

## 2016 HIGHLIGHTS

- Formally launched a school-wide paper recycling program that it has made a huge impact thus far.
- Every student in grade 4 was able to go on a Potomac River boat trip with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. This trip inspired the Watershed Club to write their proposal for the Caring for our Watersheds annual contest to have all students at KIPP schools be able to go on this trip.
- All students in grades 1-3 visited the Washington Youth Garden. Many of the students had never been to the US National Arboretum before and many students tasted veggies straight from the garden for the very first time.

## ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Heights Academy is one of six elementary schools within the KIPP DC network of charter schools. Located in the historic southeast neighborhood of Anacostia, Heights Academy shares the Douglass Campus with three other KIPP schools. At Heights Academy, students in grades 1-4 focus on building community, achievement, and persistence in addition to their academic growth. Standing behind the belief that science education is an integral part of a rigorous elementary school education, Heights Academy offers a daily, 45-minute Next Generation Science Standards-aligned science program for all students. Students in grades 2-4 have a one-to-one Chromebook laptop where they engage in personalized learning programs such as Spatial-Temporal (ST) Math, iReady, Kahn Academy, and Accelerated Reader. Students also take specials classes in art, technology, physical education, and music. The school and network belief is that all students will rise to and through college.



“We believe in the need for access to science experiences for our students, and our school is fortunate to be able to partner with local organizations to help start a garden club, bring healthy cooking demonstrations to our campus, take students on field trips to see our local watershed and test river water quality via boat, and much more. We planted trees with our students and families this past fall and started the first-ever recycling program at Douglass Campus this spring, inspiring teachers, students, and families to reduce waste and recycle paper.” – Gaelan Gallagher, principal, KIPP DC Heights Academy

## ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PROGRAM

Heights Academy's environmental programming occurs primarily within its daily grade-level science coursework. In addition to using FOSS (Full Option Science System) curriculum and the Next Generation Science Standards to explore science topics, students engage in grade-level environmental program projects. The grade 1 environmental project centers around the school's new classroom paper recycling program. Grade 1 students measure and compare recycled paper from each classroom, creating a bar graph on the lower school science bulletin board so the school can also analyze the data. In grade 2, students create "insect hotels" to learn about the needs and structures required to help insects reproduce and thrive, and observe insects in their natural habitats. Grade 3 students plant sunflowers and track their growth and study the role they play with pollinators, while also learning about plant life cycles, ecosystems and food webs, and how energy is created and transferred. In grade 4, students use principles of engineering design to create structures to attract pollinators using upcycled materials found on campus, then plant pollinating plants in the school garden. Students in grades 1-3 attend the Washington Youth Garden as their off-campus field experience, while grade 4 students go on a Potomac River boat trip with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

## NEXT STEPS

The specific grade-level projects and field trips that started this year will continue next year for each new grade of students. The goal is to evolve the environmental literacy program as part of the school's full-time science program. Heights Academy will continue to use the programming from the pilot year and add on additional field experiences, school programming, grants, guests, curricula, and projects to enhance the current environmental literacy program. Heights Academy also will focus on growing the recycling program by reaching out to the other schools on its campus and asking them to join in the efforts.



## LESSONS LEARNED

- Starting an environmental program at your school requires more than just you and your vision. You must have the support of your principal and administrative team, building maintenance team, and fellow teachers. Without a team and family approach, the visions you want to implement for your students and school community may not have lasting effects, or materialize at all.
- Explain your ideas clearly and explain how they will benefit your school community and the students. Establish buy-in, a shared purpose, or a shared belief among the people helping you with the arduous tasks that accompany starting programming or planning events. Let people know they are helping you start something amazing and important.
- Thank the people who help making things happen, especially if the people you enlist are normally behind the scenes (like a janitor, cafeteria staff, an administrative person, a business manager, or a parent that has volunteered). You need to make sure that your school and students know the role they played in making something happen and that these are celebrated for it. Ideas include a school-wide PowerPoint presentation and photo, morning announcements, student-made cards, a school newsletter, or even a bulletin board poster all show your appreciation as well.
- Do not try to do all of this yourself. To develop school-wide and grade-specific programming, recruiting fellow teachers to help can make a huge difference. By delegating tasks to others on your team, teachers begin to "own" different components of the programming which can bring it new life and detail. This also allows for your staff to invest in the program and develop ownership. You could extend this to families or other members of the school.