

https://www.mainstreet-nashville.com/news/education/stratford-stem-magnet-students-break-ground-on-campus-pollinator-garden/article_872da7be-1d6b-11ec-93e6-03574ce5f12f.html

TOP STORY

Stratford STEM Magnet students break ground on campus pollinator garden

By Payne Ray Main Street Nashville
Sep 27, 2021



Stratford STEM Magnet students Josiah Cooks, left, Aun'Trecee Bennett and Willa Sands plant the first seeds in the sch
/Payne Ray / Main Street Nashville

Stratford STEM Magnet School's Interdisciplinary Science and Research class laid the groundwork for a new pollinator garden Friday, as students began the project by planting native flowers underneath power lines running through campus.

The garden will aim to create a space for pollinator insects like bees and butterflies to live or stop to rest during migrations. Students and faculty from the school gathered alongside representatives from the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Tennessee Environmental Council, which collaborated on the project, for a ceremony Friday afternoon.

Stratford Principal Michael Steele thanked each organization and many others for their help bringing the garden together at the ceremony. He also joked about his students' enthusiasm for the project.

"I just want to say up front that I'm allergic to bees, but I love honey," Steele said. "I'm just teasing. I think my students were like 'Let's get a lot of bees around here so Dr. Steele will leave,' but no."

Steele went on to explain that while they broke ground Friday, the actual work of seeding the garden will take place over fall break. For Friday's ceremony, students planted native flowers in a garden bed underneath an electrical tower.

By the end of the project, they hope to cover 5,000 square feet of the campus with native plants.

Chad Lyon, Stratford STEM Interdisciplinary Science and Research coordinator, said the school is working with others in the area to eventually double that coverage.

“Our goal for year’s end is to have 10,000 square feet of converted pollinator gardens,” he said. “That’s almost a quarter of an acre, which would be amazing and have a huge impact for our surrounding community and all the gardeners we have in the area,” he said.

The reason they are focusing on creating these gardens underneath the power lines is the restrictions those lines and structures naturally place on the use of the land they occupy. The TVA owns more than 16,000 miles of electricity transmission lines across seven states.

“Now, there is no better place to do this than beneath these power lines that are owned and operated by TVA, the Tennessee Valley Authority,” Tennessee Environmental Council CEO Jeff Barrie said. “They provide our electricity that we rely on to run our economy, and live in our homes, and enjoy our lives, and power the school here. But this is a place where no trees are ever going to be allowed to grow because they are a hazard to the power lines. No buildings can be built here. So what better place to create a habitat for our future, and for our students and for our community?”

Rebecca Tolene, vice president of environment for TVA, said the power supplier has been working on environmental projects like the one at Stratford for some time. The pollinator garden project is the partial culmination of years of research by the TVA and others that suggests that pollinator gardens can help connect pollinator populations across the state.

Tolene said about 60 acres of TVA transmission lines have pollinator gardens.

She noted that they have seen pollinator gardens have a positive impact with migrating butterflies, which will stop to rest and pollinate flowers in the area before moving on.

The TVA hopes to see more of the area's native plants thrive by attracting those pollinators, she said.

Barrie said he was looking forward to seeing the field of native flowers that the garden will become. He also noted the value working on the garden will have for students.

“The learning opportunities are everywhere,” Barrie said. “And what better opportunity to get students outdoors, on their own campus, learning about science and ecology in a real-world setting?”

Willa Sands and Kassidee Flennoy, Stratford freshmen who planted the flowers Friday, said they're looking forward to working on the garden, which to them represents an opportunity to enjoy gardening and learn a great deal in the meantime.

Sands said she's looking forward to learning more about sustainability through the garden. Gardening is one of her favorite activities, she said, so it's a great match for her.

Flennoy added that, since much of her family attended Stratford before the Interdisciplinary Science and Research class was added, she also saw it as an opportunity she had to take for herself.

"Basically my whole family has come here, but they didn't get to do the experiments that we get to do," Flennoy said.

Payne Ray