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# Owen Middle School The Great Outdoors

By Tim Reaves, Digital Communications Specialist

At Owen Middle School, students take an active part in making their campus a fun hub for the outdoors.

As part of their Natural Impact Initiative, students have made several improvements to the 40-acre campus, including a beautiful mural, natural landscaping, and native plant restoration. Students work on problem solving and cooperative learning through the low ropes course. Owen's outdoor learning environments make it possible for students to learn experientially and connect with nature.



"When our students see what it takes to maintain landscaped areas, they take ownership of the area and care for it on a daily basis," said seventh-grade science teacher Brittany Krasutsky. "We want them to take pride in their school and feel a part of the many exciting environmental projects we are working on."

Students also helped with an outdoor art project to beautify the school. More than 600 students helped local muralist Lara Nguyen paint an outdoor mural that blends the history of the Swannanoa Valley with the natural landscape and famous works of design and art.

"We got dirty, had fun, and made something memorable," Krasutsky said.

Also, each year seventh-grade students raise and release trout to help repopulate the Swannanoa River. Owen Middle also has teamed up with community organizations to replant river cane, milkweed, and American Chestnut trees on the campus.

Of course, plants need to be tended and gardens maintained, so Owen Middle has partnered with Owen High School to get the students out in nature, working in teams, practicing good stewardship, and investing sweat equity into their environment.

"By getting to know their older peers, the middle schoolers have a less stressful transition to high school," Krasutsky said. "These activities also reinforce the benefits of working as a team and show that it can be fun to give back to the community."

"It was great to get fresh air, but even better to spend an extra part of my day with my brother doing something for my school," said Megan Ogle, who teamed up with her older brother last year during a campus-wide cleanup.

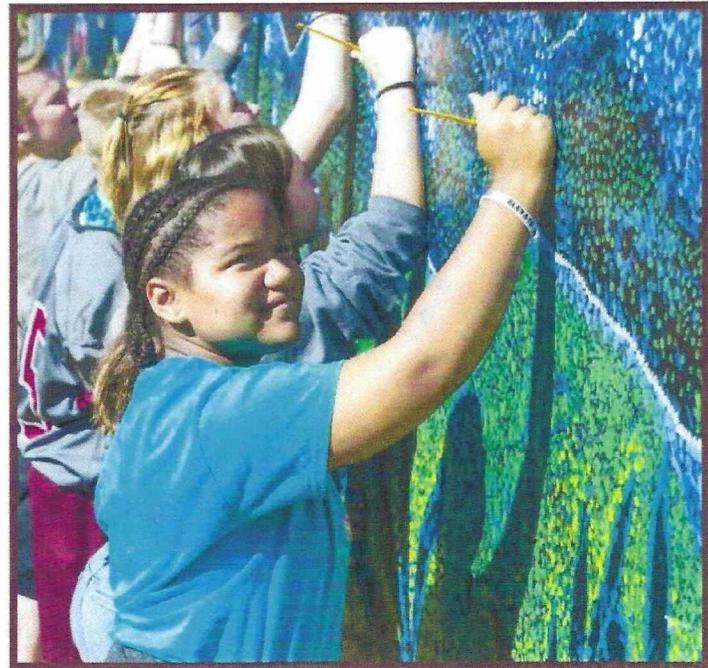
"Students, staff, and community partners work diligently to maximize the beauty and usefulness of our campus," said Owen Middle School principal Jim Lewis. "So many stakeholders are inspired by



the outdoor work and improvements that are accomplished through our Natural Impact Initiative and partnerships. Our wonderful 40-acre campus gives students the chance to live out our school beliefs – being stewards of our environment and student-led, inquiry-based.”



*Owen Middle School students take part in planting and maintaining native vegetation around campus.*



*More than 600 students helped muralist Lara Nguyen paint an outdoor mural blending local history and landscapes with famous works of design and art.*



*Students spread mulch for a ropes course at the school in October 2017.*