



Wylie Students Present at SEMIS Community Forum

Last week, students from Wylie Elementary presented their observations and research about the wildlife, ecosystems and conservation efforts in and around the Dexter community to audiences at the Southeast Michigan Stewardship Coalition (SEMIS) Community Forum. Wylie Elementary has partnered with SEMIS for the past several years to provide resources for teachers integrating place-based learning in the classroom. Through these lessons, students learn about the place where they live, and to take pride in their community through environmental stewardship.

SEMIS is comprised of educators and advocates who facilitate partnerships between school teams and community organizations to “bring the art and craft of place-based education (PBE) into core practices in schools, and advocates for transformational changes to K-12 institutions, colleges and universities, so that all living systems may thrive in sustainable, healthy and just communities.” Each year, the coalition holds a Community Forum where partner schools and organizations can see the results of student learning first-hand. The week-long event consists of both an online gallery showcase and an in-person community forum held at Eastern Michigan University (where SEMIS is housed).

On Tuesday, May 17, students from several Wylie classrooms presented their research to a virtual audience in the online gallery showcase. Betsy Schmidt’s 3rd grade students shared their research on the local beaver population in Dexter’s Mill Creek. Entitled “Beaverology,” the presentation included the reasons behind studying Dexter’s beavers, their research and methods, and a podcast summarizing their findings.

Students in Deb Eber’s combined 3rd and 4th grade classroom created a video to bring awareness to the importance of clean, fresh water in Michigan, inspired by Mother Earth Water Walkers. Eber’s students also shared their “Wylie Wonder World” video, a kindness project from earlier in the year to alleviate student anxiety around masks becoming optional in school.

Two students from Anouk Weiss’s class created “Recycling – A PSA,” a video skit showing the importance of separating trash from recycling. Another group detailed the creation of a student-run “trash patrol” to keep their school clean and educate fellow students about keeping the community trash-free.

On Thursday, May 19, Wylie students presented their learning in-person to fellow students, educators and partner groups at EMU. Leah Tatar's 3rd graders presented "Beavers are Ecosystem Engineers," after learning about beaver activity in Mill Creek in downtown Dexter. As part of this project, they learned about the importance of beavers in an ecosystem, and researched solid arguments to present to Dexter City Council about why they believe the beavers should stay in Mill Creek.

A group from Schmidt's class presented a poster detailing how de-icing salt applied at school affects our water supply, and proposing more environmentally friendly options. Students in Anouk Weiss's class put their research to music, composing both the melody and lyrics (with help from Wylie music teacher Anthony Koch) for a song about keeping our community clean. This fun and informative song was performed (along with an accompanying poster) for audiences at the in-person forum.

In a cross-classroom activity, students from the classes named above, as well as students from Jim Barnes, Roxanne Kohler, Natalie Hanlon, and Susan Karsch's classrooms, participated in a "fishbowl discussion" to share their research. Sitting together in a circle in front of an audience, students discussed questions posed by K-4 Instructional Coach Pam Krebs such as "what makes the Mill Creek area special and how can we take care of it?" and "how is pollution affecting our water?"

As part of this discussion, Barnes's students related their experience raising brown trout eggs in the classroom for release in Mill Creek, and why this non-native species is important to the community. Kohler's 4th graders shared their nature observations after spending time this spring doing mindfulness activities along Mill Creek such as "deer ears" (cupping your hands around your ears and listening in different directions) and "fox walking" (laying down feet quietly while hiking). Students in Karsch's classroom studied the storm drains around Wylie, and reported that if drains are polluted the water supply is then polluted, which in turn affects the food chain. Hanlon's 3rd grade classroom added their research on the dangers of PFAs in the water supply to the conversation.

In addition to these presentations, four 4th grade students were recognized at the Community Forum for submitting "student voice" essays to Planet Detroit, a local environmental activist group. Planet Detroit recently partnered with SEMIS and teachers across Michigan to record how climate change affects kids' lives.

The SEMIS website features the public gallery showcase of projects, ten of which are the work of Wylie students. Visit <https://semiscoalition.org/gallery/> to see the results of many weeks of research, observation, and collaboration from our 3rd and 4th grade students. In addition, the Dexter community will have an opportunity to see students discuss their research about Mill Creek's wildlife and ecosystems at Water Walker Day, scheduled for June 3, 2022 in Mill Creek Park, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

