Green Infrastructure

Franklin creates learning garden

One bright Saturday last month, parent and student volunteers added to Pottstown’s green infrastructure with a new outdoor learning garden at Franklin Elementary School.

The garden is the brainchild of Franklin principal Kevin Downes, former earth sciences teacher at Pottstown Middle School. “Kids love nature, and we wanted to provide an opportunity for our children to study plants and insects just outside the school.”

Third grade teacher Darla Stout researched and wrote a successful proposal to Lowe’s for a $5,000 grant to obtain materials for the garden. Her concept was turned into a schematic by Downes and Eric Schmidt, a former Franklin parent and owner of Colonial Gardens in Phoenixville.

Colonial Gardens provided the materials at a discount, and Schmidt supervised the work. With five hours’ effort by 25 Pottstown High School students and 15 parents and Franklin staff, Schmidt estimated that $5,000 procured a $20,000 garden.

The garden contains an area for students to sit on tree stumps and boulders, facing a gravel teacher presentation area.

The outdoor learning center contains dogwoods, butterfly bushes, viburnum, nine-barks, and a variety of perennials, all designed to attract birds, butterflies and other insects for study by Franklin children.

Teachers in all grade levels are encouraged to incorporate the garden into their lessons. As Pottstown works on its sustainability plan, we hope more schools and other institutions will invest in green infrastructure — the natural way to clean the air, absorb storm water, and encourage residents to spend more time outdoors.

Commentary by Tom Hylton

Pupils in Darla Stout’s third grade class water plants and trees in the Franklin Elementary School’s new outdoor learning garden. Stout obtained a $5,000 grant from Lowe’s to pay for the garden, which was planted in April by student and parent volunteers.