
A CLASSROOM WITHOUT WALLS

Bentalou Elementary School

Baltimore, Maryland

Picture this: It's a cold rainy January day and a group of students and parents are hiking a three-mile stretch. It's a warm April day and the same group is saying, "Let's move that topsoil! Hold that wheelbarrow!" These fourth grade students and parents are enjoying a classroom without walls!

The Maryland Commission for Celebration 2000 and The Bureau of Parks MaryLandscapes 2000 envisioned local schools planning, planting, and maintaining gardens along the Gwynns Falls Trail. A group of fourth graders at Bentalou was selected as one of three local classes to participate in the project.

The students learned scientific phenomena as they watched plants grow, and enriched their vocabularies with terms like *transplant*, *germinate*, and *pollinate*. Under the direction of Mrs. Susan Patz, Coordinator of Environmental Education, the students engaged in classroom sessions in which they learned how landscaping techniques benefit the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Mrs. Patz also directed the hiking trips in which the students surveyed the garden, marked off the boundaries, chose native plants, prepared the ground for planting, and watered the garden.

The project's curriculum had direct links to science, social studies, reading, and math. Some Maryland State Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) activities were also incorporated. The project has stimulated and motivated these fourth graders and parents into acquiring a respect to preserve nature, the Gwynns Falls Trail, and the rivers and streams leading to the Chesapeake Bay.

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