Environmental Education in an Underserved Elementary School: EnviroFest 2011 at Alexander Wilson School in West Philadelphia

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Abstract
EnviroFest 2011 will be an all-day educational event at Alexander Wilson Elementary School in West Philadelphia on Thursday, April 28, 2011. In conjunction with the University of Pennsylvania’s theme “The Year of Water,” many of the lessons will be focused on local watersheds, pollution, wastewater management, and the ecosystems involved in the water cycle. The students are in grades kindergarten through sixth, and the lessons and activities will be tailored for each age group. This festival, which is in its second year running, is led by the Graduate School of Education’s NancyLee Bergey. Lessons and activities will be taught by Penn students and volunteers, mostly from the student group Penn Science Across Ages and the course EDUC421: Teaching Science in Middle and Elementary Schools.

Goals
• Increase environmental science knowledge for students at Wilson Elementary with fun and engaging activities
• Serves as a resource for teachers at Wilson with lesson ideas and supplies
• End of April is ideal – after Pennsylvania School System of Assessment (PSSA)
• PSSA is an assessment used to measure a student’s attainment of the PA academic guidelines while also determining the degree to which school programs enable students to attain proficiency of the standards
• Tests are a major determinant as to whether the school makes adequate yearly progress as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act, and it therefore puts pressures on students, educators, and administrators
• EnviroFest provides relief for that pressure while creating a day-long enjoyable atmosphere for learning
• Environmental education is the focus because of its importance to healthy lifestyles, urban living, and an understanding local ecosystems
• It is widely believed that there is not currently enough environmental education in the curriculum

Conclusion
• Based on student interviews and conversations with teachers, EnviroFest 2010 had a positive impact on Wilson
• Most memorable: water sampling and goggle give-away, planting in the garden, shoreline sand activity
• Topics & Activities for 2011: stream ecosystems, water testing, global warming, earthquakes and tsunamis, urban gardening, using microscopes, Planet Earth airplane simulation, deforestation, outdoor recycling games, constructing biomes, and much more

Works Cited
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