

Spotlight on Sustainability



April Bartnick

6th grade Special Education Teacher
Murphysboro Carruthers Middle School
Green Classroom Professional
Noyce Master Teacher Fellow
2022 Illinois Green Outstanding Volunteer
of the Year

*Photos courtesy of Murphysboro Carruthers Middle School

April Bartnick is a life-long environmentalist who quickly realized upon beginning her first teaching position that there was no recycling taking place at the school. She decided to recruit a group of students to help collect and carry paper to her car so she could take it to the recycling center. Her initial project blossomed into a commitment to helping her students recognize the importance of their actions on building a greener future, which has led to a variety of projects expanding beyond her classroom and school into the community.

April and her students completed a project last year with the [Illinois Green Alliance: Illinois Green Schools Project](#). This project was twofold: One component helped with flood and climate mitigation by planting oak trees (donated by [Million Trees Project](#)) in the community and the other included a classroom sustainability pledge. April shared how her students were excited to create the pledge and to take action on the sustainability initiatives, such as picking up litter and using the [Literati app](#) to upload pictures. Students were also very engaged with planting the trees and **“everybody was just in a good mood”** and you could **“see the happiness with everybody doing it.”**



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Tips from April on starting your own sustainability initiatives:

1. Consider the three sustainability pillars of your project: Environmental, Societal, and Financial.
2. Start small – everything adds up!
3. Consider a needs assessment to see what students, classrooms, school building, and the community need.
4. Include student voice.
5. Take it one step at a time.
6. Consider outside organizations for grants, workshops, and trainings.

April highlights how hands-on environmental work helps students develop 21st century skills such as creative problem-solving, communication, and teamwork. "I really want the kids to go back years from now and have those trees be their legacy and they can say, 'Hey I did that!'" Hands-on learning gives students a sense of accomplishment as they begin to realize that they can make a difference in their community.

April's actions have grown from that very first recycling program to starting environmental clubs, connecting with neighboring districts, and cultivating students' passion for the planet. April's newest project is building a small grow room to germinate and grow milkweed to help monarch butterflies thrive for years to come.

"If you think about our education system and environmental sustainability and climate change and the state of the world, the education system and our schools is the perfect place to help solve that problem."

- April Bartnick

Resources on how to start your own sustainability projects:

- 🌱 [IL Green Schools Project from IL Green Alliance](#): A year-long sustainability initiative designed for K-12 schools state-wide.
- 🌱 [Litterati](#): A fun citizen science platform for litter cleanup.
- 🌱 [Ameren Energy Efficiency](#): Teachers can sign up and Ameren educators come into the classroom and teach students about energy efficiency.
- 🌱 [Living Lands and Waters](#): Illinois-based river cleanup organization that provides educational outreach and resources. Its resources include the Million Trees Project in which April's students have participated.
- 🌱 [EarthEcho](#): This is a citizen science platform.
- 🌱 [RISE Challenge Illinois](#): This is with Earthforce and the Environmental Education Association of Illinois, a resource to learn about climate mitigation and involving students in environmental action civics.
- 🌱 [Innovations in STEM Education Facebook](#): A nonprofit that provides \$500 mini-grants to local teachers in need of science materials. April is the co-founder!