

→ April 8, 2026

ANN ARBOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
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# Ann Arbor Public Schools **Environmental Education** Program Update



# Thank you for the opportunity to share about the Environmental Education Program in AAPS!



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EE Program  
History and  
Purpose

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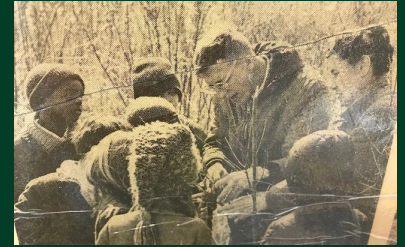
## → What does the **AAPS Environmental Education Program** do?

- Facilitate inspiring, experiential learning opportunities for AAPS students that help develop understandings, attitudes and skills that young people need to become environmental stewards
- Carry on a proud legacy for our school district and community; the AAPS EE Program was one of the first environmental education programs in the world
- Help the school district implement the goals laid out in Board Policy 8000: Environmental Sustainability and the AAPS Environmental Sustainability Framework
- Recruit, train, and coordinate a talented corps of volunteer naturalists
- Help steward the facility and grounds at the Freeman Environmental Education Center
- Help shepherd the AAPS Science and Environmental Education Endowment (A2SEEE) Fund

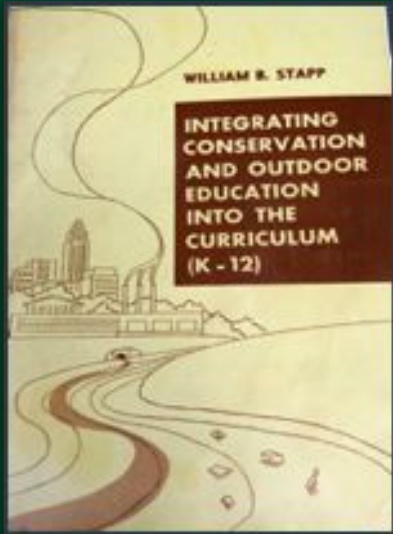


# What is Environmental Education?

*Environmental Education is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on the nexus of natural and human systems. By increasing awareness and knowledge about environmental issues or problems, EE provides the public with the necessary skills to make informed decisions and take responsible action.*



AAPS EE Program founder Bill Stapp played an integral role in the first Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1977, during which a foundational definition of EE and guiding principles were created:



- **Awareness** and sensitivity to the environment and environmental challenges
- **Knowledge** and understanding of the environment and environmental challenges
- **Attitudes** of concern for the environment and motivation to improve or maintain environmental quality
- **Skills** to identify and help resolve environmental challenges
- **Participation** in activities that lead to the resolution of environmental challenges

# Key Dates in AAPS Environmental Ed History

Late 1950s

Stapp launches the AAPS EE Program, combining field trips and classroom learning. Part-time staff and volunteer naturalists help expand instructional capacity.

1968

Dave Szczygiel becomes EE Consultant, another educator who dedicated his career to AAPS environmental ed

2018

AAPS Environmental Sustainability Framework developed by a task force and adopted by the BOE

2024-25

1959

Dr. Bill Stapp, Eunice Hendrix and other local environmental advocates work to integrate EE into schools

Bill Browning becomes EE Consultant; goes on to hold the role for 30 years and help grow the program

1997

- \* Board Policy 8000
- \* Freeman Environmental Education Center dedicated
- \* Coert Ambrosino hired

2022

- \* Sarah Hill hired
- \* Strategic Plan for the Freeman EE Center developed



# By the Numbers



- Approximately **500** classes and **10,000** students
- **2** certified teachers
- **2,000+** volunteer naturalist hours each year
- **4** Environmental Specialists, a talented pool of substitute trip leaders
- **40** acres - size of the Freeman Environmental Education Center site
- **26** current students serving on the Freeman Environmental Youth Council
- **1800+** native grass and flower seedlings and tree saplings propagated in the Freeman nursery and planted to improve the campus over the last three years

# EE Staff and Volunteers

## Environmental Education Teachers



EE Lead Teacher -  
Coert Ambrosino

*Joined program in the  
2018 - 2019 school year*



EE Teacher -  
Sarah Hill

*Joined program in the  
2024 -2025 school year*

## Environmental Specialists



**40 Registered Volunteer Naturalists in 25/26!**



# Current Programming: *Lower El*

**Young Fives** *Schoolyard Habitats*: Learn about the four elements of animal habitat and identify examples of each on school grounds.

**Kindergarten** *Michigan Wildlife through the Seasons*: Interact with puppets, explore how Michigan plants and animals respond to seasonal changes, and study furs, skulls, and other physical artifacts.

**First Grade** *Winter Animals*: Study winter birds, observe animal tracks and signs, and discuss physical and behavioral adaptations of various species.

**Second Grade** *Plant Communities/Zero Waste* \*Partnership with Ecology Center\*

Observe plant growth, reproduction, survival needs, and changes in plant communities. Learn about different types of waste and how they are managed in our community.



# Current Programming: *Upper El*

**Third Grade** *Pond Habitat or Habitat Walk:* Collect, identify, observe and release aquatic organisms. Observe how needs are met in a variety of terrestrial habitats. Study relationships, shared resources, and changes in habitats.



**Fourth Grade** *Geology Study:* Study rock formation and glacial topography. Collect and identify rock samples.

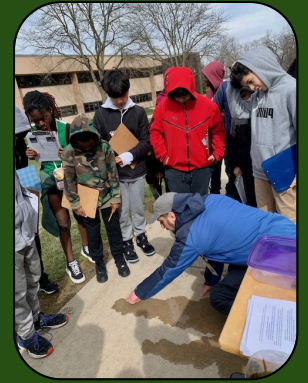


**Fifth Grade** *Winter Survival:* Work in small teams to collect fuel, build a cooking fire, and learn outdoor safety and stewardship etiquette.



# Current Programming: *Secondary*

**Sixth Grade** *Stormwater Solutions:* Participate in interactive activities around your school campus to explore connections between precipitation events, stormwater management and green infrastructure, and the local watershed.



**Seventh Grade** *Tour of the Resource Recovery Center*

\*Partnership with Ecology Center\*

Visit our local municipal facility to study various waste management processes (e.g. recycling, composting, landfilling). Consider impacts on climate and local natural resources (air, soil, water), and implications for personal waste management decisions.



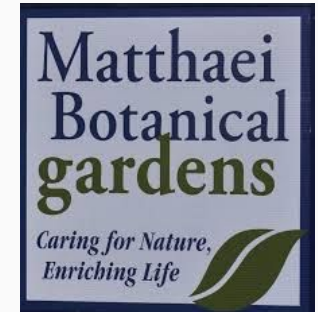
**High School Environmental Science** *Keys to the Forest:* Use a dichotomous key to practice tree identification and conduct plant surveys. Learn about land management and invasive species.



# → Community Partnerships

## Our partnerships support:

- *site access*
- *supplemental learning opportunities*
- *special projects*
- *professional development*

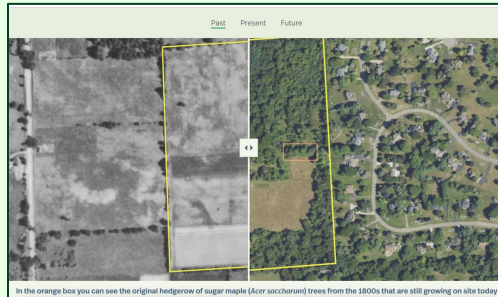


# → Freeman Environmental Education Center

## Freeman EE Center Advisory Committee Recommendations (2018)



## Strategic Planning for the Freeman EE Center (2025)



Learn more about this AAPS  
facility:  
[Freeman EE Center Storymap](#)



# → Freeman Environmental Education Center

## Current and Upcoming Happenings:

- 75+ classes visiting for field trips annually
- 5 weeks of Rec & Ed summer camp
- Community events - Seeds to Community workshops, Freeman Spring Environmental Festival (May 9!), outdoor service events
- Expanded prairie plots, rain gardens, and invasive species management efforts
- Native plant nursery program
- Solar Canopy being installed to offset 100% of annual electricity use and provide sheltered outdoor space
- CTE Environmental Science course



# Freeman Environmental Education Center

Excited to announce that we will soon be installing new outdoor signage!

New **wayfinding signage** will help visitors navigate our trail system, **site use guidelines** will better communicate expectations for the general public at this AAPS natural area, and **interpretive signage** will teach about the habitats and ecological restoration activities being carried out on site.

We also want to share our gratitude to local artist and AAPS parent Ashley Ambrosino for developing and donating a beautiful new logo to the Freeman EE Center!

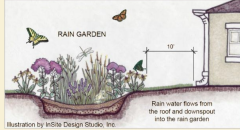
Freeman Environmental Education Center

## Rain Gardens

A rain garden is a shallow, bowl-shaped planting designed to collect and absorb stormwater runoff from hard surfaces, such as roads, parking lots, roofs, and driveways. As water slowly soaks into the ground in a rain garden, soil and plants naturally filter out pollutants before they reach our waterways.

**At the Freeman EE Center**

We have several rain gardens and a stormwater detention basin. These green infrastructure features collect rainwater from the roof and parking lot. We've planted our rain gardens with native plant species with deep roots that help water soak into the ground. Using native plants also provides valuable habitat for Michigan pollinators.



**Consider:**





- Could a rain garden help slow water down and soak into the ground at your home, school, or workplace?
- Can you help take care of an existing rain garden near you?

**Stormwater Management**

In urban and suburban areas, rainwater often runs off hard, impermeable surfaces directly into storm drains. Stormwater runoff does not go to a treatment plant, but instead is carried through pipes to nearby bodies of water. Along the way, the runoff picks up pollutants like trash, debris, fertilizer, oil, and chemicals. **By capturing and filtering stormwater where it falls, rain gardens and other green infrastructure help protect water quality and keep local rivers and lakes clean.**

**Species You Might Find Here:**

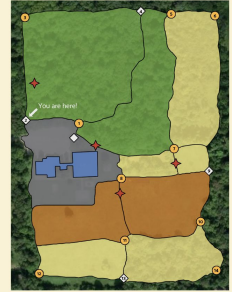
Native plants have been planted in our rain gardens to reduce erosion, enhance water absorption, and provide food and shelter for wildlife.

 Nodding Wild Onion <i>Allium canadense</i>	 Wild Columbine <i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>	 Fox Sedge <i>Carex vulpinoidea</i>	 Showy Goldenrod <i>Solidago serotina</i>
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Freeman Environmental Education Center

## Trail Map



**Map Key**

- Woodland
- Savanna
- Grassland
- Freeman's Wooded Area
- Freeman Building
- Trail Marker
- Trail Map
- Informational Sign

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# → Freeman Environmental Youth Council

- Extracurricular club made up of students from high schools across AAPS; 26 students in this year's cohort
- Guided by its mission to promote environmental literacy and sustainability, the council leverages the passion and creativity of its members to lead environmental advocacy, education, and service projects.
- Student-led with a “youth-adult” partnership framework; Coert Ambrosino has served as the adult liaison since council was founded in 2019
- Funded by A2SEEE



# AAPS Science and Environmental Education Endowment Fund (A2SEEE)

The A2SEEE fund extends the capacity of the AAPS to offer students compelling learning experiences that enrich its hands-on, inquiry-based science curriculum.



# Looking Ahead

Maintain high-quality programming that models best practices for outdoor learning and motivates students to engage in real-world science



Continue to develop and improve the grounds of the Freeman Environmental Education Center through restoration-based education projects



Expand environmental learning offerings to additional grade levels and courses when resources allow



# Thank you!

Please visit our website to learn more about current programming, volunteering opportunities, to sign up for the Friends of Freeman newsletter, or to support the A2SEEE Fund!

[www.a2schools.org/ee](http://www.a2schools.org/ee)



Questions?  
Contact EE Lead Teacher  
Coert Ambrosino  
[ambrosinoc@aaps.k12.mi.us](mailto:ambrosinoc@aaps.k12.mi.us)



# Freeman Environmental Youth Council

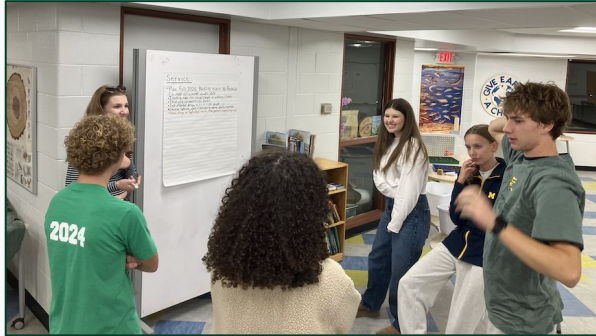


# → Youth Council Background & History

Creating a Youth Council was a goal presented to the BOE in the Freeman Advisory Committee [recommendations](#) in June 2019, with the goal of bringing high schools students together from across AAPS to participate in the development of the Freeman EE Center and to carry out sustainability and stewardship projects. Our Youth Council launched during the 2019-20 school year, and is now in its seventh year! Youth Council is currently being supported by funding provided by the [A2SEEE Fund](#).

The mission of the Freeman Environmental Youth Council is to promote environmental literacy and sustainability through youth advocacy and decisive action. We recognize the power of a passionate student collective to inspire, coordinate, and champion local initiatives to spark global change for future generations.





# Service Subcommittee

The service subcommittee aims to get ourselves and our community involved in the environment through engaging events and hands-on service to establish a greener future.



# Education Subcommittee

The education subcommittee aims to educate students on environmental issues, foster enthusiasm for environmental stewardship and empower them to create change.



# → Advocacy & Action Subcommittee ←

The Advocacy and Action subcommittee aims to raise awareness about environmental issues and advocate for what we believe in through sharing resources, political action, and holding people in power accountable.



photo: Elli Gurfinkel

# Thank you!

We appreciate the opportunity to share about our work.

We look forward to bringing a recommendation to the BOE about the idling reduction campaign and we welcome the board's feedback and involvement.

We ask that AAPS continues to provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful environmental action and develop leadership skills!



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