

# THE RYE RECORD



NEWS OF RYE

AND ITS PEOPLE

## Milton Students Track School's Ecological Footprint; "Shoe Size" Has Shrunk Over Past 18 Months

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— By Bill Lawyer —

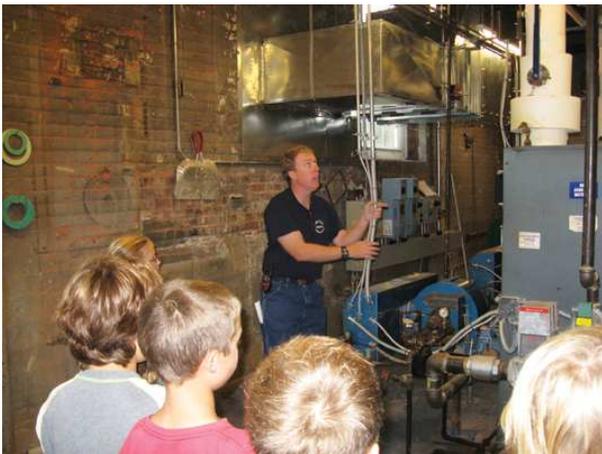
"My father used to idle the car when he was listening to the radio at my soccer games," said one fourth grader. "We just got a Prius," bragged a fifth grader. "How can I get my parents to stop idling," asked another. And so it went at a recent, half-day "ecological footprint" program in Rye.

Environmentally aware 4th and 5th grade students at Milton School went on a morning-long "field trip" to their own building October 14. Their mission was to determine the school's ecological footprint — what impact the school and all its operations has on the environment. And, they got a glimpse at their own, personal, footprints as well.



The morning started with a 9 a.m. assembly led by educators from the Children's Environmental Literacy Foundation (CELF). Carmela Federico used PowerPoint slides and student participation to help students understand that their school and they, as individuals, have a direct impact on the health of planet earth.

"Our goal with this program is to empower the students, to help them find what they can do," said Ms. Federico. And parent coordinator Mimi Bateman added that she hoped students would learn that "every little change they make can have an impact."



The 126 students were divided into five groups, and spent the next two hours carrying out research at stations devoted to buildings and grounds, transportation, paper usage, the cafeteria, and the computer lab. "Experts" at the sites demonstrated the school's operations in each area, and they answered the students' questions about the impact of said operations.

Students then reassembled in the gym to draw conclusions about their findings and develop ideas for change. The good news was that in the eighteen months since CELF conducted its previous

ecological footprint program at Milton, the school's footprint decreased by 11%. And that was despite an increase of 47 students and 13 faculty, staff and visitors.

The decrease was due to four main factors — more recycling, more walking to school, less vehicle idling, and less paper use. As Ms. Bateman noted, just replacing the school's weekly backpack news with an e-mail version cut back paper use by 75 reams during the school year.

In her opening presentation, Federico used the theme of “greener steps and lighter stepping,” to introduce the concept of sustainability — that the energy and resources generated by the earth should be in balance with those being used by people on the earth. She evoked the image of the earth as a goblet with resources coming in and going out — bringing to mind those algebra problems in which you had to determine how long it would take to fill a swimming pool if water was flowing in at one rate and flowing out at another.

One striking graphic was a chart showing that it would take “five earths” worth of resources for everyone in the world to live the average lifestyle of people in the United States.

Students considered the example of the food they eat and what it takes to get it. Currently, the average fresh produce has to travel 1,500 miles to get to one's table in the U.S. With locally grown produce, it averages less than 60 miles.



Throughout the presentation Federico stressed the importance of measurement — you can never know if you're succeeding in reducing your ecological footprint if you don't carry out accurate measurements. This was particularly true with energy use and transportation.

Students visiting the school's boiler and electrical rooms learned from custodian Bill Salisbury that everything is monitored and controlled through a computer system. This allows very specific adjustments of temperature and lighting to minimize waste. And it enables the school to carefully measure the impact of any improvements they make.



Station Expert (and Board of Education member) Kendall Egan used photos of Milton School's recent expansion and renovation to show how the building has become more energy efficient. Compact fluorescent lighting and motion sensor switches have dramatically reduced electricity use.

In the cafeteria information station, Food Service Director John Rubbo explained how waste was being reduced by the introduction of biodegradable

food trays and solid food containers. A survey of the cafeteria revealed that many students were bringing their own, homemade lunches in recyclable lunch boxes, which further reduces the school's footprint.

At the school's computer lab, each student used an ecological footprint website ([www.footprintnetwork.org](http://www.footprintnetwork.org)) designed for school children to calculate their family's footprint in terms of how many acres of land it takes to support their lifestyle. One student calculated that it takes 18.6 acres of land to keep his household going. By comparison, in third world countries the average is 2 acres. The European average is 12 acres, and the U.S. average is 24. On the global level, if everyone lived like this Milton student, it would take 4.2 earths worth of resources to support them.

The final assembly involved students starting to think about what they can do to reduce the school's (and their own) footprint even more. They focused on the need to change people's way of thinking. Some suggestions included making posters and videos.

In the coming days each class will be completing "action plan worksheets" that include listing the actions they will take, what the environmental effects will be, the time it will take, how they can share it with others, and how they will measure their success. Imagine what we can do with all the acres of land they save!