

## Porterdale Elementary School Receives Lowe's Grant for "Great Outdoors Learn and Play Project"



*Pictured (L-R): Cally Pusey, Bryan Villanueva, Ameer Wells, and Coach Ken Meakins*

Porterdale Elementary School staff members were notified this summer that they were one of 14 schools in Georgia and 400 schools or parent organizations across the nation to be awarded a grant from the latest round of Lowe's Toolbox for Education grant program. The program has provided over \$20 million through more than 5,000 grants for a variety of school improvement projects since its inception five years ago. Porterdale is the third school in Newton County to benefit from the generosity of Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation. Middle Ridge Elementary School received a \$5000 Toolbox grant for outdoor fitness stations in 2009. That same year West Newton Elementary School received a \$5000 grant for an outdoor learning center and reading garden.

Porterdale's PTO Board, Principal, and PE and Science teachers worked with Newton County Schools' Grants Coordinator, Dr. Kathy Garber, to design the project to expand their nature trail, school garden, and playground area to include an outdoor classroom and physical fitness equipment. Porterdale teachers and students, Recreation Department staff members, and business partners will work with school staff, PTO volunteers to enhance the outdoor learning areas for students. Volunteers have already built a nature trail, butterfly garden and fish pond.

Kevin Cole, Manager of the local Lowe's store in Conyers, said that Lowe's is grateful for the opportunity to give back to the community, and he and his employees will be happy to assist Porterdale in any way that they can.

Cole said, "I am really excited that in the five years I have been at the Conyers store, seven schools in the area, four in Rockdale and three in Newton, have received Toolbox for Education grants. That is really a large number for a single store!"

The school plans to work with the Lowe's Conyers store manager and nursery manager to select the most durable and affordable products to suit the needs of the outdoor classroom and garden. Using funds from the Lowe's grant and some additional funds from the PTO, volunteers will install a larger garden and outdoor classroom near the nature trail. They will also spruce up the existing trail and garden and install a solar powered pump to aerate the fish pond. The outdoor classroom will include new steel benches, plants and plant ID tags.

Debora Ondracek, 5th grade teacher, was excited to learn that the school would receive funding to expand opportunities for outdoor learning projects, saying, "I have always believed that environmental education is integral to preparing our students to be informed citizens of the future. I want to thank Lowes for their support for education at Porterdale Elementary."

New outdoor fitness stations will include a Balance Beam, Parallel Bars, a Horizontal Ladder, a Triple Horizontal Bar, and 2 Basketball Goals. Ken Meakins, Physical Education teacher, was ecstatic about the new fitness equipment being purchased with the Lowe's grant, "I'm so excited to see that our children will have a fun way of improving their physical fitness on the playground."

Lizzella Dodson, Porterdale's principal, also expressed her gratitude to Lowe's saying, "On behalf of our administration, staff, and students, we would like to send a heartfelt "THANK YOU" to Lowes for awarding our school the Toolbox grant. We are excited and grateful!"

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For more information, contact Dr. Kathy Garber, Grants Coordinator for Newton County Schools at [garber.kathy@newton.k12.ga.us](mailto:garber.kathy@newton.k12.ga.us).

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