

Local business awards GISD middle schools for environmental efforts

Three Garland ISD middle schools received a business-funded grant for implementing eco-friendly projects at their campuses. The Classical Center at Brandenburg, O'Banion and Lyles middle schools were awarded the Kings Dental Environmental Grant May 8.

In January, Garland-based [Kings Dental](#) partnered with the BEST Education Foundation to set up an endowment to reward green efforts at local schools. Business owners Arun Santhanam and Dr. Vidya Suri chose the campuses closest to their office to kick off the charitable campaign.

"I reached out to middle schools because I thought they would have a little more motivation," Santhanam said. "We wanted to disperse the seed of environmental conservation with this project, and these guys did a great job."

Santhanam and Suri provided each campus with \$100 of seed money to enact their green ventures. The schools then competed for first, second or third-place grant quantities.

Brandenburg snagged the first-place title, winning a \$400 check for implementing two impressive campaigns on campus. Sixth-grade science teacher Heather Hewett organized the projects, which included a plastic bag exchange and a [Nike Grind](#) shoe recycling drive.

"These projects just enhance our ability to think green," she said. "The green bags were such a hit, and we collected 430 pairs of shoes. We were just fortunate to have had this opportunity to further instill the importance of conservation in our students."

Hewett said the grant will be allocated for next year's eco-friendly endeavors.

Receiving second place and a \$300 check, the women behind O'Banion's green efforts were science teacher Anastasia Thomas and special education educator Janizelle Esquivel. Principal John Tucci said the campus' seed money helped fund renovations of its courtyard and installation of motivational ceiling tiles that showcase green messages.

"We had done a little bit of recycling in the past, but this really helped start our ecological projects," Tucci said. "We do not know what we will do with the money. We might buy more things that will help beautify our courtyard."

Lyles was awarded a \$200 check for its environmental undertakings. Seventh-grade science teacher April Ellis spearheaded the school's Recycle, Reuse, Redesign program. Encouraging students to engage in a variety of green activities, they not only organized a recycling club, but also made pencil pouches out of recycled chip bags and collected plastic bottles in an effort to build a campus greenhouse.

"We appreciate Kings Dental for choosing Lyles as a participant, and for helping us implement our recycling program to increase our students' awareness of the importance of recycling," Ellis said.

Santhanam and Suri hope to expand the Kings Dental Environmental Grant campaign to more GISD schools next year.

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