

Project Title: Pollution Patrols

School Alice West Fleet Elementary

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Brief summary of the project

Our 5th graders (and just about every other student) were worried about all the litter that was ending up in our bioretention beds, aka "Rain Gardens." Students of all ages could be found traipsing through the gardens, picking out trash to throw away properly. Why was this a problem? Why did we need official "Pollution Patrols" to get the job done? Well, bioretention beds/rain gardens have a specific job to do and just walking around in these areas can have a negative impact on how well they "work." We organized Pollution Patrols to pick up trash in the bioretention beds each week.

Getting Going

How did the project start? Around our school, on any given day, our bioretention beds were filled with litter blown in from garbage cans, deposited after stormwater washed through or just plain dropped by a litter bug. Our Environmental Stewardship Club had a plan!

Who were important people to contact at the beginning? We checked in with admin, custodial staff and PE dept (to borrow supplies from the safety patrols).

What are the threshold resources that need to be identified at the beginning before proceeding further? (For example, robust parent volunteer network, elevated loading docks, nearby outdoor spigot.) No major resources, other than human/time! We only needed to figure out a day and time that would work best for the students and staff members involved. We decided the students would work in pairs and participate on a rotating basis. Turned out that the only time to get it done was at recess time. Student teams were each assigned a Thursday, about once every 5 weeks. Weekly assignments were posted on a bulletin board in their hallway!

What are the policies (if any) from APS or elsewhere that may affect the project and need to be considered? This is such a small but valuable project that we were not affected by APS policies. We took safety precautions by using grabbers rather than students touching trash. (Using disposable gloves was decided against - trying to reduce our waste!)

What budget and/or funding sources were needed? We needed to gather supplies for picking up litter in a safe manner. The PE department loaned us vests and "grabbers." We ordered additional grabbers and collapsible garbage and recycling collectors through a BWET grant.

Implementation

Did you pilot or test the project and then scale it up? If so, describe your process. We didn't need to pilot this program. I suppose we tested it and realized that we needed three students on the team at one time. Two students to pick up trash and recyclables and one to record the number of pieces collected. They often rotated jobs within the 30 minute period!

As you rolled the project out, how did you present this to students and encourage their participation? Our Environmental Stewardship Club members were happy to take on this problem after I shared the news from many students about garbage in the gardens. They made videos and we shared their "job" on the Morning News program. We had to encourage all other students NOT to participate because walking in the bioretention beds is NOT recommended. Walking in the beds disturbs the nature of the area and how water is to flow and/or get absorbed into the ground. When people walk in the areas, without the proper guidance, soil shifts, erosion occurs and then the beds can't do their job!

Approximately how many students were actively involved, and how many were affected? About 12 students were members of the club. I'd say the whole student body was affected because this particular "Rain Garden" runs right along the entire playground. Students were always upset when reporting litter to me! After the Pollution Patrols took over, there were fewer reports from saddened students!

What obstacles were overcome? Are there continuing obstacles? What lessons did you learn from doing this? Our biggest obstacle is keeping kids out of the gardens. Keeping the environment clean is so important and kids naturally want to jump in, literally, to help out. BUT our rain gardens are not to be disturbed. So educating the students on the job of the garden and of the Pollution Patrol team only, was our biggest obstacle.

Will the project continue into future years? If so, how will you keep continuity? Do you plan modifications? We have established the Pollution Patrols as a legitimate committee for students in the Environmental Stewardship Club to be a part of. In the future, we may have these kids train others to work in the other rain gardens around the school.

What effect has it had on the school? Everyone, including staff, is happy to see our grounds free of litter. We are especially proud that our students are the ones taking action!

Are there photos that could help others visualize how this worked for you? If so, please insert them here.



Replication

Do you have resources you used that would be helpful for someone trying to replicate this project? Would you be willing to share them? Grabbers, vests, buckets can be found anywhere!

What else should someone wanting to implement a similar project at their school know? Scheduling would be the only issue, schools would have to work that out on a school by school basis!