Project Birdland is fueling the next generation of thinkers, doers, and makers through design-based environmental education and action.
Project Birdland’s first pilot was launched with the Francis Scott Key Elementary/Middle School using ‘fee-in-lieu’ money from a nearby mixed-use development the Anthem House.
Project Birdland aims to address the persistent lack of diversity in both architecture and landscape architecture professions. In Baltimore, diversity statistics are worse than both the national and state-wide average for Maryland.
Utilizing a theory of change that draws on recognized research in career imprinting, the program focuses on teacher professional development, student experiential learning, direct mentorship, and hands-on greening to capture the imagination of Baltimore City public students in envisioning future careers in design.
SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS

83,666
Students in
Baltimore City (k-12)

92% minority student body

120
Average # of Students Impacted by 1 Teacher

473
Students at
Francis Scott Key

72% minority student body

60
Approx. # of Students Participating in MRA Workshop

Project Birdland aims to reach minority students by working within the 92% minority school system and expand its capacity to reach as many students as possible by training teachers, who on average impact approximately 120 students annually.
Schoolyards are essential urban landscapes, which amount to almost 450 acres of underutilized green space across 170 school sites in Baltimore city.
LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

449 Documented Bird Species in MD
2 Extirpated From MD
5 Introduced Species
2 Extinct

Species of Greatest Conservation Need

141

2015-2050 Maryland State Wildlife Action Plan

42 Important Bird Areas’ in MD
Designated by National Audubon Society, due to concentrations of high-priority birds in all 6 physiographic regions of MD

18 Threatened or Endangered

83 Of Conservation Concern in Northeastern U.S. Region

6 of MD’s IBA are of Global Significance!

Note: IBA locations not accurate; shown for context only

Schoolyards offer opportunities to create high performance learning environments and urban habitats for threatened and/or declining bird species and wildlife.
Project Birdland is based on three action-oriented pillars: education, innovation, and environment. Each of the pillars is grounded in design and design research methods of landscape architecture.
Key program elements of Project Birdland’s pilot program at the Francis Scott Key Elementary/Middle School are teacher professional development, student experiential learning/design challenge, digital fabrications/workforce development, and hands-on community greening/building.
Teacher professional development took place over four all-day professional development workshops, a week-long summer program, and in-classroom technical support. The Project Birdland team co-authored lessons plans with the STEM teacher at Francis Scott Key and collaborated with other educators to inform the scope and sequence of the design challenge.
The student design challenge asked students to research three urban songbirds, the tufted titmouse, Carolina chickadee, and white-breasted nuthatch and to prototype a custom birdhouse designed to meet the bird’s performance requirements. The winning designs were translated and fabricated by master craftsmen into fully functional and durable birdhouses.
The digital fabrication techniques used to create the birdhouses represent an in-demand skillset in the design and construction industry. Students who participated in Project Birdland may now see future career opportunities that might otherwise have gone unconsidered.
The community build day at the Francis Scott Key Elementary/Middle School in Baltimore, MD drew approximately 200 volunteers for a full day celebration that included planting more than 3,000 plants, bird counts, and educational demonstrations.
The lessons learned from the inaugural Project Birdland effort are being incorporated into an updated and streamlined process and design toolkit, which will be incorporated into other Baltimore City Schools and public parks.