

URBANA PRESCHOOLERS 'STEP UP' FOR ENVIRONMENT

By Patsy Beckman • March 30, 2011



Students at Urbana's Goddard School parade around during Earth Hour week in garb they created out of recyclable items.

In anticipation of Earth Day 2011, The Goddard School® in Urbana joined World Wildlife Fund's Earth Hour 2011 with nearly 400 Goddard Schools nationwide to help spread the message of working together to make a positive impact toward a sustainable future.

The school hosted its own version of Earth Hour by incorporating the environment into a number of learning activities throughout an entire week.

Students participated in activities and lesson plans integrated into art projects, science lessons and snack time — all culminating with a “Stepping Up for the Environment” celebration when children turned off all non-essential lighting for one hour at the school.

Traci Keyes, director of Urbana's Goddard School, spent a year planning this year's Earth Hour curriculum for students and teachers. “We are stepping up to make students aware of the importance of taking care of the Earth and making a positive environment, and we are showing them how they can do this,” she said.

Throughout the week, children and teachers participated in a variety of fun activities, games and lessons designed to increase awareness of how energy use and daily activities can affect the future of the planet and how they can conserve energy and take care of the environment in their everyday lives.

A pre-kindergarten class made its own compost piles in a bottle; infants ages 12 to 18 months refined gross motor skills by building (and knocking down) towers out of recyclable items such as cereal and pasta boxes; and toddlers made egg carton litter bugs to study how important it is to take care of their planet and not to litter.

Children designed invitations asking parents and neighbors to join them in Earth Hour, decorated a banner with only recycled materials to present to Maryland Sen. Ron Young, and paraded wearing outfits created out of recycled materials.

Keyes praised teachers who have “gone green” in their own homes as ardent supporters of the schools classroom initiatives.

She said she was also pleased to find many local businesses open to Goddard's environmental dialogue and stepping up to help sponsor and promote Earth Day programs in the Urbana community.

Respecting the outdoors and conserving energy are not just once-a-year happenings at the school. By teaming with Key Sanitation, Goddard now has recycling bins in classrooms.

“We are proud to incorporate this in school so children will go home and do it with their families,” Keyes said. “Teachers can also use the recyclable items for art projects, and kids can see this.”

Children are working on the proper way to divide recyclables.

“It has given them a sense of pride. They throw it away, but it is reused, and they are doing something for their environment,” Keyes said.

During the year, students have been able to participate in a gardening program, getting their hands dirty while studying small seedlings and growth.

Urbana’s Goddard School instructs children from the ages of 6 weeks to 5 years old.

“As time goes on, we create more pollutants in the air. Our Earth is fragile, so this is an opportunity to teach students how we can keep the environment clean for future generations by throwing our trash away,” said John Pelicano, co-owner of the school.

Since its inception, Earth Hour has become a global initiative with over 1 billion people in 4,100 cities, 87 countries and seven continents participating by turning off their electricity for an hour.

“Children are like little sponges. They will take what they learn with them as they grow older,” said Keyes.