



CAPITAL CITY PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY SNAPSHOT



District of Columbia
Office of the State
Superintendent of Education

2016 HIGHLIGHTS

- Collaboration with Audubon Naturalist Society for weekly Salad Science lessons integrated with the pre-K expedition on gardening. In addition to strong lessons related to plants and animals, students created journals to document the growth of lettuce in the garden – work that is often a significant lift for this age group. Cerissa Brown, pre-K lead teacher stated, “We HAVE to have this again next year. This is amazing.”
- Strengthened recycling and started composting programs. Waste audit was completed in June 2016, and helped provide clear next steps for the school in terms of improving how waste is managed.
- Taking a close look at Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) through the lens of environmental literacy has been instrumental as Capital City goes through the process of transitioning to NGSS in the 2016-17 school year.

ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Capital City Public Charter School (CCPCS) is located in the Manor Park neighborhood of Ward 4. It is in a large open building, surrounded by gardens, that became LEED Gold certified in October 2015, and was named a US Green Ribbon School in 2016. There are already robust environmental programs in place, including regular adventure and gardening activities. The Lower School (grades pre-K 3 through 4) is considered to be one of the most racially diverse in the District. The population of the school is 35 percent black, 35 percent Hispanic, 19 percent white, 2 percent Asian, and 8 percent multiracial. Thirty-three percent of students are English language learners, and 7 percent of students receive special education services.

CCPCS is an Expeditionary Learning school, and students in grades pre-K 3 through 12 participate in two semester-long expeditions in which students participate in fieldwork, meet with experts, and create authentic high-quality products. Topics range from gardening to birds, from markets to geology. Students may produce products such as books, art installations and short films, sharing these products with a larger audience through in-person and technological outreach.



“The Environmental Literacy Leadership Cadre has helped to facilitate deeper work around not only curriculum, but best practices in our school. It has been amazing to work with educators in multiple grade levels, as well as our Environmental Literacy Fellow, to help bring lasting change to Capital City.”

– Elizabeth McNamee, grade 4 teacher, Capital City PCS

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PROGRAM

During the 2015-16 school year, CCPCS expeditions began to be guided by NGSS that focus on the environment. That will continue to be the case moving forward. For example, pre-K students learn about the purpose of markets, food preservation, and composting in the school garden. Kindergarten students conduct fieldwork in Rock Creek Park and study birds living in the District. Lessons include crafting scientific drawings of birds, creating a public service announcement on how to protect birds from windows, and distributing bird seed packets to families and staff. Grade 1 students investigate bees and create beeswax candles to sell at local farmer's markets, while grade 2 students conduct an investigation in Rock Creek Park to conduct experiments around the properties of water, study water pollution, and create large-scale installations about water made from waste materials. In grade 3, students study ecosystems and animal adaptations, and grade 4 students learn about the geology of Rock Creek Park, visit the National Museum of Natural History, and create stop-motion films on geological processes and human impacts on these processes.



NEXT STEPS

- During summer 2016, teachers will continue to work on shifting science-based expeditions to meet NGSS in the 2016-17 school year, particularly in standards related to environmental literacy (Earth and Life Science). Staff members are working together across grade levels in all three campuses (Lower, Middle, and High School) to make sure there is vertical alignment between expeditions. NGSS is being used as a tool to help ensure this alignment. In the Lower School, the environmental literacy plan will be used to determine where there are NGSS holes in existing curriculum so that those gaps can be closed.
- During summer 2016, teachers will work with the operations team to improve existing recycling infrastructure at CCPCS on all three campuses. The Audubon Naturalist Society is working with a teacher at each campus to assist with recycling training for students and staff.
- In fall 2016, students in higher grades will help educate peers on proper recycling practices and put labels on recycling bins. Grade 5 Food Waste Expedition will be utilized as a vehicle for implementing a composting program at CCPCS.
- Vertical alignment of expeditions, with particular regard to how CCPCS uses Rock Creek Park as a classroom.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Open goal-oriented discussions with the operations team and other administrators before starting an environmental literacy program.
- Make sure that all grade-level teams are on board with and take advantage of opportunities that are available to them (see first lesson learned).
- Find allies immediately in other grade levels to help support this work and provide multiple voices/perspectives. In 2016, this happened, but very late in the project.

