

Annie's BIG Nature Lesson

Annie's BIG Nature Lesson (ABNL) is an education program for elementary students, teachers, and parents to develop meaningful connections with nature. Students, parents, and teachers immerse themselves in learning for a full week at one of five nature centers in the Lansing area, and build on this learning throughout the school year. Students learn about the natural world, local environmental issues, and general ecology as they conduct scientific field investigations, observe in different habitats, and learn from community experts. ABNL builds school-community partnerships in which students learn to take responsible action to make the community a better place.

Since its beginning in 2002, over 23,000 students have participated in ABNL. There are 67 teachers from 12 Lansing area districts participating in the 2016-17 school year, as well as teachers from Kalamazoo, Marshall, Jackson, Ann Arbor, and Dryden.

The mission of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson is to immerse children, teachers, and parents in the beauty and wonder of the natural world; to engage them in authentic scientific investigations by observing the local ecology, drawing, and writing; to nurture citizens who value and protect natural resources; and to build school-community partnerships that inspire responsible environmental stewardship.

Key components of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson are:

- **Ongoing, sustained professional development for teachers.** Teachers participate in two days of training early in the school year, and then receive continuous support to develop and implement their ABNL lessons with students. Lessons are correlated with curriculum, and integrate science, social studies, reading, writing, math, and art in the ABNL week. Teachers also participate in additional workshops in which they share their best lessons and strategies with fellow ABNL teachers.
- **ABNL is teacher-led and student-centered.** Teachers design their ABNL week to match their students' interests and curriculum. The responsibility for teaching students is shared by the teacher and the nature center naturalist. Lessons are highly interactive, with a hands-on, real world emphasis, maximizing the way that children learn.
- **Extended time for learning.** Students, teachers, and parents observe in natural habitats (woods, pond, meadow, wetlands) for a full hour each day. Extended time is key for immersion in the natural world, and for making sense of the science knowledge that they are gaining each day of their ABNL week. Students choose topics to research, and use an hour each day for independent study to observe, write, and draw.
- **Parent engagement in the teaching and learning process.** Parents learn along with students and assist in leading small groups of students. Teachers provide information to parents before the ABNL week so that parents feel comfortable in their expanded role with students.
- **ABNL is year-long learning.** The ABNL week serves as a catalyst for a full year of connecting students to real world applications of science and nature. The week is a study trip, rather than a traditional field trip, and connects students, teachers, and parents to real world applications of science. Teachers expand the learning beyond the ABNL week with research projects, community action plans, and stewardship projects.

Our children are the leaders of tomorrow, and the school-community partnership of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson prepares them to be stewards of the wildlife and environment of their community.

Contact: Margaret Holtschlag, biglesson@gmail.com, 517-230-8268. Website: biglesson.org