

Greater Atlanta Christian School

Reece, Hoopes & Fincher assisted in the recent improvements at the school which will enhance the quality of the campus, putting emphasis on open / green spaces and pedestrian connectivity. The following article was printed in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Some local schools going greener

By D. Aileen Dodd
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At a new eco-friendly school in DeKalb County, recycle bins sprout along walkways like wild flowers, fuel efficient cars get premium parking and cameos by deer, birds and snakes are highly anticipated.

Jason Getz/AJC The class of first grade teacher Liz Emerson, center in green, is busy with several new students and parents that came to visit during a "sneak peak" at Springdale Park Elementary Friday in Atlanta. Students and parents met their new teachers and toured the new school. This is the first city system school to be LEED-certified (built in an environmentally friendly way.)

Jason Getz/AJC Most of the new school's classrooms have large windows to allow for a lot of natural light to illuminate the rooms reducing the amount of artificial light.

At a Gwinnett County private school, 2,700 tons of asphalt and concrete have been replaced by grass and trees. Now the squeals of students playing on swings can be heard in the afternoon instead of the sputter of cars waiting in the pick-up lane.

As thousands of metro Atlanta students returned to school Monday, some are now learning on "green" campuses.

Students at the new Arabia Mountain High School in Lithonia – one of the state's first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver-certified "green" high school, came prepared to talk about their summer outdoor adventures. On Tuesday, they must make class presentations about a visit to a state, local or national park.

"I went to places I've never been before," said Michael Lee Jr., 15, of Stone Mountain, who is considering a career in environmental law. "It was actually pretty fun."

Lee visited the Yellow River Game Ranch, the Zoo Atlanta and Stone Mountain to take in some natural beauty and complete his summer homework assignment.

Arabia Mountain Principal Angela Pringle said environmental education will be integrated in every subject this year in 9th, 10th and 11th grades.

In English, students will go outside to observe nature, daydream and write in journals.

Students are encouraged to explore the school's lush grounds, which include a pond, hiking path and grassy fields dotted with flowers. Teens will use scientific methods to study everything from weather patterns and streams to wildlife. They will brainstorm with visiting faculty from Georgia Tech and Fernbank Museum of Natural History on ways to improve the environment.

Students are required to take three years of environmental science classes, including an AP course in the subject in 11th grade.

"Our students need to be ready for green careers ... and a green economy," said Pringle. "Just imagine how marketable they will be if they have this background."

Arabia Mountain is one of about 200 schools nationwide to earn "green" certification for its energy efficient design, lighting, waterless urinals and other special features. National officials say schools stand as test grounds for students to learn practical ways they can protect the environment and get introduced to green careers.

"The greatest opportunity is for the school itself to be a hands-on teaching tool," said Rachel Gutter, spokeswoman for the U.S. Green Building Council. "They have not only minimized their impact on their environment, but they also support the learning objectives of students."

At Greater Atlanta Christian School in Norcross, officials are trying to set an example for students on how to be good stewards of the environment. The 1,200 tons of concrete they razed were sent back to a recycling plant. The remaining asphalt was used as backfill to level the lawns.

Now a grassy mall in the center of campus lets students walk to class without worrying about traffic. An artificial turf in front of the pre-school gives students a new place to play. Officials hope the school's environmental focus will prompt discussion on ways to protect nature from destruction.

"Its a lot greener, there's more grass and trees," said Annakate Pitts, 13, an eighth grader. "I really like it."