

Childs students clearing path to Eco School status

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Armed with gardening gloves and clippers, students from Childs Elementary hiked onto the school grounds in search of intruders. They were on the hunt for bush honeysuckle, an invasive species growing in abundance on the property.

Invasive species are plants that are trying to take over native plants and kill them, so they'll be the only ones growing, 11-year-old Jack Boyle said.

With the sunshine on their backs, students, faculty and parent volunteers cut the bush honeysuckle down and hauled its branches away. They also picked up any litter they could find and tossed it into a trash bag.

If we're going to make (the Earth) last, we should treat it nice, said 11-year-old Henry Marsh, a fifth-grader who wore rubber boots to school for the occasion.

Reducing invasive species around the school is only one step of many Childs has taken toward becoming a bronze Eco School, a designation through the National Wildlife Federation. Childs is the first NWF Eco-friendly Indiana school south of Indianapolis because of its efforts with recycling plastics, paper and cardboard and with gardening. Now, Childs is making a schoolwide effort to earn a bronze award by implementing biodiversity.

To achieve bronze, Childs has to go through steps such as establishing an Eco-action team, performing environmental audits, developing an Eco-action plan, monitoring progress, linking this to the curriculum, involving the school and community and creating an Eco-code, said Lisa Schlegel, a teacher at Childs. Enlisting all the kiddos in making a difference is the whole philosophy, she said.

According to Schlegel, the Eco School concept was initiated by Carroll Ritter, the Sycamore Land Trusts environmental education coordinator.

You've got good eyes, he told one student who identified a bush honeysuckle. That needs to come down, too, he said. Ritter directed the students toward the invasive plants.

Now they're invested in the idea of caring for nature, Ritter said. What better place than right on their own school property?

After the invasive species were taken out, 14 Childs Elementary Girl Scouts dropped in to dig up the soil and plant native vegetation.

In addition to increasing biodiversity, fifth-graders at the school are writing essays in the hope that they'll be able to make changes to their cafeteria system with composting, and they're talking about reducing food waste by choosing food in small portions.

Ten-year-old Grace Dunbar, a fifth-grader at Childs, is concerned about food waste. If you waste, it's bad for the environment, she said. If there is food that isn't eaten, it should be eaten so it is not wasted.

From fifth-grader Bailey DeMiers point of view, people need to take the environment seriously, so that our Earth can be a better planet.

Find out more about the National Wildlife Federation's Eco School program at www.nwf.org/Eco-Schools USA.

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