



Lawn Lab is a MWEE program run by the Clifton Institute to teach K-12 students about the effects of mowing on biodiversity. Lawn Lab was run on the school campuses, where school facilities staff reduce how often an old playing field was mowed. Second grade students and ecology students visited the experimental field throughout the school year, where they learn how to identify native plants, insects, and birds; get hands-on experience doing real scientific research; and have positive experiences outside in nature. Thanks to the support from DCR, our 2025-2026 Lawn Lab program went great.

14 Lawn Lab programs were provided over the course of the school year, for a total of 667 student interactions. The second grade Lawn Lab program was spread out over the course of the school year, with one visit each month, while the high school Lawn Lab program happened over the course of five consecutive days in the spring. But the two programs follow the same sequence.

We start by introducing the driving question of the MWEE to the students and give them unstructured time to explore the experimental field and see what they notice and wonder. Students learned to identify and survey insects and plants and the collect and graph data in the experimental field, as well as in the adjacent mowed area. Finally, students drew conclusions from the data.

Second grade students also installed bluebird boxes and learned about bluebird habitat and how to use binoculars to survey birds. This was one of the students' favorite parts of the year. It was Tree Swallows rather than bluebirds that ended up nesting and laying eggs in the box and the students were thrilled to learn they had helped create bird habitat.

One of our favorite things about Lawn Lab is how it expands and strengthens the students' community. The students take pride in working together as a grade to steward the Lawn Lab plots. As educators external to their schools, we are honored to get to join their community for a short time. The students get excited to visit people from outside of their school who have a different perspective and the students feel connected to the non-human community of plants and animals using Lawn Lab.

Workbooks were provided to both the second grade and high school classes for use in recording their data, graphing their findings, and reflecting on the experience. The

workbooks help connect SOLs with Lawn Lab instruction. This was reflected by the teachers' comments. A second grade teacher wrote that "this program worked well with the second grade standards we are teaching." Another wrote that Lawn Lab "gives them ... practice with scientific investigations and practices."

We concluded the school year by having the second grade students create posters and the high school students write about their experiences. We plan to continue both the second grade and high school Lawn Lab programs next school year. We are grateful for DCR's support and excited to keep this unique program going.



A drone photo of the Lawn Lab experimental fields.



Second grade students doing plant surveys at Lawn Lab.