



# *Annie's BIG Nature Lesson*

Annual Report 2021-2022

# Letter from the Director



MARGARET HOLTSCHLAG

As we reflect on the past school year and look forward to the future of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson, I want to express gratitude for your support as we worked to respond to the swiftly changing needs of our schools, teachers, students, and families in these unprecedented times. These last couple of years have offered us valuable lessons in flexibility, creativity, and gratitude. Ultimately, we look forward to applying these lessons to build an even stronger, more inclusive program no matter the circumstances we may face going forward.

In Fall 2021, we had looked forward to resuming scheduled ABNL weeks, but many school districts needed to cancel because of the pandemic. We experimented with different options for scheduling, and built a robust digital collection of resources for teachers to access remotely. We also welcomed six new teachers by combining in-person and Zoom options for teacher training. Retired teacher volunteers (Rewired group) taught lessons, met with teachers for zoom planning meetings, and engaged in creative and supportive conversations to prepare for their ABNL week. We hope these flexible options for instruction and support will expand access for teachers so the tenets of ABNL can be incorporated in their curriculum throughout the school year.

While we had to be flexible and creative in how the program looked in the fall, we know that nothing beats the experience of in-person, hands-on learning, values at the core of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson. When we were finally able to welcome classes in Spring 2022, the naturalists' generosity of heart created unforgettable weeks for the children, teachers, and parents, and teachers expressed such gratitude to return to teach and learn at the nature centers. Esther Weiss, Lansing third grade teacher, said: "Seeing the excitement in students' eyes and hearing their conversations is unforgettable. More than ever (with Covid), ABNL is such an exciting week of outdoor learning." This gratitude rang true for many of us, as teachers centered their ABNL week on being outdoors as much as they could. Hikes in the woods became longer, silence at observation time made way for the sounds of bird song and raindrops on dry leaves.

As we look forward to the new school year, we know we can be creative and flexible responding to the needs of our participating schools. We also have a deepened gratitude for those times when we get to experience nature with kids, and hold their moments of wonder even closer in our hearts, recognizing it as the gift that it is.

# *Ann Mason*



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 2002, 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.

Please consider making a tax-deductible gift to Annie's BIG Nature Lesson. Contributions can be sent to: Ann Mason Memorial Fund, Clinton County Regional Education Agency, 1013 South US27, St. Johns, MI 48879.





# Thank you, friends of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson

Betty Upjohn Mason

Ann Mason Memorial Fund

R. E. Olds Foundation

Joe D. Pentecost Foundation

Richard and Lorayne Otto Charitable Fund

Gerber Foundation

Friends of Eaton County Parks

Harris Nature Center Foundation

Clinton County Regional Education Service Agency

School Districts: *East Lansing, Holt, Laingsburg,  
Lansing, Portland, Out Savior Lutheran, St. Johns,  
Diocese of Lansing*





# *ABNL 2021-2022*

## *By the Numbers*



Classes

34



Students

781



Districts

9



Schools

13



Parent  
Volunteers

223



ReWired  
Volunteers

10



Grades

2-5



Nature  
Centers

4



Naturalists

8



# Participating Teachers

Dimondale Elementary, Holt

Jessica Brown

Ty Cotter

Andrew Lilley

Riley Elementary, St. Johns

Kris Ely

Dawn Kelly

St. Martha's School

Marynia Lorencen

Our Savior Lutheran

Kim Becker

Donley Elementary, East Lansing

Julie Maloney

Kelsie Rourke

Westwood Elementary, Portland

Laura Crossley

Amy English

Michael Fezzey

Rachel Fisher

Katlyn Moran

Laingsburg Elementary, Laingsburg

Katie Nethaway

Ronda Rhine

Christine Samson

St. Thomas Aquinas School

Lauren Montgomery

Rebecca Royal



Lansing School District: Dwight Rich

School of the Arts, Forest View, Gier

Park, Sheridan Road STEM, Wexford

Montessori

Jeff Boyer

Christine Baczynskyj

Lindsay Barnhart

Karen Bossie

Mikaila Davis

Jody DeLong

Kelli Fortino

Hannah Friend

Tiffany Gravier

Ayesha Jackson

Jodi Phillips

Jaimie Rollins

Anna Romsek

Rachel Staff

Anastasia Vuckovich

Esther Weiss



# ReWired Teachers

Because of the pandemic, our ReWired (retired) teachers were not able to be onsite with teachers, but they collaborated continuously to design lesson plans and support individual teachers with their curriculum.

We invite you to go to the website to check out the lessons and videos our reWireds made this year, including:

## Lessons:

Aquatic Ecology: Aquatic Macroinvertebrate Inquiry  
Teaching Students to Use Binoculars  
Using a Biltmore Stick  
How to Measure a Tree  
How to Notice and Identify the Unseen  
Techniques of Interpretation  
Concrete Poetry  
Homes for Sale  
A Walk in the Woods  
Michigan Natural Resources  
Looking Closely with Loupes and Lenses  
Observation Activities  
Plant Dissection  
Soil Stories  
A Tale of Two Wetlands  
Using Dichotomous Keys to Identify Leaves  
Water Experiments  
What's the Buzz with Honeybees and Pollination  
Careers in Conservation  
Using an Enviroscape  
Debriefing Activities  
Discovery Walk  
First Look

## Videos:

What's the Buzz  
Using Leaves to Identify Trees  
Homes for Sale  
Water Behavior  
How do Trees Make Wood  
Observation and Inference  
Macroinverta-what?



ReWired teachers in their weekly zoom meeting (from top):  
Ruth Pearson, Margaret Holtschlag, Jill Tribell,  
Dave Beutel, Dave Brigham, Cathie Wood,  
Roseann Dailey, Stephanie Knapp, and Jan Derksen.



# Above and Beyond

Annie's BIG Nature Lesson gives teachers tools and resources to incorporate outdoor learning no matter the limitations of their circumstances.

Here are three teacher teams whose experiences show how students stretch themselves to use new vocabulary, skills, and practices that carry over into other aspects of their learning even after their ABNL experience has ended.



**Mike Fezzey, Grade 5, Westwood Elementary, Portland**

"I have been attending ABNL for several years and there are common themes I have noticed. Education tends to be dogmatic and data-driven but there are intangibles found in nature, and research (along with common sense) is showing this conclusively. ABNL addresses the grade-level science curriculum, and equally important is the freedom to learn about nature in an organic manner. Throughout my years as an ABNL teacher, I have watched my students consistently explore what the classroom can never provide: the experience of being fully immersed in nature.

Learning doesn't live exclusively in a vacuum of data-driven tests. My students are learning -- from hiking on the river trail, to watching me drink water seeping from the side of the hill, explaining water filtration; or, lying quietly in a field writing about the sights and sounds, to countless other unscripted educational opportunities. There is never a shortage of exploration taking place. I strongly believe ABNL gives kids a chance to explore in a comprehensive way. Over the years students consistently refer to ABNL as their favorite part of the year. I am looking forward to many more years of ABNL and watch growth take place at all levels."



Christine Baczynskyj, Lindsay Barnhart, Karen Bossie, Jeff Boyer, Kelli Fortino, and Hannah Friend, Forest View Elementary, Lansing

"We were reminded (as we are every year) of how wonderful time spent outside is for our students, and what a gift it is to slow down and look at the world around us. They grow in their appreciation of stillness, their observation skills become sharper, and they gain a greater understanding about the interconnectedness of nature. One of the most memorable experiences at Fenner was watching our students' excitement as they spread milkweed seeds across the field. They were so in awe of the soft floating seeds! We also participated in a stewardship project where we collected 31 lbs of the invasive species garlic mustard, and an extension lab where we collected pond water samples and observed them under microscopes. These skills and concepts carry over when they return to school into other aspects of their learning. We took the stewardship mindset back to our community on May 20th and 21st this year, when Forest View students, staff, and volunteers worked to improve the school's natural habitats, including things like butterfly houses, sandboxes, and new raised planters. By integrating foundational academic skills within the context of environmental education, we create areas where our students can learn, observe, and explore in the natural world."



*"No doubt this program addresses the grade-level science curriculum, but equally important are the intangibles found in nature." - Mike Fezzey, Portland teacher*



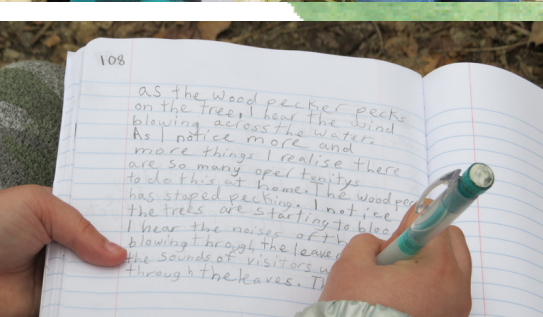
Kris Ely and Dawn Kelly, Grade 4, Riley Elementary, St. Johns

"Our ABNL week is the highlight of our 4th grade year. After missing the last two years, we are so grateful to have the opportunity to participate this spring. It is a tremendous learning opportunity for our students, not just academically, but socially and emotionally, as well."



We challenge the students each day to sit quietly and look all around themselves, and to take the environment in through all of their senses. At first, a couple of kids struggled to sit for any length of time. We asked them to take in smaller and smaller chunks of their surroundings until they had a little window of the ground under their feet to examine. By Day Three, these kids were on their bellies looking under leaves for worms, roly polys, seeds and salamanders. Observation journals were filled with noticings, pictures and questions about nature. In the woods by the river we overheard one of our students talking to Miss Margaret and had the revelation that she "could actually do this every day" in her backyard!

The most often asked question is "When can we come back?"







# Stewardship Projects

Prepared trees for winter

Spring cleanup of Portland's River Trail

Collected 5 bags of trash throughout the ABNL week

Conducted a water usage project at school

Researched and wrote about local environmental topics, culminating in "author share day" in which students read their books to families and children

Pulled 31 pounds of the invasive plant garlic mustard

Prepared and planted schoolyard garden beds

Collected data for salamander protection project

Raised salmon eggs and released salmon in the Red Cedar River  
for Salmon in the Classroom project

Cleared brush from trails

Spread milkweed seeds

Built animal habitats







# Nature Centers

**Harris Nature Center**, located in Okemos on the Red Cedar River, features 200 acres of forests, meadows, and wetlands. It has several new features adding to the outdoor experience for teachers and their students. The new pavilion and patio, and Nature Exploration Area are outdoor classrooms and gathering spaces. The Michigan Fossil dig and Rock Garden give students an opportunity to explore many facets of nature. Finally, HNC built an observation deck, situated along the trail in a meadow habitat that provides even more opportunities for learning and quiet observation. Staff: Kati Adams and Allison Goodman

**Fenner Nature Center**, located in the heart of Lansing, has 130 acres of prairies, ponds, and forests. Fenner is excited about opening the Fenner Nature Preschool in Fall 2022, a program based on child-directed learning in both indoor and outdoor settings. Fenner recently honored Joan Brigham with the lifetime achievement award for laying the groundwork of their mission. Staff: Liz Roxberry, Sam Ansaldi, Dylan Lallemand, Madison Ostrander

**Lincoln Brick Park**, located in Grand Ledge along the Grand River, has 90 acres of prairies, woodlands, ponds, and historic ruins and 6,000 feet of river frontage. Lincoln Brick Park is one of the citizen science sites for SPARCnet, (Salamander Population and Adaptation Research Collaboration Network). Staff: Jacki Blanc

**Woldumar Nature Center**, "For the Naturally Curious," is located on the Grand River on Lansing's west side, has over 5 miles of trails and 178 acres of prairies, ponds, forests, and woodlands. During the pandemic, Woldumar was one of the community's Learning Labs for Lansing School District in which students had a daily, safe place to learn with the guidance of the Woldumar staff. Woldumar has developed a team of volunteers who come to Woldumar every other Saturday for removal of invasive plants. Staff: Kevin Wernet, Allie Shigley, Whitney Beaird

Other Participating Nature Centers: Bengel Wildlife Center (Bath), Dahlem Conservancy (Jackson), Kalamazoo Nature Center (Kalamazoo), Seven Ponds Nature Center (Dryden), and Wilder Creek (Marshall).





# *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.