

Local News

An elementary school with the 6 'Rs'

Brookview School adds reducing, reusing and recycling to the traditional subjects. County honors school with annual award.

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BENTON TOWNSHIP - Learning the how and why of recycling is an everyday part of environmental education for students at Brookview School.

The students get hands-on experience in recycling paper, plastic, metal and cardboard and in learning how to reuse materials that were headed for the waste bin.

As a result of Brookview's efforts, Berrien County chose the school on Zollar Drive to receive its annual Earth Flag Award. The award is to be presented as part of this year's Earth Day celebration in April.

The Montessori school, which has an enrollment of 130 for children from infants through middle-schoolers, exceeded all criteria for the award, said Jill Adams, county environmental specialist.

"Reducing, reusing and recycling waste, and using recycled content products is a regular way of life at Brookview," Adams said.

Jennifer Spikner, development officer at Brookview, said environmental education is an important part of the curriculum.

"Over the past few years the county has offered recycling grants, and we have taken advantage," she said.

New separation bins allow more materials to be recycled. Composting, which ties in with the school garden, has also been improved.

Earlier, the school switched waste haulers to better accommodate the recycling effort.

"We have an organic garden for a program called Slow Snack," Spikner said. "It's a parent-led initiative so kids can have healthy, homemade snacks. Our garden helps there."

Last year Brookview planted about a dozen heirloom apple trees on the grounds. Eventually, fruit grown on the trees will also provide snacks.

"It's partly about the environment and partly about healthy kids," Spikner said.

Adams said Brookview was recognized for its renewed, comprehensive recycling program. Each student, staff member and parent gets instruction about the program.

Up-to-date signs are posted around the school. Waste materials that are not recycled often get reused in art class or school projects.

For example, middle school students made working pinhole cameras from trash items such as oatmeal boxes and paper towel rolls. Photographs from the recycled cameras were then developed and displayed in an art exhibit on school grounds.

Brookview used money from the county Community Development Department's school recycling grant program to buy plastic benches for the school grounds. The benches were bought from a Michigan company and contained 80 percent recycled material.

"The benches are just one recycled-content product used on school grounds that allows the students to learn about the importance of buying items made from recycled materials," Adams said.

The school worked with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's Retired Engineer Technical Assistance Program to find ways to save energy, cut waste and save money.

One system allows the use of dishes for meals when possible instead of throw-away products.

Adams said the Earth Day Award was first presented in 2003. The award competition is open to schools in Berrien County.

More information about the award and the school recycling grant program is available at www.berriencounty.org/recycle/EarthFlagAward or by calling 983-7111, Ext. 8234.

Applications for the next round of grants will be accepted until Feb. 24.

The grant program is supported by the county's landfill use fund. The fund receives money collected as tipping fees on waste going into three state-licensed landfills in the county.

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