

Howard County Times

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2021 | Vol. 180, No. 30
howardcountytimes.com



Going on a 'Climate Xpedition'

Conservancy, school system launch climate change curriculum for students PG 9

Volunteer naturalist Sharon Gustin leads a group of sixth grade students from Murray Hill Middle School at the tree canopy station during a climate change curriculum field trip at the Howard County Conservancy in Woodstock. JEFFREY F. BILL/BALTIMORE SUN MEDIA

7 18 122 48 204 7
 NEWSSTAND PRICE \$1.50

**JOURNALISM
 MATTERS**
 Today more than ever.

We deliver it every day.
Trusted. Powerful. Real.
baltimoresun.com/subscribe



COVER STORY

Going on a 'Climate Xpedition'

Howard County Conservancy, school system launch climate change curriculum for middle school students

By Allana Haynes

On a recent chilly autumn morning, three yellow school buses unloaded a group of sixth grade students on the grassy fields of the Howard County Conservancy in Woodstock.

Sporting multicolored face masks, the students gathered in small groups near their assigned volunteer who would guide them throughout the conservancy, a nonprofit environmental education center that was founded in 1990.

Visiting from Murray Hill Middle School in Laurel, the students were among the first in the county to participate in the Howard County Public School System's new climate change curriculum, "Climate Xpedition."

The curriculum, which features classroom and field instruction, teaches students the impacts of climate change and how to take positive action to avoid and solve negative effects, how and why some communities bear a greater brunt from severe weather, how tree canopies help mitigate flooding, and the impacts of different land surfaces and urban heat islands, according to a news release from the school system.

Funded by a nearly \$400,000 grant to the conservancy from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the curriculum is the first of its kind in the region and will be piloted in three county public middle schools during the 2021-22 school year — Murray Hill, Patuxent Valley Middle School in Jessup and Folly Quarter Middle School in Ellicott City — and incorporated in all county public middle schools over the next three years.

"At the end of the three years, we will be reaching every sixth grader within the Howard County Public School System," conservancy Executive Director Meg Boyd said. "Because it's a systemic program, every student will be learning about climate change; it's not a matter of whether you can afford to take a field trip."

The conservancy and the school system have collaborated to provide environ-



From left, Murray Hill sixth graders Khalil Malloy, Dllas Lane and Gianna Bagley, all 11, participate in an experiment at the tree canopy station, which illustrates the effects tree canopies have on the environment and rain water, during a climate change curriculum field trip at the Howard County Conservancy in Woodstock. **JEFFREY F. BILL | BALTIMORE SUN MEDIA**

mental education for students since 2003, according to the release. Other initiatives include a biodiversity program for county fifth graders and a Watershed Report Card project for all ninth and 10th grade biology students.

"Our school system deeply appreciates our close partnership with the Howard County Conservancy, which has been invaluable in providing all students with relevant, hands-on environmental learning experiences," schools Superintendent Michael Martirano said in a statement.

During the Oct. 27 expedition, students took part in hands-on activities highlight-

ing different aspects of climate change, including climate solutions, environmental justice and tree canopies.

After a short hike through the woods, one group of students arrived at their first rotation station, "Carbon Cafe."

Weighing plastic food items on a small scale, they discussed strategies to best reduce their carbon footprint.

Bonnie Hodder, a sixth and seventh grade science teacher at Murray Hill, stood nearby supervising the students as they participated in the activity.

Having collaborated with the conservancy to bring the curriculum to the school system, she said she felt that all students should be able to learn about climate

change.

"I've been doing a climate change project with my students for years now, but this is an opportunity for every one of the kids to do that and that wasn't an opportunity before," Hodder said. "Being able to take something that is so important to their future and being able to engage them more is something that is really important to me."

Sixth grader Roselyn Bartlomeo, 11, said it is important for students to learn about climate change.

"Maybe one of my friends or classmates might find something and maybe change a little bit and it will change how the climate is," Roselyn said.