



Thomson Elementary School



District of Columbia
Office of the State
Superintendent of Education

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY SNAPSHOT

2019-20 HIGHLIGHTS:

- Received a grant/financial support to continue improving the school’s rooftop garden and making it a usable teaching site for students.
- Through partnership with Casey Trees, Clean Air Partners, fifth-grade students were able to go out into the school community and learn about the health of the trees around their school.
- Created concrete inquiry experiences for students based on science standards and incorporating them into curriculum.

ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Thomson Elementary School is located in Mount Vernon Square and Chinatown. It is a pre-K through grade 5 school with just over 300 students. Thomson is a diverse school community, where almost half of the students speak English as a second language, primarily Spanish and Mandarin. Thomson became the first DCPS elementary school to become an International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Program World School. As an IB school, Thomson focuses on creating lifelong learners through inquiry learning. The school commits to engaging the whole student through its partnerships with: Teaching for Change, DC Scores, Everybody Wins!, Girls on the Run, City Dance, and OSSE’s Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. Thomson is making the school more “green” by improving its recycling, composting programs and the rooftop garden.



It was so wonderful seeing my students become so engaged in their community! They had so many questions about not just the trees in their neighborhood but also the history of trees in DC, the impact it had on the environment and how they could be part of the preservation of our trees”

- Nicole Braxton, grade 5 teacher, Thomson Elementary

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PROGRAM

Thomson Elementary has created an Environmental Literacy Program by engaging with multiple programs. Thomson used the Next Generation Science Standards, DCPS Units of Study, and the IB PYP Curriculum to develop a plan that best supports the school. The Environmental Literacy Program at Thomson is divided into two parts (that intersect with each other). The first is the whole-school program focusing on programming for the school community. This includes a school-wide system for recycling and composting as well as improving our rooftop garden. The second part of the Environmental Literacy Program is at the individual grade levels. Each grade level engages with six inquiry units that ask students to take action at the end of the study. Some units are focused directly on environmental topics such as plant life cycles, water systems, habitats and natural resources. With those units, Thomson has been able to utilize its partnerships with outside organizations to give students more hands on experiences. Other units have the environmental literacy embedded into the action portion of the unit. In units such as Activism and Expressing Yourself, students choose action projects connected to environmental topics again through the support of the outside partnerships.



NEXT STEPS

Next school year, Thomson plans to continue its work with engaging students in environmental topics with its partners and field trip connections. All Thomson teachers will be trained next school year in recycling and composting to ensure everyone is on the same page. From there, Thomson staff will create a school-wide program for students to have ownership over the recycling and composting programs. The school is working with partners to get more funding to expand the rooftop garden and build a garden curriculum that can be implemented in each grade level. The school is also working with its partners to create more field-trip experiences for students that directly engage with the content being taught.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Field trips! Field trips are an amazing way to provide high engagement and meaningful experiences with the content being taught. Try to research as much as possible beforehand so that the field trip can be an extension of the content students are learning in the classroom.
- See what you have! Environmental literacy opportunities are all around us. Engage first with the environment and materials you have before looking to expand.
- There are plenty of resources and materials out there with little to no cost for educators. DC is filled with organizations that have programming or curriculum for students and will cover the costs!