



Santa Barbara Middle School Recognized as 2021 City of Santa Barbara Water Hero



Every year, the City of Santa Barbara Water Conservation Program honors an individual, business, or organization that has gone above and beyond in their water conservation efforts and serves as an example of resource efficiency in our community. Santa Barbara Middle School has been awarded the 2021 Water Hero Award for their commitment to sustainability and achievements in saving water on campus.

Santa Barbara Middle School is an independent, co-educational, day school for grades 6-9 that serves approximately 175 students each year. Founded in 1976, the school moved campuses several times before moving to the former Brooks Institute campus on the Riviera in 2010. In 2015, Ernie Brooks II, a photographer, environmentalist, and educator, gifted the campus to the school as its permanent home. Both Brooks and Santa Barbara Middle School shared a belief that students should be inspired to live a life of continuous learning, trust in themselves, and make a positive difference in the community and beyond.

“Ernie Brooks and Santa Barbara Middle School share a common vision that we become not just students of where we live, but stewards of where we live,” said Brian McWilliams, Head of School.

With a permanent home in place, the school embarked on projects to make the campus a living classroom for sustainable practices. Efforts on campus include installing solar panels that reduced electricity use by 41%, introducing organic and sustainable landscaping practices, constructing rain catchment basins, using reclaimed materials in art classes, and creating recycling programs for the student body. These sustainability projects and practices offer opportunities for teachers to integrate further sustainability lessons into their classrooms, especially in the subjects of math and science.

Indoor retrofits include low flow toilets and faucets in the bathrooms and a high efficiency spray nozzle in the kitchen. This resulted in water savings of 26% on the water meter that serves the building and upper landscaping. The majority of the landscaping is on a separate water meter which had significant water savings of 39%. That savings was accomplished through the stewardship of the Regenerative Landscape Alliance (ReGen). In 2018, the school hired ReGen to bring their unique team approach to the campus to address projects within each team member’s area of expertise: irrigation, landscape design, pest management, soil management, rainwater capture, and more.



“We felt uniquely qualified to take on this property with the team experience we have built over the years and from taking different courses. Whether it’s an agrarian course, a rainwater harvesting course, or through some of the founding members’ landscape experience from working for decades in Santa Barbara,” said Andrew Fuess, member of the Regenerative Landscape Alliance.

ReGen provides the school with irrigation management -- including fine-tuning watering schedules based on observations of the plants and athletic field, and updating inefficient watering systems. They have upgraded landscaping areas with water wise plants, captured the rainwater runoff from nearby properties to water their tree grove, applied 275 gallons of compost tea to nourish the soil, and spread 19 dump truck loads of County mulch to reduce evaporation and control weeds. New plants need to either be food-producing or water wise, as well as provide habitat, shade, or be pollinator-friendly.



Additionally, Santa Barbara Middle School participated in the City's pilot of Automated Metering Infrastructure (AMI). Automated metering infrastructure is a system of meters, communication networks, and software that transfers hourly water usage information and service alerts over a secure, wireless network to a central database. The school and ReGen staff used the AMI pilot to analyze hourly water usage trends and identify leaks.

"We're watching our water usage per day, per hour, or per week to figure out our high and low points of watering and how to best utilize the water on campus. Also, a property of this size ends up having leaks from time to time, and the pipes tend to crack, so we can catch leaks really quickly with an alert on my phone," said Will Fredericks, the school's Facilities Manager.

The school continues to be committed to sustainability now and into the future. This vision is reflected in the school motto, which speaks to the way we are responsible to build on the legacy of those before us, and create a legacy for those that come after: "Because of them, us. Because of us, them."

"What's rewarding is the drive in here and to see kids doing projects, kids planting, kids harvesting, kids playing outside, kids climbing trees, and kids having a dialog about what we should plant next," McWilliams said. Congratulations to Santa Barbara Middle School for being a Water Hero! For more information on current and prior Water Heroes, please visit www.SantaBarbaraCA.gov/WaterHero.

