

Educators, youth position their schools as community models of sustainability

How can schools serve as models of sustainability for their communities? Teachers and students across Northeast Michigan are transforming schoolyard habitats and promoting green school practices, like recycling and renewable energy, to do just that.

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Elementary students at [Alcona](#), [Bingham Arts Academy](#), [Inland Lakes](#), and [Wilson \(Alpena Public\) Schools](#) are establishing schoolyard habitats—from nature trails to butterfly gardens, to watershed-improving rain gardens. Middle and high school students at [Onaway](#), [Rogers City](#), and [Alcona Schools](#) are [producing maple syrup from schoolyard forests](#), developing biofuels, starting school recycling programs, and exploring renewable energy while [securing grants to install solar and wind energy systems in their schools](#). What do these projects have in common? They are all habitat-enhancing, energy-saving, and quality-of-life improvements for these area schools. The projects serve as wonderful public demonstration sites for community members and decision-makers who may wish to apply similar practices. They also reflect amazing hands-on, place-based learning opportunities led by students and supported, regionally, through school and community partnerships of the [Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative](#) (NE MI GLSI).



Educationally, these projects reflect remarkable case studies of applied principles and best practices of [place-based education](#)—where [youth, while learning, engage in environmental stewardship leadership activities that enhance the communities where they reside](#). These ventures illustrate the value in cross-connecting schools and community partners who invest in youth learning and, in exchange, benefit from youth leadership. Collectively these schools, community partners, and youth-led projects reflect a growing community of shared interest in schoolyard habitat and green school activities. These GLSI partners are networking and fostering school-community partnerships, sharing ideas and resources, and collaborating between their diverse schoolyard projects and activities.

These fruitful school and community partnerships were fostered through the NE MI GLSI, a regional place-based education network. Sustained professional development for schools, educators, and school partners involved is crucial to the long-term success of authentic place-based education programming. Aside from teaching processes, networking and resource sharing can be important opportunities to learn about new curricula and educational tools, as well as to share success stories, best practices and lessons learned, and develop new ideas. School and community partners, through this network, are proving the value of doing just that!

On September 27, Wings of Peace - Donna Smith Memorial Garden at Alcona Elementary School was the host site for the [Schoolyard Habitat/Garden Workshop](#) for eleven area teachers interested in developing their own schoolyard habitat projects. The teachers, representing six regional schools, came together to hear from local partners including [Alcona County Michigan State University Extension Master Gardeners](#) Diana Zeimen and Nora Corning, Heather Rawlings of [US Fish & Wildlife Service \(USFWS\)](#) and [Natureology's Maureen Stine](#), Green School Coordinator for [Cheboygan- Otsego-Presque Isle Education Service District](#). These professionals offered valuable experience and resources for those in attendance, including the [USFWS Schoolyard Habitat Project Guide](#) and the [Michigan Green Schools](#) program.



Participants gained ideas for beginning or expanding a garden project of their own, and left the workshop inspired to achieve goals that would offer outdoor opportunities for students. The workshop focused on tangible ways to create a garden plan and incorporate the project into class curriculum, while marshaling as much community support as possible. This event was organized through the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative

and supported by [Michigan State University Extension](#), US Fish & Wildlife Service and Natureology.

For more information about place-based education and youth-led sustainable schoolyard education projects and partnerships visit the [NE MI GLSI website](#) and learn about these [Projects in Action](#).

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