

Connecting Students with Nature

3M Eco Grants Bring the Classroom Outdoors

Kids are often reminded it is what's on the inside that counts. But for a group of middle school students from Connecticut, they're also learning what's outside is also fascinating.

Meriden Public Schools is turning its playground into a science lab thanks to a 3M Eco Grant given to the Connecticut Audubon Society Center at Glastonbury. The center will develop a series of outdoor classes which will allow kids to become inquisitive scientists and use ecosystems as the coursework.

"These classrooms not only make learning fun and interesting, but will also help students build their affinity to nature and, in turn, create citizens concerned about the environment," says Cynthia Bartholomew, director of the Connecticut Audubon Society Center.

Meriden K-12 Science Supervisor Mary Jean Giannetti says student learning is enhanced when they study the environment in an authentic setting. "Kids are able to make valuable connections about their personal experiences, while also making future career choices."

Since 2001, 3Mgives has invested more than \$25 million in sustainability initiatives as part of the company's commitment to encouraging environmental stewardship. This year's Eco Grant recipients provide programs that help students connect science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education with the world around them.

In addition to helping students in Meriden, Conn., 3M selected nine other organizations to receive nearly \$400,000 in grants for projects aimed at improving science-based environmental and conservation education for youth. Recipients were environmental organizations in communities near a 3M facility and were selected based on the following criteria: connecting STEM education and nature with outdoor learning opportunities, education that encourages environmental stewardship, and the ability to increase student visits and teacher preparedness — thereby, extending the learning beyond a single visit.

"3M is always excited about ideas that create energy and excitement around learning," said Kim Price, vice president of 3Mgives. "We are dedicated to backing initiatives that enhance environmental education through hands-on experiences with nature."

The additional 2014 Eco Grant recipients are:

Oaken Acres Wildlife Refuge & Rehabilitation
Center
Delaware Nature Society
Somerset County Park Foundation
Massachusetts Audubon Society
Squam Lakes Natural Science Center
Minnetrista Cultural Foundation
Tree People
National Audubon Society
Whippany River Watershed Action Committee

DeKalb, IL
Newark, DE
Flemington, NJ
Rockland, MA
Tilton, NH
Hartford City,
IN
Northridge, CA
Little Rock, AR
Whippany, NJ

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