MISSOURI GREEN SCHOOLS
PROMOTING WELLNESS FOR ALL

Anne Cummings

Sustainability Teacher

“I had no idea that I could make so many economic decisions in a day. All those little decisions add up and I’m also surprised that even when I think I’m not making a choice, I’m still making a choice.” Michael, grade 7

Meet Anne Cummings, a Sustainability Teacher at Brittany Woods Middle School. As a child, Anne Cummings grew up outdoors and began cultivating her own garden when she was 13 years old. After ten years of university fundraising, she decided to become a teacher. Currently, Anne is a Fulbright Teacher for Global Classroom Fellow and a Certified Garden Educator with Life Lab. There's no better feeling than this for her.

Has Brittany Woods always had a sustainability program?
In fall 2017, we didn’t even have a garden! Alara Stewart, who was then an 8th grader, spoke that dream into life through a grassroot effort to recruit gardeners, raise money, and design our first growing space. That spring, with the help of Seed St. Louis, more than 80 kids installed our first six beds and named their accomplishment, “The Giving Garden.”

The garden kept us connected through the pandemic but I was still teaching unrelated classes. Two years ago, I was invited to create an elective course that would allow us to harness student excitement for the garden, which had grown to nine beds and orchard plants. Since then, we’ve added a flock of chickens, a bee apiary, a seed to table cooking program and a second ten bed garden. All of these are student designed and managed.

What is your role as a Sustainability Teacher?

I am responsible for designing and teaching elective classes that introduce students to the 3 Pillars of Sustainability and the Sustainability Rainbow. The next phase will be working with core content teachers to build Education for Sustainability principles into everything we teach. I aspire to be a mindset shifter.

What are your go-to resources to initially engage your students?

Start with cloth shoe covers, a push lawnmower, and garden tastings. Shoes are very important in middle school culture and I respect the limit they present. Washable shoe covers get kids into the garden and the push lawn mower lures the rest. While kids waited to mow, I'd casually mention other jobs like harvesting and watering. Sometimes, I just stand near the sidewalk and hand out freshly plucked cherry tomatoes for a snack during passing.

What resource/person has been pivotal in elevating your sustainability instruction?

I had no idea where to start, so I contacted Bill Henske at Maplewood Richmond Heights Middle School. He taught both of my children in his well-established sustainability elective course and they both developed a strong passion for environmental stewardship. He pointed me toward Jaimie Cloud, founder and director of The Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education. She's dedicated a lifetime to working with educators to help people of all ages think and act sustainably. Bill and I both teach programs built on her standards and expertise. I've benefited from her direct mentorship and highly recommend that others do the same.