

# Warren school is going green



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Alani Black, 11, left, and classmate Matthew Mixen, 10, are pleased with more than 16 boxes of paper that they and other fifth-graders in Nicole Quandt's class recycled Feb. 29. Students at Great Oaks Academy in Warren, a charter school, are learning what they can do to help the environment. The school is in the process of going paperless.

## **MORE ABOUT GREAT OAKS ACADEMY**

Great Oaks Academy is at 4257 Bart St. in Warren. It is a charter school run by the National Heritage Academy, a school-chartering organization that has schools in six states, including nearly 40 in Michigan.

For more information on the school or the organization that runs it, go to [www.heritageacademies.com](http://www.heritageacademies.com) or call 586-427-4540.

Many a parent can attest to the piles and piles of paper brought home by schoolchildren -- work-sheets, permission slips, graded tests, calendars; the list goes on.

In addition, the school library remains open until 5 p.m. daily for children without home access to computers.

In the classrooms, there are changes too.

The art teacher recycles old and used pieces of paper for artwork.

Kindergartners through third-graders read books by using a computer software program instead of duplicating hard copies, Hardy said.

"The other thing we've done is no-work-sheet days. The teachers have to plan a lesson to replace the usual work-sheets," he said.

An anticipated effect, he said, has been an increase in student-teacher interaction.

"From an academic standpoint, it helps the students and teacher be more engaged. They talk more. You have a lot more communication and strong social relationships forming," Hardy said.

### **Assignment: Don't waste paper**

On Wednesdays, fifth-graders go classroom to classroom picking up boxes of paper to be recycled. In pairs, they gather the boxes and deposit the paper in recycling bins across the school parking lot.

On a recent round of pickups, teacher Nicole Quandt's fifth-graders took their room assignments and spread out through the school.

There was some laughing and some feigned difficulty picking up the boxes, which can get heavy, but otherwise, they worked hard and seemed to understand deeply why they were there. Quandt's class started the project about six weeks ago, she said.

Alani Black, an 11-year-old fifth-grader from Detroit, clearly explained the impact of not wasting paper.

"We do it so you don't have to cut down trees, so it saves animals' homes; it saves oxygen because oxygen comes from the trees," she said.

Matthew Mixen, her 10-year-old classmate from Ferndale, nodded, agreeing. He also questioned the waste he had become so used to seeing.

"Some people write something, get it wrong and throw away the whole piece of paper," he said. "Why can't you just cross it out and write somewhere else on the paper? You don't need a new sheet of paper."

If writing on it isn't possible, for some reason, there's always something else to do with the paper besides trash it. "I sometimes cut it out, glue it,

make creations," he said. "I fold it and do different things with it. I make paper airplanes."



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## **A socially responsible school**

Hardy said Going Green is part of the academy's larger philosophy to involve students in community service and environmentalism.

Students come to Great Oaks from Detroit and throughout Macomb and Oakland counties. Great Oaks is a college prep academy for kindergartners through eighth-graders with 615 students. Great Oaks is run by National Heritage Academy, which has 58 schools with a total of about 40,000 students in six states.

Holly Ray, a parent ambassador with two children -- a fifth-grader and first-grader -- at Great Oaks, said that the social responsibility aspect of the school is one reason she loves it here.

Every grade completes a community service project, be it collecting food for homeless pets or coats for homeless people.

She created a Web site, [www.geocities.com/greatoaksacademy](http://www.geocities.com/greatoaksacademy), where she uploads newsletters, flyers, fund-raiser information and the school calendar.

"I am not a Web designer by any means," she said. "It does the job and it is free."

About 90% of parents have signed up to receive information via the Web site, she said. "Only a small number require a paper copy, and we're trying to get that number down."

### **A win-win environment**

It didn't take long for the old paper habits to die after the paperless mission began in January 2007.

"By the beginning of this school year it was just the norm," she said.

For example, about 117,600 sheets of paper -- or 235 reams -- have been saved by eliminating the paper versions of what were once school staples.

The school newspaper, a bi-weekly called the Grizzly, is now an electronic product, saving 50,400 sheets of paper in a year.

By going electronic instead of taking the print route with school flyers, some 25,200 pieces of paper have been saved.

Likewise, the school's fund-raising information no longer requires paper, saving 8,400 sheets of paper annually. Weekly classroom newsletters, which average two pages, are no longer using 33,600 pieces of paper, since they are sent home electronically.

It all adds up, Hardy said. Paper and money are saved; children -- and perhaps parents -- learn.

And ideally, the environment benefits.

"It's a win-win," he said.

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