
Community Assets Mapping

Activity Overview

Students will begin to learn how to identify and activate the assets of the community that may help their school ground restoration project.

Objectives

Students will:

- Interpret maps
- Identify and describe resources in their community
- Write letters, interview/communicate with local residents

Subjects Covered

Social Studies and Language Arts

Grades

3 through 12

Activity Time

Minimum 2 hours

Season

Any

Materials

Street maps of the area around the school. You can define the area however you want according to your goals. It may be just the streets adjacent to the school. It could include the entire neighborhood, town, city or school district.

Phone books, community resource lists (available from chamber of commerce, school districts or similar agencies), clear plastic overlay, clipboards, pens, paper, markers

State Standards

Social Studies:

Describe examples of land use, communities, shelters (A.4.4)

Use atlases, databases, charts, graphs, maps, etc. (A.4.5)

Use maps, photographs, satellite images for information (A.8.1)

Construct maps (A.8.2)

Conduct land use history (A.8.4)

Use atlases, aerial photos, satellite images, databases (A.8.5)

Background

Students need many types of information to make decisions about their school ground restoration or planting. Site maps show existing features such as utilities, vegetation, traffic patterns, and buildings. Area maps show watersheds, roads, parks, and other outside physical influences. Students own drawings of the school and adjacent land reveal student feelings about the “hidden curriculum” of the site – the message students get from the landscape. Community assets mapping provides students with information about who they can involve in their schoolyard project to help make it a reality.

Community assets mapping is traditionally used to focus on a community’s strengths. Community planners and others have come to recognize that too much focus is often placed on what is “wrong” in communities rather than its strengths. Rather than looking at community deficiencies and problems, “community assets” approach looks at the supports and opportunities in a community and how they can be used effectively. Community assets’ thinking recognizes that every person in the community has skills, knowledge, wisdom and gifts to help build a strong community. This same approach can be used to help achieve the goals of a schoolyard project.

Once local assets—people, places, and things—are identified, they can be connected to each other in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness. This approach works! All one needs to do is ask. Research in a Chicago neighborhood found that when asked, 75% of the residents were willing to do something for their local park and school. A common response was, “Of course we would--nobody’s asked us.”¹

Activity Description

The objective of community assets mapping is to document the supports and opportunities that exist in the community for your schoolyard project. The first step is to identify the goals and support needed for your project. Once you have a list of needs, you can find out who could help get it accomplished. In this process, you will create a community assets map by surveying the surrounding neighborhood. For areas outside walking distances, you will use phone books and other local resource materials. Steps in the process include:

- 1) Divide the school’s neighborhood map into sections. Assign a section to each team of students and adult volunteer.
- 2) As you walk along your route, make an inventory of potential resources in your community that can strengthen your schoolyard project. Take clipboards and pencils and note potential resources you see during your walk such as:
 - Homes with gardens

Community Assets Mapping (cont.)

Identify & examine sources of information about history (B.4.1)

Describe cooperation & interdependence (B.4.9)

Analyze conflict, cooperation & interdependence (B.8.10)

Locate, organize & use information to understand an issue (C.4.6)

Locate, organize & use information to understand an issue (C.8.7)

Use information to understand & communicate about an issue (C.8.7)

Identify & evaluate how advocates influence policy (C.12.9)

Describe contributions of institutions (E.4.5)

Describe contributions to social continuity & change (E.8.4)

Identify work skills (E.12.15)

Language Arts:

Create or produce writing (B.4.1, B. 8.1, B.12.1)

Plan, revise, edit, & publish writing (B.4.2, B.8.2, B.12.2)

Listen & comprehend oral communications (C.4.2, C.8.2, C.12.2)

Participate in discussion (C.4.3, C.8.3, C. 12.3)

- Homes with native gardens
 - Senior citizen apartments, retirement centers, etc.
 - Businesses
 - Public services such as police and fire departments, libraries, and other schools
 - Historical society
 - Organizations such as grassroots' environmental groups, religious organizations, service clubs, athletic clubs, youth groups, garden clubs, etc.
 - Parks and other public spaces where people meet
 - People with work similar to what needs to be done on the school project. These can include:
 - Landscaper companies and nurseries that can provide labor, tools, native plants, and design ideas.
 - Restaurants that can donate refreshments for your planting celebration.
 - Printing businesses, which can donate signage and/or other publicity.
 - Local newspapers that can provide free publicity and highlight your project.
- 3) When you return to the classroom, mark these resources on a master map.
 - 4) Discuss how each of these resources identified might help the project.
 - 5) Write a letter to people, businesses and organizations, explaining the project, and asking if there is a way they would like to help. You can identify specific needs if you know them e.g., sod removal, snacks for work days, etc. You may also ask individuals how they would like to help. Sometimes they will offer support in a way that was not considered.
 - 6) Report back to the class what you discovered through your letter writing and/or other communications such as an interview with potential resource contacts.

Extensions

- Go through the yellow pages of the phone book to find additional resources.
- Identify people in agencies that could help e.g., local extension agents, Department of Natural Resources employees, etc.

Additional Resources

- Aberly, D. (Ed.). (1993). *Boundaries of home: Mapping for local empowerment*. Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers.

Community Assets Mapping (cont.)

- (2001). *Building a coalition: Making the community connection*. Earthteaching News. Earth Partnership for Schools, UW-Madison Arboretum. Madison, WI.
- Kretzmann, J.P., McNight, J. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. ACTA Publications. Chicago, IL.
- McNight, J. (1996). *The careless society: Community and its counterfeits*. Basic Books.
- (1998). *Stories in the land: A place-based environmental education anthology*. Nature Literacy Series Number 2. Great Barrington. MA: The Orion Society.

Assessments

- Develop a presentation out of what you learned through letter writing or other communications with potential resource contacts.
- Describe the route you took surveying the neighborhood using compass directions from start to finish.
- Write a complete letter to a community member including a heading, salutation, introduction, body, conclusion, closing, signature, and contact information.

¹ Kretzmann, John P. Keynote Address: *Rediscovering Community Through Parks*. Center for Urban affairs and Policy research Neighborhood innovations Network, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.