

JMIS Launches Environmental Program: Trash Transformed into Energy

Submitted by Hillary Hoppock, JM History Teacher

Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School (JM) students are talking trash these days – and that’s a good thing! Middle school students are lining up daily to sort and save food scraps from their lunches at specially designed ECO (Environmental Conservation Organization) stations. Color-coded bins for recycling food scraps, cans & bottles, as well as dry paper and foil, sit side by side with traditional trash cans. The food waste collection system is diverting over 300 lbs of food scraps each week to a water treatment plant in Oakland, where bacteria breaks down the food to create methane and power the plant.

“JM students have really



Students and teachers of the JM ECO (Environmental Conservation Organization) club standing by the stations students use to collect food scraps and recycling. Photo provided

stepped up and impressed us,” states Kim Lockett, JM science teacher and founder of the school’s three-year old ECO Club. Fifteen dedicated ECO club members, five teachers and parent volunteers devote at least one day a week to be on hand at lunch to monitor the stations. Lately they haven’t had to do much in the way of discussing how to use the ECO stations. “Our JM kids come to the station and know exactly what to

do. It’s like they are on automatic as they scrape out the extra food, and recycle their cans, bottles and paper bags,” reaffirms science teacher and ECO club supporter Pam Bailes.

It’s been so successful that the school is adding plastic recycling to its recycling program in December. ECO Club members have volunteered extra time the first week or two to help JM students recycle plastic and paper (or

cardboard) containers. Thanks to the cooperation of the JM PTA, which sponsors the school’s Hot Lunch program, most of the food vendors use recyclable containers. The challenge will be to still separate out those items that cannot be recycled and put them in the regular trash bins, destined for the landfill.

Waste Management, Moraga’s trash service provider, has been an enthusiastic supporter of

the school’s program and attributes JM’s success to the careful groundwork followed as the program began. All science teachers devoted class time to explaining the food waste collection system and showing the transformation of trash to energy, and will now update students on the plan for additional recycling. JM is very proud of its efforts to help our school, our community, and our planet.

Lafayette School District’s Cost-Saving Demo Garden

By Sophie Braccini

According to Barbara Williams and Brad Crane, it costs \$1.70 a square foot to maintain a lawn, so replacing decorative patches of grass with drought resistant native gardens that won’t require any maintenance should make accounting sense. The idea appealed to Lafayette School District Superintendent Fred Brill and

he gave the go-ahead for a test cost-saving garden in front of the District’s administrative offices. A group of six parent volunteers got to work in early November—they claim that the money the District invested in plants for the 1000 square-foot garden will be recovered in savings within nine months.

“When I started the water usage audit at Lafayette Elementary, where my children go to school, I noticed that many native plants were over-watered on the premises,” recounts Crane. “I talked to the principal about stopping the watering and she decided to refer my proposal to the District.”

Crane’s idea reached the Lafayette School District Green Team, a group composed of the superintendent, representatives from the District’s school board, schools and staff, and a member of Sustainable Lafayette (Williams). “We looked at the plan with Fred (Brill) and he decided to try a test patch,” says Williams, “there was an area of about 1000 square feet in front



Barbara Williams and Brad Crane in the garden. Photo Sophie Braccini

of the District’s offices on School Street that served no recreational purpose and that we all thought would be a good test site.”

Crane worked with Garth Jacober, who owns Mt. Diablo Nursery & Garden, for his list of plants. “We wanted plants that are going to provide a lot of colors,” adds Williams, “we also ran the plan by Kim Curiel, the Garden Instructional Specialist at the Burton Valley Elementary Garden Classroom.” A total of 76 plants were planted in the garden that will not require any water after the plants are established.

“The District’s maintenance crew removed the lawn, we added amendments as we put our new plants in the ground, then we added mulch on top to contain the weeds,” explains Crane. It took the parent volunteers four hours to complete the garden, including the flag stones that were donated to create a path. “The total cost of the plants was \$990,” said Williams, “we estimated that the cost to maintain the area when it’s planted with grass is approximately \$1300 a year (mow, weed, fertilize, edge, water). The cost to maintain the demo garden is about \$100/year for water, to get the plants started, and mulch. So the annual savings to the District is \$1200 per year or \$1.20 per square foot of lawn converted.”

“There are other benefits to this garden,” adds Crane, “native gar-

dens are a great place for learning by experience. The native plants have been used by the indigenous American population in all sorts of ways that the children can learn. Native plants also attract native critters and pollinators and they do not require pesticides and fertilizers.”

Since this is a demonstration garden, Williams and Crane hope that it will spread. “We have asked the District’s maintenance crew to show us areas that present a maintenance challenge to see if we can do something about it.”

Williams and Crane say that the feedback has been positive so far, both from the School District and the neighbors on School Street. But they know that it will take time to convert all of grassy areas that are not being used for recreational purposes. “Most principals still think that the front of their school needs a large, green, grassy area – it’s what people are used to,” says Crane.

The native, drought tolerant plants newly installed in front of the Lafayette School District offices include:

- Manzanitas
- Yarrow
- Lupines
- California Fuchsia
- Penstemon Mimulus
- Milkweed
- Ribes (California currant)
- Mock Orange
- Native grass

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