



SEATON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY SNAPSHOT



District of Columbia
Office of the State
Superintendent of Education

2016 HIGHLIGHTS

- For the first time, grade 5 students participated in an overnight Chesapeake watershed experience. They spent three nights in the woods, where they had the opportunity to spend time in nature and learn about how our city is ecologically connected to the bay.
- Seaton Elementary School won the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's National Healthy Schools Gold Award, which celebrates Seaton's work with students that focuses on all aspects of wellness. A large part of the award came from Seaton's many programs that involve learning in the school garden during and after school.
- Four teachers participated in extensive professional development in the fall as a part of the RiverSmart Schools program, in which they learned how to incorporate more environmental education into the classroom. Teachers used what they learned to plan an Earth Day celebration, in which all students participated in activities such as a recycling relay and a water runoff demonstration. Students also made and tasted salads they made from vegetables harvested vegetables in the garden.

ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Seaton Elementary School is a pre-K through grade 5 school with just over 300 students in the Shaw neighborhood of Washington, DC. Seaton has a very diverse school community with students and teachers representing more than 30 countries. Many Seaton students speak English as a second language and the school has a large ESL program that particularly serves students speaking Spanish, Mandarin, and Amharic. Seaton has many interesting partnerships that focus on health, wellness, and the environment, including the Department of Energy and Environment's RiverSmart Schools program, SweetGreen in Schools, YMCA Before Care, DC Scores, Girls on the Run, CanoeMobile, Old City Farm, and more. Seaton has a large outdoor space with a big garden, soccer field, two playgrounds, and a large asphalt area with basketball hoops and running space. The school is working with the RiverSmart Schools program to make the school more "green" with permeable pavement, water catchment, and more garden space.



"Seeing kids make connections between the cafeteria and classrooms and the garden makes it all worth it. One of my students ate spinach at lunch because he said now that he helped to grow some in the garden, he knows that it tastes good."

— Sarah McLaughlin, grades 3-5 special education teacher, Seaton Elementary School





ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PROGRAM

Seaton Elementary has implemented environmental literacy largely through its many partners and programs. Seaton used the Common Core Science Standards along with the DC Environmental Literacy Framework to come up with a plan that works best for its school. Each year, students focus on specific themes such as sun's energy, wildlife habitats, or the water cycle. Along with those themes, students complete projects in the garden and participate in a field trip that brings to life what they are learning in the classroom. Each grade is responsible for caring for a different aspect of the garden, such as the compost pile, the pollinator garden, and the wetland area. Individual grade activities are complemented by school-wide events such as Earth Day, Growing Healthy Schools Month, and our Wellness Fair. The idea is that by graduation, students have a holistic view of how humans are connected to and responsible for being ecologically responsible citizens.

NEXT STEPS

Next school year, Seaton Elementary plans to continue to work with its partners and field trip connections to implement the same environmental education programming but with more classroom-to-field trip fluidity. Seaton has a training planned for all teachers at the beginning of the school year to get everyone on the same page. The school also is working with its partners to plan trips at meaningful points in the year for students so that trips align with work they are doing in the classrooms. Seaton hopes to expand its after school gardening club to include more students and families, encouraging more weekly involvement in garden care. Seaton hopes that the more teachers become comfortable with using the school's outdoor space, the more that they will use it during class time.



LESSONS LEARNED

- Start small! One little garden bed is plenty to teach all sorts of lessons and activities.
- Most things are free. With some work on Craigslist and with parent help, you can procure most gardening supplies that you need for free.
- Field trips! Field trips are amazing and provide meaningful experiences for kids. Try to get as much information as possible about what will happen on the trip ahead of time, so that you can provide pre-learning activities for the kids. The information on the trip will stick better if it's not the first time students are exposed to it.