

repeated sessions with Muddy Sneakers they see how their actions impact the natural environment.

“They’re making connections with the cycle of life outdoors and their own existence,” says Ryan. He adds that technology-addicted children gain real health benefits from the experience of being in nature, including increased fitness levels, improved communication skills, increased serotonin levels, and decreased agitation.

Beyond better health, higher test scores, and lessons in biology, the proof of the program’s impact on students is reflected by their inclination to bring their parents and friends back to the places they’ve been in the woods with Muddy Sneakers. Wanting to share their experiences demonstrates their excitement for nature.

“It’s an extension of the classroom. We never refer to it as a field trip,” says Ryan. He explains that the dialogue between lead teachers and Muddy Sneakers instructors is integral to shaping the program for each learning expedition.

“Muddy Sneakers offers several different lessons. They meet with 5th grade teachers to decide what they want to cover. They can focus on weaknesses for [the teacher], or they can focus on what kids can see,” says Chad.

As the North Carolina state curriculum standards evolve, so do the hands-on activities of Muddy Sneakers. The five-year-old organization is undergoing a review of its curriculum and is examining how to bring environmental education into a greater array of subject areas for school systems.

By keeping current in its approach, Muddy Sneakers ensures its value to teachers and schools. In fact, teachers at Pisgah Forest Elementary see so much importance

in the program that they find ways to raise the funds needed to ensure their students can participate. Each school contributes a third of the cost for the program’s implementation, matched in a three-way cost share along with Muddy Sneakers and the community.



Muddy Sneakers funds its share through fund-raisers, private donors and grants. Community Sponsorship donations, that can be designated for use in a specific school district, come from individuals, other nonprofit organizations, or corporations that believe in the heart of Muddy Sneakers’ work to equip students with confidence to explore and learn in their natural surroundings.

For more information, visit muddysneakers.org.