



ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY SNAPSHOT

2019-20 HIGHLIGHTS

- Partnered with Murch’s custodial team to organize school-wide recycling training with Audubon Naturalist Society. The training removed some barriers to successful school-wide recycling, which included ordering proper materials for school-wide recycling and addressing staff confusion around school-wide recycling.
- Began the development of a student leader program for older students to support younger students in the proper disposal of their waste during lunch time.
- Ongoing progress communicating and sharing projects with the Green Scene, a group of parents that previously worked independently to take care of school grounds at Murch.
- Partnered with Casey Trees to provide programming with Murch’s fifth grade, which led to a day of tree-planting along Reno Road and an ensuing unit of study.
- Ongoing environmental learning in pre-K 4, which included weekly nature walks and year-long trash studies as well as visits from Audubon Naturalist Society’s Garbology program to teach about compost and decomposition.

ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Murch Elementary School serves more than 600 students from pre-K 4 to grade 5 in the Forest Hills neighborhood of Northwest (Ward 3). The school population draws largely from the surrounding neighborhood and the community congregates around the large indoor and outdoor spaces before and after school and on weekends. Murch was renovated for the 2018-19 school year and has an enormous new playground, soccer field, basketball courts, and surrounding green spaces. Parents are highly active in the school community and the Home School Association fundraises hundreds of thousands of dollars per year for school programming. The early childhood program at Murch is rooted in a Reggio-inspired philosophy and Murch’s youngest students are very engaged in nature-based learning.

The Murch community includes several families in each grade who work for nearby embassies. Ten percent of Murch students are English learners and 9 percent receive special education services. The school population is 57 percent white, 15 percent black, 11 percent Asian, 11 percent Latinx, 5 percent multi-racial, and 1 percent Native American. While the school is consistently high-performing on both standardized test scores and Star Ratings, the community has recently started to organize with teachers and parents to address persistent achievement gaps with the goal of improving school experiences for non-white students, low-income students and for students with disabilities.



“The environmental learning and activism Casey Trees provided for our fifth graders was incredible for the entire grade level. The learning prior to the planting prepared and engaged them - and lent an excitement that lasted well beyond the immediate efforts of planting trees. By the time the planting came around, students were beyond ready to put their learning into action, even in rough weather. Students continued to ask about similar opportunities, eventually leading to creating a fifth grade Environmental Club.”

– Kelly Crabtree, grade 5 teacher, Murch Elementary

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PROGRAM

Murch's Environmental Literacy Program (ELP) consists of nonprofit partnerships at several grade levels: pre-K and grade 2 with Audubon Naturalist Society, grade 4 with Anacostia Watershed Society, and grade 5 with Casey Trees and Clean Air Partners. Murch's ELP has also led to a school-family partnership with parent-led organization the Green Scene. The Green Scene's contributions to Murch's ELP have mainly been around school landscaping. Green Scene leader and alumni parent Alma Paty also supported Murch in applying for small grants which include, but are not limited to, supplies for an outdoor classroom for the 2020-21 school year. Perhaps the largest change for Murch during the 2019-20 school year was the prioritization of school-wide recycling, which came as a direct result of Murch's ELP.

NEXT STEPS

As the city remains in the midst of a global pandemic, the school continues to be flexible and creative when planning for the next school year. The school will need to adjust based on how much time students and staff can spend inside the school building safely. The following are tentative ideas:

- Creating a teacher-led Environmental Literacy team.
- Creating a functioning partnership with the parent-led Green Scene with clearly delineated responsibilities.
- Continuing efforts that we were unable to get to this year due to pandemic: finalizing a school recycling system, organizing our annual Mearth Day celebration; reducing end-of-school-year waste by engaging families and Home School Association to focus on reuse.



LESSONS LEARNED

- Partner with the custodial team from the start to support school programming that may change their day to day routines.
- Dream big, but focus on small, achievable tasks. Teachers' time and energy are pulled into a million different directions, we can be most successful if realistic goals are set.
- Prioritization should continue to be given to collaborate with a school's parent and family community, especially in regards to the use of outdoor spaces and environmental literacy-themed events.

