

Environmental Clean-up Day



On October 19th, 240 students and 50 adults (parents and teachers) came to work on a day school was closed. Students were broken into groups of fifteen 6th and 7th graders with 8th graders as group leaders. The groups were sent to do various tasks on the school grounds. The tasks included picking up all debris and litter and putting it into a dump truck, cleaning two stream beds, weeding and mulching all the flower beds, working in our new school yard habitat (which was built by last year's 6th grade class), cleaning the inner courtyards, planting four trees, storm drain stenciling and painting yellow curb lines. Students worked for three hours and then went in to eat lunch and write their reflection statements for Student Service-Learning Hours. The Character Counts! Pillars addressed were respect, citizenship, caring and responsibility.

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project? We recognized the need to make our school safer by getting rid of debris that was from illegal activities. But most importantly, it was an environmental activity done to teach the mission of the Chesapeake Bay Trust. That is to "promote public awareness and participation in the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries." This was our second year working toward this goal. Initially our townhouse neighbors asked if we could do something about the trash along the fencerow. We realized our school needed to advocate stewardship of the land and teach the values of Character Counts and environmental concern. The school, the City of Gaithersburg, the neighboring community and all the students were helped environmentally, physically, and spiritually.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives? To be specific, our science outcomes are as follows and these were met both before the activity with classroom explanation and then by the hands-on-approach to teaching.

Environmental Science: Chesapeake Bay Populations & Ecosystems

6.6.2 Identify and explain the interdependency of organisms within the environment in a given ecosystem (i.e. producer/consumer, predator/prey, host/parasite).

3.6.12 Analyze evidence that within an ecosystem organisms have different functions (niches) that enable the ecosystem to survive.

6.6.5 Analyze how human activities can accelerate or magnify many naturally occurring changes (i.e. erosion, air and water quality, population).

1.6.20 Apply concepts and processes of science to explain a position relative to an issue.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project? After lunch, students were asked to look at the overhead, Form 560-51, Verification of Student Service Learning (SSL) Activity. They completed this worksheet with guidance from the teaching staff and SSL coordinator. Students were told to answer the following questions -

1. What did you do?
2. What effect/benefit did your service have on the people/place you served?
3. Did your service effect the community as a whole, and how?
4. How do you feel about the service you provided?
5. Why is helping the community an important thing to do?
6. Why was volunteering today important?

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? Students from the 8th grader were recommended by their science teacher to be group leaders. Groups were made up of 6th and 7th graders with a few 8th graders interspersed throughout. The leaders were responsible for gathering the lunches, taking the group to the assigned work areas, and following the prescribed morning schedule. The group leaders also had to take their group to the greenhouse. Once there, the students had an opportunity to visit two animals from Second Chance. Second Chance rehabilitates injured wildlife and then sets them free if possible.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? We worked with the City of Gaithersburg, the police department, the mayor, the teaching and building services staff, McDonald's, the Gaithersburg Gazette and other media. Everyone's time was donated.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? The first thing we did was to contact the City of Gaithersburg and coordinate the project. All the specific details were outlined and the goals were determined. A letter was written to all the parents in the school explaining community service-learning and our Special Emphasis Program which uses Gardner's Multiple Intelligences to teach curriculum. We emphasize the Naturalist Intelligence in our unique program. The Special Emphasis Teacher went into all the Science classes and taught about how we live in the Chesapeake Bay area and impact its watershed. Permission slips for October 19th went home with all the students; this was followed up on our back-to-school night where flyers were handed out.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? Students gained ecological, environmental, and Character Counts knowledge. They also gained writing experience because the reflection statement had to be written using MCPS and MSPAP objectives. The paragraph followed the "hamburger" model. (The model shows a burger where the top bun is the topic sentence covering all one wants to say. Next, one must give the reader three- four juicy details, the meat, tomato, lettuce, pickles, cheese, and onion. It is finished with a filling conclusion - bottom bun). Students also learned how to plant trees, weed, mulch the flower beds, clear debris from a stream, storm drain, stencil and other gardening type skills.

To learn more about the project contact Amy R. Pike (AmyR.Pike@fc.mcps.k12.md.us), Special Emphasis Teacher or Thelma C. Smith, Principal, Gaithersburg Middle School, Montgomery

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