



Sustainable Schoolyards

Case Study: Clarkson Elementary

NEBRASKA STATEWIDE ARBORETUM

At Clarkson Elementary school, kindergarten teacher Wes Pokorny's classroom is designed with one adventure after another to take advantage of his young students' enthusiasm to explore. All around the room are pictures of Nebraska birds that help students learn how to use a bird ID book. An indoor tree house takes up the back wall and hidden behind the tree house is a bench of grow lights which the students use to start seeds for their vegetable and flower gardens. The adventure doesn't stop there though, Mr. Pokorny embraces his students energy and excitement for learning by taking many of his lessons outside.



Mr. Pokorny believes that children should learn to enjoy nature in nature and be allowed time and space to "be a kid". Behind the school building is four acres of school property that has been developed into an outdoor classroom and named Harlan's Hill for the founder of the local Blue Bird Nursery, Harlan was concerned that children should have recreational opportunities beyond plastic playgrounds and the area was developed with the help of his family and the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.



The hill already had trees, natural paths and many things to explore but needed just a little bit more. Mr. Pokorny's class added new trees and planted wildflowers while the high school shop class built a gazebo and a sign for the hill. Mr. Pokorny's class learns about nature, plants, math, and reading and he is always on hand to answer questions about a dove's nest, praying mantis eggs or what lives under a log. By exploring Harlan's Hill together Mr. Pokorny's students learn more than classroom lessons; they learn how to respect each other and nature, to interact with birds and bugs in a positive way, to create their own games together, and to stay curious about the world around them.

