

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY SNAPSHOT

2019-20 HIGHLIGHTS

- Established a new composting program with the DC Department of Parks and Recreation, and began an active composting program in every classroom that included sorting out compostable food scraps and utilizing a new three-bin system.
- Partnered with the Audubon Naturalist Society to bring age-appropriate environmental science programs into our Primary and Lower Elementary classrooms. Students deepened their understanding of decomposition, recycling, and waste management. Staff members and custodians also received training to properly sort trash and recycling.
- Garden workday that involved diversifying native plantings in our rain garden, as well as the construction of three new raised beds.
- Conducted air quality tests with our Upper Elementary students through Casey Trees and Clean Air Partners' program: Cleaner Air, Tree by Tree.



ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Lee Montessori Public Charter School fosters a lifetime love of learning and cultivates independence among DC school children, using the student-centered Montessori Method, an evidence-based approach to closing the opportunity gap. The school provides a high-quality experience for a racially and socio-economically diverse community with the goal of empowering each child we serve to transform society. Lee Montessori is committed to an anti-bias, anti-racist framework that addresses social inequity through the lenses of race, class, immigration, gender, and LGBTQ identity.

Inside school classrooms, children as young as age 3 move around a beautiful room and work with hands-on, manipulative materials. In this manner, learning and well-being are improved as children gain a stronger sense of control over their lives. Lee Montessori is one of only five public Montessori schools in Washington, DC and the only public elementary school fully recognized in DC by the Association Montessori Internationale — USA. The school innovates by blending conventional educational practices with progressive Montessori principles that release a child's innate eagerness to learn.



Audubon Naturalist Society's 'Worms at Work' unit was so great for our Primary classrooms – the students were so excited to handle and observe the worms, and it was awesome to track the process of decomposition within the classroom."

- Meera Connors, garden coordinator, Lee Montessori-Brookland

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PROGRAM

At Lee Montessori, students are encouraged to question, explore, and engage with the natural environment around them. Teachers highlight the interconnectedness of both human and natural systems, and emphasize how individual behavior shifts can work toward larger solutions. Both inside the classroom and out in the garden, students are witnessing the ways in which their personal choices can transform their environment.

Lee's three-bin compost system set up by DC Parks and Recreation Community Compost Cooperative Network has helped reinforce the idea that individual actions can culminate in big results. Students, staff, and the school's surrounding Brookland community have worked together to divert some of the food waste that would have otherwise ended up in the trash. In doing so, students and staff have witnessed the transformation of everyone's lunch scraps through the process of decomposition. The final compost product went right back to our school garden, creating a nutrient rich environment for new plants to flourish.

This is just one example of how integrating sustainable practices into classroom routines has created a culture shift within the school. Lee will continue to incorporate hands-on activities and experiential learning opportunities into our curriculum and around the campus to emphasize the school's commitment to shaping young environmental stewards.

NEXT STEPS

The school's environmental literacy plan will continue to take advantage of the excellent learning opportunities granted to all Environmental Literacy Leadership Cadre members in the coming school year, but will also further expand connections between classroom-based and outdoor learning. This will include age-appropriate activities for Primary, Lower Elementary, and Upper Elementary students that deepen curriculum standards through schoolyard ecology. Lee is working toward creating a functional outdoor classroom environment that has a shade structure, in addition to an area for independent nature play to accompany our rain garden and raised beds. This space will serve as a tool for data collection, community engagement, and artistic expression.



LESSONS LEARNED

- Increased flexibility and accountability by having two Environmental Literacy Leadership Cadre representatives from the school.
- Take advantage of all opportunities presented by high-skilled partner organizations.
- Early and frequent communication with staff members around guest speakers, field trips, and activities will allow deeper in-class connection and engagement.