

Every Thursday morning, at 7:30 am, the Gilbert School Earth Club meets in our history teacher's room to discuss our goals for the year. Because our group was only created one year ago, we have no examples or expectations to meet, which creates a huge challenge for all those involved. We have absolutely no money to work with, so our projects are severely limited.

This past year, we've done as much as we can to push Gilbert towards a greener lifestyle. We spent days decorating old cardboard boxes for each classroom to recycle paper. The brightly colored recycling boxes with "green" quotes and pictures remind students and teachers to put old tests, homework, memos, and other miscellaneous documents in them. At the end of each week, our custodians empty all the boxes and recycle it in combination with the rest of the school's unneeded paperwork. In addition to Earth Club's recycling bins, the Life Skills class at Gilbert made posters to hang up across the school with statistics about energy use, water conservation, and clean air to raise awareness.

Second on our agenda this year was to create a "dreamboard". In September, our school booked an inspirational speaker named Ed Gerety, who spoke to the school about leadership, encouraging participation, and accomplishing goals for all of our school clubs, student council, and sports teams. He told us about the idea that goals are more successful if they are written down. After that, he gave us ideas to try out in our own lives, such as putting a poster of the college we want to attend on our wall, or building a dreamboard for the entire school. Everyone left the auditorium that day pumped and excited.

After the inspirational conference, a few of the Earth Club members got together and agreed that it would be fun to create a dreamboard especially for Earth Club. We brought it up at the next meeting and everyone seemed excited about it. Over the next couple of weeks, we all brought in old magazine clippings, pictures we drew, and other pieces that we would need to complete our project. One morning all we did was cut and glue, stick and paste (and of course recycled the scraps!) until our dreamboard was officially done. Now, it hangs outside of our meeting classroom and we see it every Thursday before we get together. On it, we have a picture of a potted plant --- one of our ideas for a fundraiser for Mother's Day is to plant flowers in small terracotta containers and sell them to students, teachers, and faculty. We also have a picture of a Gilbert T-shirt; we want to encourage all other clubs to purchase merchandise made from recycled material. We also developed an idea for our own Gilbert Earth Club t-shirt to raise awareness across the school: our mascot the yellow jacket with an energy-saving light bulb above its head. Underneath we've got the phrase "Blue + Gold = Green!" Hopefully with the t-shirt and plant sales, we'll meet one of our biggest goals: to make \$200 for our treasury.

This year we have been really focusing on one side of the building. Our school is split in two, one side housing the classrooms and the cafeteria and the other containing our gym, art rooms, auditorium, and music rooms. Another project for our Earth Club this year is transforming the ugly and overgrown courtyard behind the chorus and band rooms into a beautiful garden. Our principal and custodians have given us permission to renovate it, and so on the first sunny day when the snow has melted, our Earth Club plans on removing all the weeds. We'd like to plant

a low-maintenance garden and donate a picnic table so that students can enjoy an outdoor lunch or a quiet place to study after school. We even discussed planting a small herb pot for the cooking class; providing them with fresh ingredients such as basil, parsley, thyme, and rosemary.

If we are awarded the grant money, we have plans for how we would spend it. First, we would purchase sturdy recycling bins to replace the flimsy ones in the gym and football field. During the fall season, hundreds of water bottles, soda cans, and other plastic containers are thrown away, and we'd love to see that change. With heavy-duty bins that could withstand the harsh effects of the elements, we could almost eliminate unneeded waste for many years.

Secondly, with the money from the grant, we plan to help the school purchase motion detector lights and sinks to install in the building. Although teachers do make an effort to shut them off when classrooms are not in use, lights in areas like bathrooms and computer labs are on constantly, and for what reason? With motion detection lights, we could save a little bit of energy, but as we all know every little bit counts.

At Gilbert, the sinks in the bathrooms are often leaky and even left on for portions of the day. Whether it's on purpose or just an accident, that unused water could be conserved with motion detector sinks. That way, the absolute minimal amount is used to wash hands.

With the projects we've already accomplished and the ones we plan to do, we are moving Gilbert towards a more energy efficient and conservative lifestyle. From the simple cardboard boxes for paper recycling, to the heavy duty bins in the high-

traffic areas of the school, to student-supported gardens, and even new features like motion detector sinks and lights, small improvements will make Gilbert cleaner and “greener.” Even though our Earth Club is brand new, we want to make a huge impact this year that will set the precedent for future leaders and members. Remember, Blue + Gold = Green!