

Green School Case for Ecological Urbanism 2015

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1. Title: Manhattan Country School
2. Location and Dates of Operation: 7 East 96th Street, New York, NY 10128, the farm is in the Catskill Mountains in upstate New York
Since 1966 when the school was founded, the farm program has started.
3. Abstract and Keywords:
The school features “outside classroom” experience in a farm in upstate New York where students can learn one-week lessons every season of school year by 5th grade. In the designed curriculum students are able to see and participate in the food making processes, the differences between organic and non-organic food production and more. Also the school tries to tie environmental literacy as part of its courses and keep it as a sustained number for each group of faculty.

Keywords: food production; farm program; environmental courses
4. Type of Case: Green School
Criteria for identifying it with this type: Caring about food production, being involved in several wastes and recycling programs, embedding environmental courses in curriculum, programming sustainability training for faculty and staff, and having a clear vision for sustainability in quantitate manners.
5. Mission and Goals
Since Jan 1st 2003, the school has set up a formal commitment to advancing sustainability on campus with participation from the principle, faculty and staff, and actively involved students to participate.
6. Context: Origins, Organization, and Operation
Manhattan County School has raised financial support from slide-based tuition and private donation, also collected grants from New York City government to assist school’s sustainability program. Parents and supporters are involved on an informal base and annual events. The farm program hires professional staff to take care of the farm chores and to prepare curriculum and trainings for students. At the same time a fair amount of faculty are responsible for different types of environmental education for students from 4th grade to 8th grade. According to the Green School Alliance website¹ the school has been branching out to local community to arrange volunteer cleanups and letter-writing campaigns. Apparently the programs running now are more contained within the school itself, and some more engagement with parents and local communities are expected².

7. Programs

7.1 Farm Program

Starting from 2nd grade, students travel to the school farm in a class or group setting, after that they visit the school farm on a regular basis to get involved with the farming processes. At the farm the students prepare food through cooking classes one by one, learn to make yeasted bread, take parts in milk production, and help with animal reproduction, seed on vegetable beds and a row garden. Weaving a textile, barn chores and making composts are also part of the program. In the farm community kids got an unusual experience to stay in a collective working environment and are exposed to hands-on experience.

7.2 Environmental Literacy

The school prepares environmental education across all grades. The students bring their farming experience and continue food preparation for school lunches in their classrooms. They are also asked to recycle their waste and compost materials at school. Each faculty member needs to create a new lesson plan to integrate sustainability or create a faculty group representing several departments to add sustainability to the curriculum of at least 3 courses.

8. SWOT Assessment

8.1 Strengths

The school obviously has a very comprehensive environmental education system with clear vision and goals. Their farm program provides exclusive experience for students to have a holistic, multi-sensory experience³ towards agriculture production; the hands-on experience cannot be replaced by any second-hand knowledge learning process. Also though the school is in Manhattan, curriculums are engaged with exploring nearby rooftop gardens, community gardens and street trees to observe natural processes. Their environmental education started with observing nature, learn about human intervention towards nature (mainly agriculture), to participating environmental problem solving and decision making processes in their higher grades.

8.2 Weaknesses

No observed community engagement has been conducted. All the sustainable programs are designed and concentrated on the kids, with very limited influence on neighborhood.

8.3 Opportunities

The farming program works extensively well for a school with a big farm like this case. It could be a potential common platform for other schools to use the farm to conduct similar educational program. And the school can make more profits and influence more schools from renting their farms, or holding more learning-based events.

8.4 Threats

For a private school running on private donation, financial risk is always a challenge to make ends meet. Running a farm out of town and attending professional training at the same time are difficult for teachers and staff. The faculty received relatively low income considering their liability and devotion.

9. Lessons for Philadelphia

Although most public schools in Philadelphia cannot receive as much financial merit as Manhattan Country School, there is still opportunity for them to work with a local natural resource to provide students exposure to nature such as a community garden, a greenhouse or a farmers' market. The continuity of working with the same place and people is important to gain local knowledge as the kids' growing up. And their observation and experience about certain place would update through time.

Notes

¹ <http://www.greenschoolsalliance.org/schoolprofile/manhattan-country-school>

² Mitchell Clute, Manhattan Country School: A NYC School with a 180-Acre Classroom, Organic Connections, <http://organicconnectmag.com/manhattan-country-school-nyc-school-180-acre-classroom/>

³ Top Ten Reasons to have an Outdoor Classroom in Every Schoolyard, <http://greenschoolyardnetwork.org/>