



Brent Elementary Students Enjoy Their New Outdoor Classroom.

students about homelessness and the importance of treating the homeless with dignity. Women from the shelter then led students on a homeless awareness walk. Walk on Ludlow-Taylor! – Submitted by Donny Kirsch.

Brent Elementary School Receives Outdoor Classroom

Last month, Robert Brent Elementary, a museum magnet school, held a special outdoor celebration to officially open the school's new outdoor classroom. Ward 6 Councilmember Tommy Wells served as the school's special guest.

The new addition to the school was made in large part by numerous members of the entire Brent community, including hardworking parents and the generosity of several outside groups. Specifically, The Friends of Smart Growth and Sustainable Communities donated an exhibit called "One Planet – Ours" that was on display at the US Botanic Garden during the summer.

The exhibit included the donation of numerous structures, such as a school house, a teepee, a chicken coop playhouse, a tool shed and a solar panel. The new donations to Brent have essentially transformed the front of school, and the new exhibit will help connect present and future generations to outdoor learning.

Heidi Johnson, a Brent parent who was instrumental in bringing the project to Brent, said that Ray Mims of the US Botanic Garden was also essential in helping transfer the exhibit to the school.

"The National Wildlife Federation, the USDA and Longwood Gardens also donated thousands of dollars worth of plants and trees," said Johnson.

"This special outdoor learning environment, which demonstrates the multiple benefits of green schoolyards for education and play, will continue to engage students and inspire the parents, faculty, staff and neighbors of Brent Elementary School," said Brent's principal, Cheryl Wilhoite.

This Sustainable Schoolyard illustrates the principles of ecological design, interconnected natural systems, the use of natural and recycled building materials and other green building practices, renewable energy systems, environmentally responsible water systems, local wildlife habitats and edible gardens. Brent Elementary will use its schoolyard as a rich outdoor classroom, filled with interdisciplinary educational tools that serve curricula ranging from art and music to science, math, nutrition, healthy living and community building. It will also include areas designed for outdoor creative play, using natural materials and open-ended play elements that encourage children to be imaginative.

"The Sustainable Schoolyard will have a renewed life near the nation's capitol," said Susan Boyd, of Friends of Smart Growth and Sustainable Communities, who played a key role in making the move happen. "This is a win-win partnership," she added.

Johnson noted that the project was also in large part due to the determination of several Brent families who worked on a special outdoor "Greening Team" and are committed to transforming and

enhancing the outside of the school. "Many parents and community members worked an entire weekend to make this happen and often in the pouring rain," said Johnson. "Brent parents, teachers and our neighbors are committed to continue making Brent a great neighborhood school." – Submitted by Angie Lundberg.

Capitol Hill Cluster School Notes

Everyday Arts

"It was the best story ever," Watkins students reported home after their first session with artist-in-residence Diane Macklin.

The noted storyteller is working with the third grade this year on "Global Storytelling." Macklin is sharing some of the world's great stories with students and helping them create and share their own stories. Macklin's sessions with the students connect to the third-grade curriculum in social studies, language arts, science and even math.

The storytelling project comes out of the Cluster's participation in the Art Education Initiative, a three-year pilot program sponsored by the DC Arts and Humanities Collaborative in partnership with the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities and the Ford Foundation. The program has provided eight DC schools (including Brent) with teacher training, materials and performances, field trips and artist residencies. It encourages schools to increase arts education and arts integration – an approach to learning, using the arts to teach core subjects that has shown success in increasing reading comprehension and mastery of other core subjects like writing and math.

As part of the program, at the Cluster's early childhood campus, Peabody students are spending the year exploring "Nature in Art." Artist in Residence Laurie Siegel (DC Art Teacher of the Year while at Watkins) led the first unit, "All About Me." Students created knee bowls – a hands-on activity that supported lessons on math (shapes and sizes), science (physical attributes of clay, effects of gravity and heat), literacy (reading books on related subjects, painting letters on the bowls), and social studies (other people who have used/made pottery,



Peabody students create knee bowls with artist-in-residence Laurie Siegel (in red).