bring nature indoors and foster a new generation of environmental stewards. Other facility features include:

- Use of non-toxic building materials
- A green wall to treat greywater
- Abundant natural daylight
- Solar panels to produce 100% of energy needs
- Sanitary water treated with constructed wetlands
- Rainwater collected and filtered for building use or infiltration
- Exposed mechanical systems that encourage student engagement and inquiry

Expected to impact thousands of children each year as the new home of Phipps' [science education programs](#) — along with internship classes for underserved students, field trips, citizen science initiatives, and professional development opportunities for teachers — the SEED Classroom will spark scientific engagement.

"Quite often children are placed in some of the worst building environments. The SEED Classroom is a powerful model for demonstrating the importance of providing healthy places for children to learn," says Phipps Executive Director Richard V. Piacentini.

"Phipps has demonstrated leadership by being the first on the East Coast to embrace a SEED Classroom," says SEED Collaborative Executive Director Stacy Smedley. "We are excited to be a part of Phipps' continued commitment to educating children and adults on the important role that the built environment should play in restoring planetary and human health. This space will be a hands-on learning laboratory, informing how we think about a Living Building designed classroom as a tool for education and engagement."

PHOTOS BELOW



About Phipps: Founded in 1893, Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh, Pa. is a green leader among public gardens with a mission to inspire and educate all with the beauty and importance of plants; to advance sustainability and promote human and environmental well-being through action and research; and to celebrate its historic glasshouse. Learn more: phipps.conservatory.org.

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