

ANNIE'S BIG NATURE LESSON

2018-2019 Annual Report



Greetings from the Director

To the generous contributors of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson—the teachers, children, parents, nature center staff, and volunteers all thank you! Your support made it possible for 66 teachers, 1,561 students, and 527 parents in the Lansing area to learn about and explore the wonders of the natural world.

To the participants of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson—weather shenanigans did not stop (or freeze out) your enthusiasm in this 2018-19 school year in spite of ice, rain, snow, and more ice, closing schools for as many as 13 school days! Teachers taught life skills of observation, cooperation, flexibility, resilience, interrelatedness of community and environment, and described the ABNL week as the best week of the school year. Lise Martin, second grade teacher in Holt, said, "An essential understanding for my students was the connection between their own perception of nature (weather, plants, animals, water) and scientific ideas and pursuits. Science is all around!" Mike Fezzey, fifth grade teacher in Portland, said, "The most rewarding thing was to see my students' desire to simply be in nature...to move out of the classroom (and their video-laden world) and discover sounds, smells, and themes of nature!"

As we finish the 17th year of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson, we see the biggest rewards are the participants' deep understanding, appreciation, and commitment to action for taking care of the environment.

With gratitude, Margaret Holtschlag, Director of the BIG Lesson programs



Ann Mason and Annie's BIG Nature Lesson

Annie's BIG Nature Lesson is named in honor of Ann Mason, environmentalist and enthusiast about all things of 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 to the 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
Capital Region Community Foundation
Jackson National Community Fund
Friends of Eaton County Parks
Harris Nature Center Foundation
Meijer, Inc.
Michigan Nature Association
Wheels to Woods Fund
Grand Learning Network
Clinton County Regional Education
Service Agency
School Districts: Bath, East Lansing, Holt,
Laingsburg, Lansing,
Morrice, Portland, Pottsville, Our Savior
Lutheran, St. Johns, St. Thomas Aquinas



2018-2019 HIGHLIGHTS

Teachers begin each day of their ABNL week with “First Look,” an activity in which the class looks at ground level, eye level, and sky level, noticing temperature, humidity, clouds, finding evidence of wildlife, listening to sounds, and taking a deep breath as they start each day. Third grade teachers at Elliott Elementary in Holt learned about “First Look” in the ABNL teacher training and incorporated this strategy into every day of the year. In this “hurry-up” world, those lucky third graders had the daily gift of slowing down and reflecting on the beauty of the natural world.

Parents accompany the teacher and students for the ABNL week, assisting the teacher, as well as being learners and guides. Naturalists have commented on parents’ positive attitude, helping individual students, asking curious questions, setting examples of wonder and curiosity. There are several parents who continue to volunteer, years after their own children experienced ABNL. Charlotte Trendel, Lansing parent, works nights, volunteers for multiple days in the ABNL week, said, “I have a total of twelve Annie’s weeks with my boys and I cannot wait for another years!” So many parents are looking for natural and unplugged activities for their children, and after joining their children for the ABNL week, they often return to the nature center for family walks, summer camp, and community events.

Naturalists continue to expand their lessons to meet the academic needs for curriculum connections, especially with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) standards. Kati Adams trains Harris Nature Center’s red-tailed hawks, screech owl, and raven, and uses them as she teaches children about birds and their unique characteristics. Jackie Blanc engages students and parents with “CSI Nature Detectives” lesson in which she brings participants to “crime scenes” on the trails at Lincoln Brick Park. Jackie sets the drama for all of us so that we are often fooled to believing we have come across real nature events! Jenny Mensch, along with volunteer Dave Brigham, developed a “walk-in” lesson in which classes explore nearby Scott Woods and Sycamore Creek for a full morning, starting near Hawk Island and finishing at Fenner Nature Center. Emma Campbell and Dan Auer designed a yearlong stewardship project at Woldumar in which students gather seeds in the prairie in the fall, separate and sort in the winter, and disperse in the spring. The participants are making an impact on the health of the prairie, and with return visits to Woldumar, they can see the growth of their project!

Annie’s BIG Nature Lesson is connecting people interested in getting kids outside with communities and resources online. Please visit our new website (biglesson.org), facebook ([facebook/TheBigLesson](https://facebook.com/TheBigLesson)), and Instagram (instagram.com/anniesbignaturelesson), as well as a blog (biglesson.org/blog) that details the everyday magic that happens at The BIG Lesson.

Annie's BIG Nature Lesson

By the Numbers

5

Lansing area nature centers offering resources,
naturalist lessons, and support: Bengel, Fenner,
Harris, Lincoln Brick, and Woldumar

11

Lansing area school districts investing the time and
energy in this worthwhile program

1,561

Lansing area students learning, engaging, and
cultivating a love of the natural world outdoors this year,
along with 66 teachers and 527 parents

17

Years of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson

30,384

(and counting) students who have experienced the
awe-inspiring study trip that they'll remember for a
lifetime at Annie's BIG Nature Lesson

2018-2019

STEWARDSHIP PROJECTS

Ushering in the newest generation
of environmental stewards



BUILDING BENCHES AND BIRD HOUSES FOR OUTDOOR LEARNING AREA
RESTORING SCHOOL NATURE TRAILS
CLEANING THE PORTLAND RIVER TRAIL
PRESENTING AT SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS
SALMON IN THE CLASSROOM PROJECT
TESTING WATER QUALITY OF LOCAL RIVERS
WRITING GRANTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS
BUILDING ANIMAL HABITATS
PICKING UP LITTER
PLANTING A SCHOOL FLOWER GARDEN
CLEANING BIRD FEEDER AREA
IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL-WIDE "TRASH-FREE" LUNCHES
COLLECTING, SORTING, DISPERSING SEEDS
YOUNG AUTHORS' DAY, POETRY AND STORIES ABOUT NATURE
ORGANIZING SCHOOL-WIDE PLASTIC RECYCLING
BUILDING MASON BEES "HOTEL" (NESTING SITES)
FAMILY NIGHT, ABNL POETRY SLAM

Participating Teachers

2018-2019

Lansing School District Schools: *Dwight Rich, Forest View, Gardner International, Gier Park, Lewton, North, Pattengill Biotechnical, Sheridan Road STEM, Wexford Montessori*

Jennifer Adams
Christine Baczynskyj
Wendy Bennetts
Terrel Boyd
Jeff Boyer
Alesha Cole
Ellen Corrie
Jody DeLong
Mindy Dipple
Chelsea Ezze
Kelli Fortino
Tiffany Gravier
Rebecca Heibeck
Skye Kapinus
Sarah Laurens
Connie Larson

Tonya Lenkner
Marynia Lorencen
Megan Luchenbill
Karen McKinstry
Nathan Owen
Shirley Patrick
Karla Pavey
Cynthia Provo
Jennifer Rice
Anna Romsek
Traci Shepard
Lisa Stier
Kristina Swisher
Jody Vicary
Esther Weiss

Holt School District
Dimondale, Elliott, Sycamore

Jessica Brown
Ty Cotter
Megan Curtis
Jason Gentry
Roxanne Klauka
Andrew Lilley
Lise Martin
Lauren Schneider
Emily Simowski
Traci Steere
Meredith Washeleski

Potterville School District
Potterville Middle School

Tamara Hartman
Amy Pelfrey
Julie Pung

Bath School District
Bath Elementary

Andrea Hartlund
Jon Vanderberg
Michelle Walters

Morrice School District
Morrice Elementary

Chelsee Schram
Lindsey Olrich

St. Johns School District
Riley Elementary

Kris Ely
Dawn Kelly

Laingsburg School District
Laingsburg Elementary

Katie Nethaway
Ronda Rhine
Christine Samson

Portland School District
Westwood Elementary

Laura Crossley
Michael Fezzey
Kyle Janetzke
Teri Keusch
Tiffany Sherwood
Jennifer Walters

East Lansing School District
Donley Elementary

Julie Maloney
Kelsie Rourke

Our Savior Lutheran School

Kim Becker

St. Thomas Aquinas School

Kathleen Caruso
Becki Royal

Annie's Nature Centers

Bengel Wildlife Center, located in Bath, is the home of the Michigan Wildlife Conservancy. Bengel has 259 acres of wetlands, ponds, upland forests, prairies, a bog, and Prigooris Lake. Staff: John Ropp.

Fenner Nature Center, located in the heart of Lansing, has 134 acres of prairies, ponds, and forests. Fenner Conservancy connects people to nature through conservation, education, and stewardship. Staff: Liz Roxberry, Jenny Mensch.

Harris Nature Center, located in Okemos on the Red Cedar River, features 200 acres of forests, meadows, and wetlands. Its mission is to protect, promote, and interpret the Red Cedar River and its surrounding ecosystems. Staff: Kit Rich, Kati Adams, Allison Goodman.

Lincoln Brick Park, located in Grand Ledge along the Grand River, has 90 acres of prairies, woodlands, ponds, and historic ruins. Eaton County Parks provide protection of natural, cultural, and historical resources, preservation of green space, and environmental education. Staff: Jackie Blanc.

Woldumar Nature Center, 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. Its mission is to educate people about the natural environment. Staff: Kevin Wernet, Emma Campbell, Dan Auer.

Other Participating Nature Centers: Kalamazoo Nature Center (Kalamazoo), Dahlem Conservancy (Jackson), Seven Ponds Nature Center, (Dryden), Leslie Science and Nature Center (Ann Arbor), and Wilder Creek (Marshall).

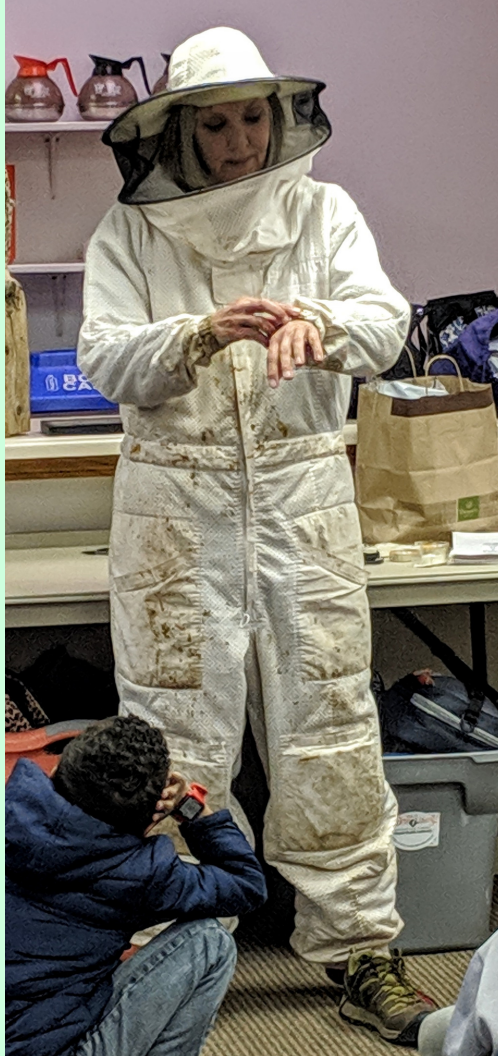


Annie's ReWired Teachers

These retired teachers are an integral part of how the magic happens at Annie's BIG Nature Lesson. Whether they're offering insight and expertise to teachers as they plan their lessons, leading instruction or explorations, facilitating discussion, or even making Michigan-themed breakfasts, there isn't much they don't do!



ReWired Teachers (clockwise from top left):
Dave Brigham, Ruth Pearson, Joni Baker,
Cathie Wood, Jan Derksen, Stephanie Knapp,
Jill Tribell, Dave Beutel, Shirley Hazlett
Not pictured: Karen Davis



Don't take our word for it...

Overheard at ABNL

It's so important for kids to just go outside and play. There's anything and everything to do outside. When I heard about Annie's BIG Nature Lesson, I thought to myself, how could I not give my students this experience? -- Ty Cotter, teacher

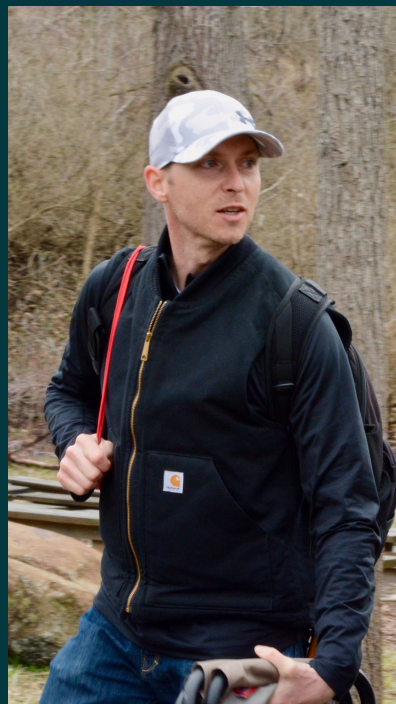
By being exposed to nature, students develop a natural appreciation for the natural world. The calming quality that is generated by being outside creates an open learning environment that is conducive to retaining knowledge. -- Dave Brigham, reWired teacher

What I like best about this week is the gentle breeze, the earth beneath my feet, the sunshine that's finally coming out...all of it. - Julian, Student

We were lucky enough to experience Woldumar in two separate weeks (February and April). As we were walking on a path in April, we came upon one of our observation spots from February. My students were excited! It was as if they had discovered a long lost friend, and one of them exclaimed, "I know this place! This is where we observed before!" -- Megan Curtis, teacher

Usually when I'm outside, I am playing sports and just sort of ignoring nature. At ABNL I got to feel and see and smell nature. -- Student

Now I know why people take a vacation to hike. There's just something freeing about it. -- Student



Through observation time, my students gained a true appreciation of nature: they learned to be still and mindful and enjoy the quieter things. There is so much stimulation in their regular lives that our kids aren't always good at "down time". We all need to learn to take a minute and just "be". Observation time allowed for that and the kids loved it. -- Teri Keusch, teacher



They learned important facts about the life cycle of trees, why leaves change color, types of landforms and water cycles...but most of all, they cultivated a love of nature and outdoor experiences. -- Traci Steere, teacher

I love that ABNL shows our kids how fun it is to be outside. I mean hey, we live in Michigan! Get outdoors!
-- Becky, parent



A few students told me that they had NEVER been on a hiking trail before! I loved that ABNL gave them the chance not to just do it once, but MANY times over the course of the week! -- Andrea Hartlund, teacher

This experience was too vast for words. I can't wait for next year. I have new ideas and so much more knowledge than I did before. I saw changes in children out in nature. It was an amazing time.
-- Roxanne Klauka, teacher

Good-bye, prairie, with all your beautiful yellow grass waving back and forth like a snake slithering through the grass. Good-bye, writing, snuggled up cozy in such harsh weather. We will really miss writing outside, embraced in your prairie arms. -- Isaac, student



I remember when Margaret started this whole thing. We were in that first group of nature centers, and I was thinking what a wonderful idea. The BIG Lesson, that idea of being immersed for five days, that this -all of this- is their school. I thought ABNL was the greatest thing I've ever heard. -- Kit Rich, Naturalist





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 based
partnerships that inspire responsible
environmental stewardship.

