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PHOTOS BY KATHY ANDERSON / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

Second-grade students from Samuel L. Green Charter School walk through 'The Edible Schoolyard,' an outdoor classroom on the school's Uptown campus.

## the green grades

Two K-8 schools have infused their programs with environmental education and a sense of stewardship of the planet.



St. Paul's Episcopal School teacher Susan Malone and student Xavier Tircut trim a bush outside the Lakeview school, which has a master plan to 'green' its campus.

By Molly Reid, Staff Writer

It wasn't a textbook that the Samuel L. Green Charter School second graders were eager to dive into on a recent Wednesday morning.

"We're not putting our hands in the dirt yet, OK?" garden science teacher Aaron Ciuffo cautioned his charges, who stood with wide eyes and ready fingers around a black bin filled with organic soil. "We are going to put sand in here to help get some of the water out."

The children, wearing green aprons and divided into groups with names like "Green Dragonflies" and "Yellow Beans," were preparing dozens of planters that would be installed later as a "green roof" atop the Edible Schoolyard's outdoor classroom.

Ciuffo measured a plastic beaker full of sand and dumped it in the bin. He was about halfway finished explaining how to mix the soil when the children, their patience exhausted, plunged their hands in and began mixing.

Scenes such as this are repeated daily at Samuel L. Green Uptown, and across town at St. Paul's Episcopal School in Lakeview, two schools that are becoming models of eco-conscious education in New Orleans.



Kathy Anderson / The Times-Picayune

Samuel L. Green Charter School students Reginald Jack, left, and Akiel Dunn work with plants in "The Edible Schoolyard."

Spun off of the flagship Edible Schoolyard in Berkeley, Calif., two years ago, the Samuel L. Green program takes up one-third of an acre and features extensive organic flower and vegetable gardens, as well as a fully-

staffed outdoor classroom that hosts classes three to five times a day.

Although sustainable gardening is a hallmark of the program's output, the Edible Schoolyard is more about fully integrating outdoor, hands-on, environmentally friendly activities with the school curriculum, program director Donna Cavado said.

Students practice measurements in their science class by measuring soil in metric and standard amounts in the schoolyard. Kindergarteners learn the life cycle of butterflies by watching them grow from caterpillars to chrysalises and to adults in the butterfly garden. Vegetables and herbs harvested from the garden go toward monthly and elective organic cooking classes. All organic material from lunchtime goes into the schoolyard's straw-covered compost heap.

"It's not an add-on program," Cavado said. "It's a comprehensive approach to incorporating sustainable and organic practices, which are woven throughout the whole project. The school is very much built on serving the child in a holistic experience."

Like the Edible Schoolyard, St. Paul's Episcopal School has begun incorporating environmental components into its curriculum, with plans for an even deeper integration into its overall mission.

Every week, prekindergarten through eighth-grade students participate in "Paws to Work" classes, which include gardening, recycling, composting and trash pickup. Classes keep track of sustainability projects throughout the year, and a sixth-grade green club lobbied successfully to the church vestry to approve the school's compost pile.

On a recent Friday, groups of students spread out over campus to complete the week's green tasks.

"Come on y'all, we've got lots of cans to get," music teacher Myers McAllister said to a group of lingering students.



Kathy Anderson / The Times-Picayune

Linda Dense, De'Asia Jackson and Garden Teacher Dana Blanton work in "The Edible Schoolyard" at Samuel L. Green Charter School.

Outside, a boy worked a carbon-free push lawnmower in the school's "renewable garden" as a group of girls trimmed the grass along the beds with scissors. Another group of fourth-graders turned the compost heap with shovels, while their counterparts tore newspaper strips to add to the pile.

"Last year, we put in all these biodegradable plates and forks, and in no time they were all gone," teacher Debbie Waldmann said. "It was so exciting. We were like, 'It really works!'"



St. Paul's Episcopal School students Isabel Torres, left, Claire Olivier and Iana Springer crush cans for recycling.

The greening of St. Paul's involves much more than just student classwork and extracurricular activity. Since last fall, the school has worked to build a sustainable vision for its entire Lakeview campus.

Head of school Merry Sorrells said she was inspired to propose bold changes to the school's mission after touring a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified green middle school under construction in Washington, D.C.

"Outside of that building there was a simulated wetland that they were using for water filtration," Sorrells recalled. "When I saw that I thought, 'The city and our wetlands need saving. This is a way to take part in making our educational system a sustainable one, and to have an impact on wetland recovery.'

"We don't have to simulate a wetland. We have a wetland, and our kids can be a catalyst to bringing them back."

Faculty and parents galvanized behind her message of the school leading by example with a healthy lifestyle. Working with architectural firms specializing in green school design, St. Paul's has begun to develop a formal master plan for improving the health and efficiency of existing buildings and outdoor spaces, as well as the construction of a new LEED-certified classroom building.

Other local schools are bringing green building and sustainable lifestyle practices to classrooms by making school buildings more energy-efficient and environmentally responsible.

The local nonprofit Global Green has been working since 2007 to improve the campuses of seven New Orleans schools through energy-efficient

upgrades. A.P. Tureaud Elementary, the International School and Dr. Martin Luther King Elementary have either completed or are in the process of receiving \$75,000 each in green renovations -- including energy audits, solar shading and occupancy sensors to turn off lights when rooms are empty -- as "green seed" schools. Tureaud, the first school to get the green goods, will save more than \$24,000 a year, with a 35 percent reduction in utility consumption, because of the upgrades, according to Global Green.

In July, Global Green broke ground on construction at Andrew H. Wilson Elementary, one of two "model schools" to receive a combined \$720,000 in green construction, which will include solar panels, a wetland habitat and rainwater cisterns. Both initiatives are being financed by the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund.

Sorrells of St. Paul's Episcopal believes the investments will reap educational dividends.

"The studies show that green schools are healthier schools," Sorrells said. "Attendance is quantifiably stronger, there's less student absenteeism, and it just makes the schools brighter and more conducive to teaching and learning."