



## STEM Elementary School



District of Columbia  
Office of the State  
Superintendent of Education

## ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY SNAPSHOT

### 2022-23 HIGHLIGHTS

- Initiated a recycling program by working with the Department of General Services to provide recycling bins in each classroom and on the hallway floors. Each grade had a “Team Captain” who helped empty class bins into the larger floor bins.
- Students took ownership of maintaining the school garden. Classes from pre-K through grade 3 prepared the beds and planted seedlings from the University of the District of Columbia’s 4-H program.
- As part of the Department of Energy and Environment’s Nature Near Schools grant program, second grade students went on a field trip with the Anacostia Watershed Society, which included a boat tour of the Anacostia River and stormwater management activities.
- Pre-K students began composting by separating compost from trash in their classrooms during breakfast and lunch.



“This has been a great year in environmental literacy for Hendley. Our students learned how [environmental literacy] can help our community and communities around the world. Recycling and planting have helped students put their learning into action!”

- Natalie Nagorski, Kindergarten Teacher,  
Hendley Elementary

### ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Hendley Elementary is a Title I elementary school with pre-K 4 through grade 5. The school proudly serves the Washington Highlands neighborhood, located in Ward 8 in the District’s Southeast quadrant. Many of the teachers are long-standing members of the Hendley community who have taught both alumni and their children. The school has several outdoor learning areas, including the well-maintained Hendley Garden. Students regularly help maintain the garden with teachers and enjoy science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) lessons outside in the rear learning space. With a RiverSmart Schools grant from the Department of Energy and Environment, Hendley will receive new outdoor learning classroom designs to further ensure high quality STEM instruction for all students. Teachers also use STEMscopes, which provides materials for hands-on experiments and aligns with the DC Public Schools science curriculum.

## ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PROGRAM

---

As a school that understands the importance of STEM, Hendley provides ample opportunities for all grades to engage in environmental literacy. The school has a dedicated STEM teacher who coordinates with grade level teachers and provides hands-on engaging lessons for pre-K through fifth grade. Classroom teachers have organized engaging lessons in the school garden. Additionally, Hendley has started to recycle and compost. Under the watchful eye of Recycling Team Captains, all students collaborate to ensure the recycling bins are emptied and properly used during breakfast time. Pre-K students have created an environmentally-conscious culture by composting each meal – breakfast and lunch. To wrap up the kindergarten English/Language Arts unit on conservation, the students engaged in a Cornerstone project in the garden. Each class planted their own tree. The unit was supported by books about the environment such as *The Lorax*. The school also partners with the Friends of the National Arboretum’s Washington Youth Garden program, which provided second grade classes with field trips in the garden at the US National Arboretum and support with school garden maintenance. In addition, Hendley leverages the FoodCorps curriculum to provide engaging lessons in healthy foods, gardening, and pollination.



## NEXT STEPS

---

To successfully continue recycling during the next school year, Hendley needs a consistent recycling pick-up schedule from the Department of General Services. Once a consistent recycling system is in place, the school would like to expand its composting program to include lunch from all grades. Garden maintenance work will expand to include a pollinator garden and additional herbs in the herb garden. To reinvigorate the pollinator garden, students will plant seeds provided by the Department of Energy and Environment and teachers will use resources from Anacostia Watershed Society to educate students on the most effective additions to the garden. Once the RiverSmart Schools outdoor space is complete, the school will create a schedule for access to these outdoor spaces, so all classes have equitable time outside.

## LESSONS LEARNED

---

- Consistency is key. Having a schedule for staff members and students to pick up recycling or tend to the garden is helpful in making sure all tasks are completed.
- Students enjoy taking ownership of lessons and activities. Garden work should be an engaging learning experience for students, not a task for staff members.
- Have an understanding of staff or organizations that are able to carry out necessary tasks. Sometimes, components of a project or activity will not be carried out by others that you do not have control over.

