
2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

ANNIE'S BIG NATURE LESSON



www.thebiglesson.org



DEAR FRIENDS,

A letter from the Director, Margaret Holtschlag

Thank you for supporting Annie's BIG Nature Lesson (ABNL) and helping our program thrive. Each year, our work teaches children and parents about the environment and inspires them to become stewards of the natural world. ABNL balances learning about the environment, interacting among children and naturalists, discovering new information, and experiencing the ever-changing weather. During their five days of ABNL, children demonstrate resilience and kindness, lessons they take with them when they return to their classrooms. We hope they remember these experiences and that they provide strength when they face challenges in the world.

One of our new ABNL teachers, Amanda Sucher, wrote: "My students long to be given the chance to "live" their learning. They want to touch, feel, hear, see, sense in any way possible. ABNL creates this kind of learning."

As we begin our 22nd year, I am filled with gratitude to all of the children, parents, teachers, and naturalists who are a part of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson.

We are all learning together,

Margaret

THE MISSION OF ANNIE'S BIG NATURE LESSON

Immerse children, teachers, and parents in the beauty and wonder of the natural world;

Engage them in authentic scientific investigations of the local ecology by observing, drawing, and writing;

Nurture citizens who value and protect natural resources;

Build school-community partnerships that inspire responsible environmental stewardship.





Annie's BIG Nature Lesson is named in honor of Ann Mason, environmentalist and enthusiast about all things nature. Ann was director of Clinton County's Department of Waste Management, and built one of the most respected solid waste and recycling programs in Michigan. After her death from melanoma in 2001, Anne's family and friends established a fund to continue Anne's legacy of taking care of the environment, and Annie's BIG Nature Lesson was created. ABNL is a five-day study trip to local nature centers in which students, teachers, and parents learn about the natural world, local environmental issues, and general ecology.

ABNL inspires children, parents, and teachers to value nature and take care of the environment by offering learning activities and meaningful connections with nature.



Ann Mason

To Support Our Work and Annie's Legacy

Please consider making a tax-deductible gift to Annie's BIG Nature Lesson.
Contributions can be sent to:

Annie's Big Nature Lesson Endowment Fund
Capital Region Community Foundation
330 Marshall Street, Suite 300
Lansing, MI 48912

<https://Ourcommunity.org>

Thank You, Friends of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson!

Because of you, this program is making a difference.



Betty Upjohn Mason

Ann Mason Memorial Fund

R. E. Olds Foundation

Joe D. Pentecost Foundation

Richard and Lorayne Otto Fund

Friends of Eaton County Parks

Harris Nature Center Foundation

Meijer, Inc.

Wheels to Woods Fund

Michigan Nature Association

Capital Region Community Foundation

Clinton County Regional Education Service

Agency (CCRESA)



School Districts: Bath, East Lansing, Holt, Laingsburg, Lansing,
Portland, Our Savior Lutheran, St. Johns, St. Thomas, Waverly

Annie's BIG Nature Lesson

Our impact in numbers



Classes from the Lansing Area participating



Weeks of learning



New teachers starting their ABNL adventure



Students attending



Parents volunteering



Years of ABNL



Approximate number of students discovering their passion for the natural world from 2002-2024



Nature Centers

"All of our time with the naturalists was so special. I was impressed with their knowledge and the amount of time they spent with our class -- even learning each student's name by the second day! Their enthusiasm for the lessons grabbed the students' attention and captured their interest. Every time we discovered an animal in nature--deer, turtles, and more--extremely memorable!"
- Chester Richmond, East Lansing

Fenner Nature Center Staff: Gabriel Biber, Dylan Lallemand,
Sam Ansaldi, Kendall Travis

Harris Nature Center Staff: Kati Adams, Allison Goodman

Lincoln Brick Park Staff: (Fall) Jackie Blanc, (Spring) Ethan Jacobs

Woldumar Nature Center Staff: Kevin Wernet, Alexandra Shigley,
Ashley Austin, Tom McNeilly, Alex Laskowski

Other Participating Nature Centers: Belle Isle Aquarium and Nature Center (Detroit), Dahlem Conservancy (Jackson), Kalamazoo Nature Center (Kalamazoo), Seven Ponds Nature Center (Dryden), and Wilder Creek Conservation Club (Marshall).



Stewardship Projects



2023-2024 Projects:

- Celebrated Earth Day at school with students presenting, singing, and speaking to the neighborhood community
- Picked garlic mustard and calculated how many seeds we prevented from spreading
- Helped with storm clean-up by moving branches and sticks
- Worked together to clear trees from a long trail after a storm
- Returned to nature center in the spring for a day of stewardship
- Filled trash bags at school during recess time
- Pulled 58 pounds of invasive plants at the nature center
- Designed, painted, and placed wooden snake boards that will act as habitats for snakes in the grassy fields
- Continued our clean-up of the school forest during our daily walks
- Collected data for the MSU Salamander Study
- Spread wildflower seeds in the meadow
- Planted a young maple tree in honor of Arbor Day

“On our final day, we took a beautiful walk along the river, 21 total miles for the week. We saw a beaver, small flowers popping out, water running down the hills into the creeks, and an endless amount of trees and birds, all under an umbrella of blue sky. Then we went to clean up the main trail to the quarry. Students put on their work gloves and safety glasses and boy, did they work hard! We cleaned the entire trail! Many students asked if they could go back next week. It truly will be a week these kids will never forget.” - Christine Samson, Laingsburg

Professional development for teachers -- equipping them with the information, tools, and resources they need to provide engaging instruction outside the four walls of the classroom -- is a cornerstone of what we do at ABNL. All teachers participate in training workshops in which we explore the philosophy that underpins the program's parts, provide mountains of multi-disciplinary resources to support learning, and get to experience some of the activities they'll be doing during their weeklong adventure at the nature center with their class. New ABNL teacher Melissa Swales says, "ABNL matches student learning so naturally because students are smack dab in the fascination of it all. ABNL inspires the curiosity of our natural world - an amazing treasure!" We have no doubt these teachers will inspire their students -- we are inspired by them and love to imagine what they will share with their classes at ABNL and beyond.





Participating Teachers

Lansing School District
Dwight Rich Academy,
Forest View,
Lyons, North, Sheridan
Road STEM,
and Wexford Montessori

Christine Baczynskyj
Lexa Bell
Karen Bossie
Jody DeLong
Libby Dusenbery
Tiffany Gravier
Emma Heedum
Ayesha Jackson
Karen McKinstry
Elaine Miller
Kieshaune Perkins
Cassie Pung
Anna Romsek
Amanda Sucher
Anastasia Vuckovich

Holt School District
Wilcox and Sycamore Schools

Jason Gentry
Lise Martin
Denise Schaffer
Traci Steere
Andrea Strang
Kasey Wollet

Morrice School District
Morrice Elementary
Morgan Gage
Tammy Smith

St. Johns School District
Riley Elementary
Kris Ely
Dawn Kelly

St. Thomas Aquinas School
Jozie Faupel
Becki Royal

Our Savior Lutheran School
Kim Becker

Portland School District
Westwood Elementary
Amy English
Michael Feezey
Jessika Grapentien
Kate Moran
Alizabeth Schrauben



East Lansing School District
Donley and Red Cedar Schools
Chester Richmond
Kelsie Rourke
Julie Rush
Melissa Swales

Bath School District
Bath Elementary
Michelle Clark
Kelsey Harbert
Andrea Hartlund
Erin Teeple

Laingsburg School District
Laingsburg Elementary
Christine Samson
Ronda Rhine
Autumn Khalid
Katie Nethaway

Waverly School District
Elmwood Elementary
Lily Dubbs
Cheryl Kelley
Sarah Slovinski
Hana Walter



Lessons from the Field

Teachers share meaningful experiences, memorable discoveries, and valuable lessons gained during their ABNL experience.

“The best thing to emerge was watching the kids help each other. The hiking is always a challenge for some but I saw kids helping others by holding their hand up hills and even carrying them on their backs. Their willingness to help others was the best outcome this week.”

- Michael Feezey, Portland



“One of my students, usually very physically active and distracted, found his "home" in the woods. During observation time, he sat for the entire time, looking, observing, never talking. He could be seen looking at the sky, rummaging through leaves at his feet, turning different directions on his stool to take in different views. It's the most profound change in a student I've ever seen!”

- Denise Schaffer, Holt

“This program always softens my most challenging students. Getting those students out of the classroom and into the natural setting gives them a different environment to find comfort and success.

They are always the ones who are the saddest when our week is over. This year was no exception.”

- Jody DeLong, Lansing





"I learned the importance of teaching kids to stop and take in the moment. Their lives are so fast paced. This opportunity is such a blessing for our kids to just slow down and realize what nature offers us."

- Amanda Sucher, Lansing

"I learned that children really need to be outdoors more. I had never seen my students so engaged with their lessons before this week. Since our ABNL week, we do SO many assignments outside because their energy immediately changes, and they work harder on their assignments in the sun."

- Jessika Grapentine, Portland



"I had many students that were so excited to be in the woods. It seemed like many of them had not experienced that before. Each year students are in wonder while they explore and learn about nature, regardless of past experiences."

- Katie Nethaway, Laingsburg



"ABNL created a 'lightbulb moment' for me. This year is the first time that I felt truly confident in myself as a teacher and as a leader. When other adults observe me teach, I sometimes feel unsure of my ability and how I run my classroom. Something about the comfort of the environment, I felt able to be the teacher that I needed to be. When I got accolades from parents about how I engaged the kids, it meant so much to me. Something about *this* week with *these* students made me dig deeper and become a better teacher for myself and all of my students to come." - Kelsey Harbert, Bath



