



Schoolyard Habitat Genesis

Students at South Dorchester School planned, implemented and assessed an Earth Day Celebration, which included the planting of a wetland, planting of native trees and shrubs, a schoolyard clean-up, and a seminar from the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge.

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project? Environmental education, civic improvements, and parental involvement were recognized and met with this project. The students conducted a schoolyard environmental strength assessment. They found a need for animal habitat and decided to create several habitats. Every student, parent, and staff member at South Dorchester School, in addition to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge were helped by this project.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives? This project was an interdisciplinary project, incorporating MSDE outcomes and indicators from Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, Science, and Media Skills. Skills and concepts from the regular Dorchester County Curriculum were taught and assessed through this project by incorporating skills into planning of habitats, writing a grant, writing about experiences, measuring distances, and conducting research in the media center.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project? Students were asked questions about what they were doing while planning the project as well as during the implementation of the project. Questions were asked that required both oral and written responses. Students referred to a timeline of events frequently so they could assess their progress. Plans were changed as progress slowed or stopped at times. Students used skills gained under the 5th Dimension of Learning to activate their metacognition and to anticipate future challenges throughout the project.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? Students were broken into teams. These teams were reflective of the various habitats they planned to build. They then elected leaders and a member from each team served on the grant writing team. They were responsible for conducting "perc tests" to determine locations for their habitats. In addition, they researched, ordered, and planted their species of plants. They also wrote letters to the principal in request of land area to develop their habitats and carryout the planting of their habitats.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? South Dorchester School worked with the following partners to complete this project: Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Spicers Sacomill, Blackwater Wildlife Refuge, Parent Council, Maryland State Forestry Department, and Environment Concern.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? Students planned this project. They researched their plants, wrote their grant, developed a proposal to the principal, and carried out their plan. Students and teachers facilitated agreement of a timeline, as well as an agreement on who would accomplish which task.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? Students gained knowledge of local species of plants, respect and a sense of responsibility for their environment, and an understanding about wildlife management and burning of brush and marsh, as well as an array of concepts and skills within their regular classroom setting (reading, writing, math, social studies, science).

For more information on this project, contact Rob Cooper, South Dorchester School, Church Creek, MD at 410-901-2557 or cooperr@dcpemd.org.