

# School Spotlight

## FAIR (Fine Arts Integrated Resource) School Downtown Utilizes MinnAqua *Fishing: Get In the Habitat!* for Teaching Green Science

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For a number of years, a spring tradition of the 5th grade students at FAIR School Downtown in Minneapolis is to be involved with the MN DNR [MinnAqua](#) and [FiN](#) (Fishing in the Neighborhood) programs. Each spring, the students do an in-depth study of pond habitats. Under the guidance of Michelle Kelly, we use the [MinnAqua Leader's Guide \*Fishing: Get in the Habitat!\*](#) as our primary resource. The students at FAIR Downtown learn about the needs of all lake animals and plants, create pond dioramas and learn about water stewardship.

In addition, we work closely with Mark Nemeth, of the FIN program. We meet him and his co-worker, Leah Weyandt at nearby [Loring Park](#) and help them stock the lake. Over the years, we've stocked [channel catfish](#), [bluegill sunfish](#) and [black crappie](#). The students learn about each of the fish species as they assist with getting them in the lake. Mark and Leah explain the trapping process and the need for stocking city lakes. They teach the students about the adaptations of each fish, the diets and other needs. As Mark and Leah scoop the fish from the tank on the back of the truck, the students take turns walking the nets full of fish down to the shore and putting them into their new home. The students get pretty excited about being able to come back during the summer with their families to try to catch one of the fish they stocked.



Stocking catfish in Loring Lake.



Youth removing a fish hooked on a student-made pop can caster.

We also take a trip to Loring Lake with pop can casters we've made. For directions on how to make a Pop Can Caster download MinnAqua [Lesson 5:3 - Pop Can Casting](#) [PDF](#) (15 pages | 2.1 MB). You can also see how to make a pop can caster in this [video](#) produced in part by the Minnesota Conservation Volunteer magazine. While half of the students fish with teacher assistance, the other half learn more about different species of fish and the Loring Lake habitat from Michelle.

Last year, we were lucky to be selected to participate in a DNR sponsored Fishing Opener event. Roland Sigurdson set up the whole day for us at [Fort Snelling State Park](#). We learned how to cast with the Minnesota Vikings, how to fish from professional fishing guides, made observations of native fish, collected water from the lake in various places to look for food for the fish, and played simulation activities

that taught us about the life cycle of fish and the water cycle. It was an incredible day that

showed the students just how wonderful fishing can be and the need to understand where fish come from so we can preserve these environments for generations to come. In addition, we received a class set of fishing poles, tackle and safety equipment for all of the students in our school to use.

For other teachers interested in starting a program like this, be sure to look on the DNR website for the MinnAqua Program **Fishing: Get in the Habitat!** It's a wonderful curriculum that can be used for a variety of lessons about aquatic habitats, Minnesota fish, water stewardship, fish management, fishing equipment and skills and fishing safety. It is a beautiful resource full of color pictures, lessons, activities and hands-on learning opportunities, helping you share your love of Minnesota, fishing and the need for all of us to be stewards of our precious lakes.

**FAIR School Downtown** is located in downtown Minneapolis on Hennepin Ave. in the heart of the theater district. We are just blocks from Loring Park. FAIR School Downtown is one of two magnet schools in the West Metro Education Program. The students who attend FAIR School Downtown live in 11 different communities in the west metro area. In addition to using the fine arts as a gateway to learning and integrating the arts into all areas of curriculum, FAIR Downtown prides itself on teaching green science. Our science classes emphasize environmental awareness, focusing on ecology and conservation.

I will be leaving FAIR School and Minneapolis for fairer climates as my husband and I retire to San Diego, California. There are many things I will miss about teaching and living in Minnesota. This habitat unit and partnership with the MinnAqua program and FIN will definitely be a memory I treasure. My teaching partner has vowed to keep this legacy alive. I just may have to come back in May to go fishing!



Observing macroinvertebrates with FIN Educator, Mark Nemeth.