

Students learn importance of nature in Wetland Day

School Days

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(Enlarge) Students Grace Maisel, center, and Ellie Davis, left, look at a soil sample with parent volunteer Deb Eisenberg. Bushy Park Elementary School students have been working to create wetland and wet meadow habitats behind the school. (photo by Don Watkins)

James Parry's hard work as a fifth-grader at Bushy Park Elementary School last year paid off this year with the celebration of Wetland Day Oct. 9.

The Glenwood Middle School sixth-grader, who conducted research about wetlands last school year, visited his alma mater on that day to help plant bushes and observe the fruits of his labor.

"We just came over to visit. It looks nice," James said.

Cultivating a wetland -- an area where water meets land -- and educating students on its importance and how to maintain it, were some of the key objectives of the event. The wetland area worked on by the Bushy Park students is adjacent to a pond behind the school.

The day's events, which consisted of indoor and outdoor activities, were organized by Gifted and Talented resource teachers Irene Brown, Greg Tralka and Linda Jensen. Environmental Concern, a nonprofit organization that educates about wetlands, acted as consultants for the school. Students also played a role in organizing the event, beginning last year, and carried out various tasks on and before Wetland Day.

"It has been in the process for 18 months," Jensen said of the planning that led up to the event.

The students spent the day rotating through indoor and outdoor stations, including a wetland art activity, in which students created beaver masks and paper turtles, and outdoor planting and soil testing areas.

"It's been a total cross-curricular day," Brown said, adding that the various stations were run mostly by parent volunteers.

For fourth-grader Dustin Schwenbeck, "just making the wetlands" by planting grasses and other vegetation was the highlight of the day.

"We can help the environment," Dustin added.

Having an outdoor classroom also proved to be fun for the students.

"We usually don't get to be outside," student Jon Wilkin said as he planted river oats.

The soil testing station was another favorite of the students.

"You got to dig and see the different parts of the soil," fourth-grader Mason Steinberg said. "I like getting dirty a lot."

The event was part of the school's larger initiative to obtain green school certification from the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education, according to Brown.

"We seemed to have a natural area out back for the wetlands," Jensen said, explaining why they chose to create the wetland habitat.

The Gifted and Talented teachers obtained grant funding to cover expenses, some of which were also covered by the school's PTA.

"It was smashing," Jensen said of the event overall. "We had over 800 units that were planted."