

Adopt a Park

This ongoing project was the idea of our 5th grade GOLD (Generating Outstanding Leadership Development) students who were asked to select and implement an environmental project with a committee of six 4th and 5th grade students. They selected Pop's Park because it is located within a block of the school, making it easy for the students to maintain and because it was a way of getting involved in the local government. This service-learning project combines direct service when the students are cleaning and planting in the park, indirect service when the students have fundraisers to purchase plants and equipment to improve the park and create rain gardens there, and service through advocacy when the students collaborate with the city council and public works department concerning types of plants, access to water, and simple repairs to equipment. Visits are planned for the fall and the spring.

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project (e.g. health, education, environmental or public safety need)?

This local park gets plenty of use and was in need of regular maintenance of the gardens and the equipment. The city government is committed to creating local rain gardens to protect the Anacostia River Watershed which leads to the Chesapeake Bay, and could see the need to develop the gardens at this park.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to school curriculum (e.g. what course outcomes were met and/or how did the project reinforce or enhance student academic learning)?

The students can achieve a variety of curriculum objectives through note taking, writing persuasive letters to local government, fundraising, creating a budget, identifying and describing the positive and negative impact of human activities on the environment, and by understanding the relationship of academics to the world of work and to life at home and in the community.

Best Practice 3: How did you reflect on your experience throughout the project?

The students are responsible for maintaining a journal containing notes they take on field trips to the park, at committee meetings, and when completing research assignments. They refer to their notes when creating an action plan and presenting their plan to adults.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project?

The students worked in teams to record observations, create a "to do" list, help with the fundraiser, complete the work at the park and communicate with Public Works and the City Council.

Best Practice 5: What community partners did you work with on this project (e.g. non-profits, civic organizations, business that provided donations, etc.)?

The students worked with Berwyn Heights Public Works, City Council, Prince George's County Government and the school's PTA.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project?

The GOLD committee met to plan the initial and subsequent field trips to the park during the school day. The students had seen a video on citizenship, during a regular classroom guidance lesson. In the video, children adopted a local park in order to clean it up and provide the park with recycling bins. The timing of the video influenced our GOLD student in her decision to adopt a park as her environmental project for the committee. The

committee decided to plan at least one trip each spring and each fall in order to maintain the grounds and plant additional plants as needed.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project?

The students will have opportunities to share their project with the Student Council at monthly meetings. They will write thank you letters to community partners and debate future environmental needs at a mock Town Council meeting in April of every year.