

SEED

just keeps on growing

It's a beautiful fall day in September. There's a light breeze and leaves are scattered on the ground or falling from the trees. A 10-year-old girl leans over the dock at Blacklick Woods' Ashton Pond to get a better look at the tadpoles and frogs hiding under the lily pads. Pointing to the two little eyes that rest just on the surface of the pond she exclaims to one of her classmates, "I've never seen a real live tadpole."

This scene is played out over and over again as more than 6,000 Central Ohio 5th graders visit a Metro Park as part of their participation in Metro Parks' Students Exploring Ecosystems Dynamics (SEED) program. For many, this is their first visit to a Metro Park.

SEED is a comprehensive program developed 10 years ago — the same year many of this year's participants were born. The program, originally called Students Exploring Ecosystems (SEE), was part of a Metro Parks initiative to get every child in Franklin County to a Metro Park.

What started out with 36 classes has grown and adapted as the needs of the academic community changed. Today, more than 235 5th grade classes from Columbus City, Groveport Madison, Westerville City and the South-Western City school districts are involved in the program.

Franklin County voter support for the 2009 parks levy has allowed the program to continue to grow. In addition to all the schools that participated in the 2010 fall season, this spring Metro Parks will offer a new season of SEED to an additional 14 classes (340 students). Over the next 10 years Metro Parks will strive to meet its goal to reach every child in Franklin County.

Metro Parks staff conduct teacher training and the park system provides most of the



Allison Shaw

Students search for real-life items matching the illustrations in their SEED journals as part of the Exploring a Natural Ecosystem module of SEED at Three Creeks Metro Park.

supplies needed for educators to teach Ohio's 5th grade life science content standards over the nine-week long curriculum, with up to 26 hands-on activities. Every child receives a student journal to use during and after the program. Park staff also conduct a 90-minute interactive presenta-

tion for each classroom at their school. Each class gets a daylong field trip to a Metro Park where they take an exploratory hike, learn about watersheds and water pollution prevention, and discover nature using microscopes and other scientific tools.

Sponsors AEP, PNC, The Olen Corporation,



Susan Boggs

SEED participants hike a trail at Sharon Woods Metro Park. For many kids, a SEED program provides their first opportunity to visit a Metro Park.

Nucon International and The Jones Fuel Company have either donated money for field trip transportation or supplies for the SEED terrariums.

If you were to ask a SEED student about Metro Parks, they would be able to tell you a great deal. This is because during the nine-week long program students study in the classroom and then come to observe and experience real life interconnections in the parks.

Students learn about concepts and answer questions such as what makes up an ecosystem, why are these specific organisms found in the parks, what connections are there within the food webs, and how do animals and organisms adapt to living in the parks and surviving in our temperate forest biome.

Students grow and experiment with plants in terrariums, create dioramas and make presentations about six of the world's different biomes. They study the interconnections between organisms, identify and discuss various dynamics that affect the natural world around them and more. They learn by using what teachers call process skills as they work through the experiments individually or in groups.

These skills include life-long learning tools such as the ability to compare and contrast, observe, communicate, predict, classify, interpret data, design, connect, draw conclusions and problem solve. Students going through SEED learn not only the specific details about their environment but also the big picture concepts like how their actions play a role in

the world around them.

We know SEED is a success in helping students understand life science concepts by looking at improved test scores. Gregg Timmons, a teacher at Groveport Elementary School, says: "The activities in the SEED student journal, the field trip and the in-class visits by Metro Parks educators have helped my students make big improvements in their pre- and post-test scores on life sciences in the Ohio Achievement Assessment in science."

We also listen to student responses to questions and remarks. Students write in thank you letters and tell us during visits that because of the SEED program they had their first opportunity to visit a park, see a

tadpole, or look closely at a daddy long leg. Many students start our program with a fear of the parks but end with an appreciation and a desire to learn more about being a better steward of their surroundings.

This is the true measure of the success of SEED — what the students will take with them into the next 10 years and beyond not only in life science knowledge but also in life experiences.

For Metro Parks' SEED program the lasting impact of getting more and more of Central Ohio's children to the parks just keeps growing and growing. ■

Tanya Taylor,
Education Administrator



Tanya Taylor

Groveport Madison School 5th graders experience an outdoor classroom in a beautiful natural setting as a naturalist leads a discussion alongside Turtle Pond in Three Creeks Metro Park.