



Key Elementary School



District of Columbia
Office of the State
Superintendent of Education

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY SNAPSHOT

2017-19 HIGHLIGHTS

- Almost all classes at Key Elementary School have participated in a field experiences that were immensely positive for students and teachers. These experiences are becoming part of the school's curriculum and not just an extra activity. Students are eager to get to the next grade so they can go to the recycling plant, or raise shad to release, or spend two nights with NatureBridge at Prince William Forest Park.
- While recycling has been part of Key Elementary School for many years, recycling and lunchroom composting are becoming routine and habit-forming.
- Students from the green team wanted a greenhouse for winter gardening. They collaborated with the Key Elementary School's student council and wrote a grant to the Palisades Community Foundation. The grant was awarded and with support of parents, a greenhouse is now on site.
- Competitions hosted by the Department of General Services provided extra excitement and enthusiasm for students to collect data, assess the school's recycling efforts and recommend changes. Being recognized on the DCPS Recycles! Honor Roll with Distinction and "Most Improved" award in the DCPS Reduce First! Challenge – Plastics Edition were nice perks, too.



ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Key Elementary School is a nationally recognized Blue Ribbon School that serves students pre-K through grade 5. Key Elementary School strives to provide students with the skills to think critically and to explore and discover their unique abilities. Connecting students to their local environment through inquiry-based learning and empowering them to make a difference has long been a part of the science program at Key Elementary. With the expansion of the school's garden program in the last few years, students are given more opportunities to learn about the local environment. Key has a very active and supportive parent community.

“Developing an environmental literacy program has really helped our school solidify the work we were already doing around environmental education. We have a clear path forward on implementing our plan. By far, one of the best features of the program is the amazing community partners and mentors who brought stellar opportunities for our students and staff! It doesn't get much better than watching our students become 'citizen scientists' around important environmental issues facing our community!”

— Amy Johnson, grades 3-5 science teacher, Key Elementary School



ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PROGRAM

The environmental literacy program continues to grow at Key Elementary School. Key Elementary was one of the first public schools in the District to pilot a school-wide recycling program and provide students an opportunity to lead the efforts. The environmental literacy program has been housed through the science program, but classroom teachers are getting more involved. Previously, field experiences were largely in the upper grades; now, every grade has a meaningful activity that connects to the local environment. The yearly progression of experiences strengthens the school's culture of caring about the environment from the youngest to the oldest student. Another positive benefit is that these activities directly connect to the Next Generation Science Standards at each grade level, expanding the learning opportunities beyond the field experience.

Key Elementary has a large and active student green team that helps build the school culture by leading school-wide initiatives. These activities include recycling and energy competitions, walk/bike to school days, and special Earth Week activities. In addition, the green team provides weekly monitoring of the cafeteria waste, recycling patrol of classrooms, and many gardening activities. The Key School Parent Teacher Organization also has a green committee to support student activities and encourage environmental best practices at school events.

NEXT STEPS

Key Elementary plans to continue participating with community partners through the field experiences so each year every student is educated about the environment. Next steps include a closer examination of cleaning products used, energy waste, and moving beyond recycling to reducing the amount of consumables. This will require participation from all of the stakeholders at the school, plus educating those groups who use the school and grounds during out-of-school time. A major goal will be to apply for the US Department of Education's Green Ribbon School recognition in the next two years.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The field experiences and the support of the community partners are an essential part of this program. It not only builds high student engagement but helps students and teachers recognize the impact of their local decisions on the overall health of the environment and how they can make a difference.
- It takes a team to build consistency and tackle all of the areas necessary to building a school culture of sustainability and stewardship. This team needs to include school staff (not just teachers), parents, and students working together.
- A student green team is an integral component to work on special projects, maintain enthusiasm, and create student directed projects and programs.
- It is essential to receive support from District agencies, such as the Department of General Services, since many of the infrastructure decisions are not made by the local school but are implemented and directed from a central office.

