



VAN NESS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY SNAPSHOT



District of Columbia
Office of the State
Superintendent of Education

2016 HIGHLIGHTS

- Office of the State Superintendent of Education School Garden Grant recipient – \$10,000 to develop a school garden for the 2016-17 school year.
- Recognition by the Department of General Services: *DCPS Recycle Right! Competition* Honorable Mention Award and *DCPS Recycles!* Honor Roll Award.
- First school in DCPS to successfully implement both classroom recycling and organic composting programs.
- Chesapeake Bay Trust Grant recipient – \$1,600 to implement professional development for teachers about the watershed.
- Pre-K 4 classes visited the US Botanic Gardens where students participated in hands-on activities about seeds, created seed balls, and toured the gardens.

ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Van Ness Elementary is located in the heart of Southeast Washington, DC, and reflects the revitalization of the Navy Yard community. Van Ness opened in the 2015-16 school year and is still in the midst of renovating its infrastructure to be completed by August 2016. The school currently serves students in pre-K 3 through kindergarten. Located minutes away from the banks of the Potomac River and the Anacostia Riverfront community, the school can address environmental issues, the importance of stewardship, restoring the Potomac River, and the role of the riverfront to local community development. This combination of urban renewal and environmental initiatives in the community presents an opportunity for Van Ness to design a unique school curriculum that models and engages with environmental initiatives in the surrounding neighborhood.



“Initially, I was against the idea of recycling in a space with limited facilities ... but throughout the process of trials and accomplishments, I must say, recycling works! Our teacher and maintenance collaboration is so much better. It has drawn us together.” – Paul Mullings, building foreman, Van Ness Elementary



ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PROGRAM

Improving environmental literacy among students is a key priority at Van Ness; as such, it is a key part of the curriculum. The school created a “Green Team” comprised of teachers, parents, the school nurse, administrative staff, maintenance staff and nonprofit organizations. The school garden committee plans and develops school-wide initiatives related to classroom recycling, organic composting, and the school garden. Environmental literacy activities included a whole school recycling presentation and recycling truck touch with the SWEEP Jr. program of the Department of Public Works; monthly Eating the Rainbow program by Revolution Foods; field trip to the US Botanic Garden with FoodPrints; and the Pennies for Otters initiative to support Niko the river otter at the National Zoo.

As the school continues to add a grade level to the student body each year, the development of the school garden will play a vital role with environmental literacy. Community partnerships will provide support for field trips across the curriculum to include art, music, social studies, math, literacy, and social development. Independent tasks will include recycling, composting, watering, seeding, weeding, going on scavenger hunts, observing habitats, digging in designated areas, sketching, and journaling.

NEXT STEPS

Looking ahead, the new school garden will be inspired by the ecology and ecosystems that exist in the Navy Yard community. The new outdoor space will inspire students to create murals and poetry about plants, flowers, or insects; read garden books in the garden; have book drives to increase garden related books in the school library; and participate in cooking demos, nutrition lessons, and lunchtime in the garden. Students also will investigate the connections between the garden and watershed issues, water conservation, and river clean up. In addition to the outdoor classroom, there will be an effort to improve environmental literacy of school faculty with professional development opportunities.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Community partnerships are vital to supporting environmental literacy among students and teachers.
- There are many grant opportunities available to support environmental literacy.
- Field trips are fun and excellent ways to reinforce environmental literacy.
- Professional development is crucial for knowledge and implementing lessons.

