



School Grounds for Learning, Case Study

Habitat: Courtyard/Outdoor Classroom

Stage of the Project: Planning and Implementation

Introduction: Annapolis Middle School (AMS) serves a diverse and growing population of over 800 –900 students, including many English language learners, who are enthusiastic about being outdoors and learning outdoors. One benefit from their school building built in 1964 is having two large courtyards (0.8 acres each) within the building that provide natural light to classrooms and protected habitat areas enhanced by the students. The school district draws from urban/suburban areas, where native plant landscapes are sometimes scarce, so the courtyard beautification is appreciated and adds to a calm and peaceful mood.

Plans for Greatness: When the courtyards started as barren spaces with just a few large trees, AMS' Science Coordinator and science teacher, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and South River Federation helped the students turn the courtyards into appealing habitats with many native plant types. Plants were chosen for spring and fall flowering periods, when students are in school, as well as for wildlife and pollinator benefit. AMS added an aerator to their small pond, run by a small solar panel. This microhabitat attracts a mallard duck pair each year, whose ducklings are a source of excitement to spot. Two teachers are planning additional outdoor classroom



7th graders installing the rain garden

features within the second courtyard, which provides fewer distractions to indoor classes than the first courtyard. In addition, a courtyard signpost has been added with student painted signs, as the school is an International Baccalaureate Program school, to indicate direction of other countries.

"Students turn the courtyards into appealing habitats"

Overview

Annapolis Middle School
Anne Arundel County, MD

The Challenge:

Difficult to maintain their courtyards

Adaptation to the Challenge:

Reached out to local businesses to help with the maintenance



"Before" courtyard condition, all mowed grass to drainage system.

Challenges: As the two courtyards are entirely contained within the locked school, the regular grounds contract mowers do not maintain the courtyards. Courtyard grass mowing falls to the custodians of the school, who are busy with many other areas of upkeep in a 53 year old school. When the grass gets very long, it overwhelms the regular lawnmowers available, and long grass is unappealing to the students. As the courtyards are surrounded by indoor classrooms, teachers try not to provide too much distraction to the indoor space. Stumps need to be peeled of bark and varnish or paint sealed on top to stall the decay of the wood from moisture, so the first set of stumps will need to be replaced.



Newly planted rain garden and native understory trees, which have continued to thrive.

“Outdoor lunch is a nice stress reliever and calming influence for students.”



A calm and shady spot in the courtyard with a tree stump circle for classes or relaxing

Adaptations to the Challenge: The principal has reached out to local contacts who have a landscaping business and will be assisting with mowing. And regular clean up maintenance will be done by students around the Earth Day time period.

Where they are now: Numerous large picnic tables obtained by the school are used for outdoor classroom activities, as well as positive behavior rewards for outdoor lunch access. Outdoor lunch is a nice stress reliever and calming influence for students. Raised bed gardens have been maintained by the

Environmental Club with help from local scouts. A scout also constructed 4 large benches and provided a native plant interpretive guide for the courtyard.