



FOUNTAIN INN ELEMENTARY



Breathe Better Air at School (B²@School) and the TreesGreenville Model Tree Garden

The Measuring Sprawl and Its Impact¹ study ranked the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson MSA as the 5th most sprawling metropolitan area in the nation. Greenville County is located between Atlanta, GA and Charlotte, NC along the I-85 corridor. The area has been ripe for sprawl and rapid road expansion. The Interstate highway system has not only fueled the economic engine, but also has had an adverse effect on air quality throughout the region.

The purpose of the “Spare the Air” - A Path to Clean Air Forever public awareness campaign is to increase awareness of citizens and public officials on local air quality issues. Understanding these issues allows officials to make informed recommendations and/or decisions on local public policy. The campaign set in motion a series of activities toward improving air quality. A component of the campaign is the “Breathe Better at School” (B²) program implemented at the Fountain Inn Elementary School (FIES). The B² program seeks to educate parents, staff, bus drivers, and faculty about the importance of not idling vehicles and the positive impact of a “no idling” school policy on children’s health, especially children with asthma. An educational piece of the program is the “Air Quality Patrol” made up of students who wear the “B²” vest and encourage parents and bus drivers to turn off engines while on campus. The patrol also helps gathering data prior, during and after implementation of the program, designing the 2008 activity calendar, and conducting air quality experiments.

The B² program also seeks to educate the public on the value of reducing the amount of lawn areas necessitating mowing by replacing them with native gardens. The original school expansion plans retained a courtyard that would have been reseeded with grass, requiring mowing during school hours. Instead the B² program considered replacing that area with an educational native tree garden modeling a local forest ecosystem. To classify as a tree garden, TreesGreenville, a local non-profit organization, requires that teachers attend a free educational workshop and develop a curriculum and educational signage. Benefits include the elimination of the need to mow grass—hence no emissions and dust from lawnmowers—and distracting students during lawn mowing operations. Volunteers from garden clubs, non-profit organizations, parents, students, school staff and faculty, staff from the City of Fountain Inn and Greenville County, and other organizations assisted with planning and planting the native tree garden. When complete in the March 2008, the native garden will serve as an outdoor educational classroom.

FIES is leading the way in making the public aware about improving air quality along with appropriate land use and transportation. FIES has become a model school and a catalyst in the Greenville School District for other schools to see the urgency of pursuing cleaner air measures for the benefit of the students, the public, and the environment. The school exceeded all expectations of the B² program and is extending plans for a Safe Routes to School program. As a result, FIES received technical and financial assistance from the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control, TreesGreenville, and Greenville County.



¹ Retrieved December 31, 2007 from <http://smartgrowthamerica.org/sprawlindeX/MeasuringSprawl.PDF>