

District of Columbia Environmental Literacy Update June, 2021

BACKGROUND DATA

ELIT Summary [[Full report](#)]

The public school system in Washington, DC, is comprised of 67 local education agencies. DC Public Schools, the largest local agency, enrolls 53% of the total number of students enrolled in public schools and operates 115 school campuses. In addition, 66 charter school local education agencies serve the other 47% of students enrolled in public schools, and they operate across 123 school campuses. This report represents an accurate picture of environmental literacy efforts for students enrolled in DC Public Schools. DC Public Schools reported being somewhat prepared to implement high quality environmental education in both 2017 and 2019. In DC Public Schools, there is a systemwide MWEE in place at the elementary school level, and some MWEEs are available in both middle school and high school (but not system-wide). In 2019, DC Public Schools reported that funding and community partnerships were their greatest needs for support.

Standards of Learning

- DC does not have stand alone environmental literacy standards. The District adopted the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and created the [Environmental Literacy Framework](#), a guidance document that identifies knowledge and skills for environmental literacy and is aligned with NGSS performance expectations. DC's Early Learning Standards, revised in 2019, include science and engineering standards for students to investigate living things and the characteristics of Earth and space, and a social studies standard for students to demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between people and the environments in which they live. Additionally, DC is revising its state social studies standards. The [Social Studies Standards Guiding Principles](#) includes Knowledge and Skills guidance, with environmental literacy included as a knowledge framing topic.
- In science, the NGSS include standards that address climate change. The social studies standards currently being developed will include a discussion of climate change.
- Currently exploring how DC Science Assessment outcomes can measure environmental literacy.

Teacher Preparation

- Teacher professional development is coordinated by OSSE and DOEE, often in partnership with environmental education providers.
- OSSE has conducted sessions on environmental education for early learners and a summer institute for garden-based learning. Upcoming efforts will include place-based education training and outdoor learning.
- DOEE has hosted educator workshops at its Aquatic Resources Education Center. Additionally, a component of the DOEE's Overnight MWEE program is for partners to lead workshops and trainings to ensure teachers can incorporate MWEE components into their existing curriculum as well as support students in action and stewardship projects.

RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Successfully recruited a third cohort of teachers for the Environmental Literacy Leadership Cadre in fall 2019, a 2-year program where schools work to integrate environmental education into every grade level within their school in addition to developing environmental literacy resources for their peers. OSSE continues to engage schools from the first two cohorts ("alumni schools") to assist in sustainability of environmental programs.
- Updated in 2019, the District's Sustainable DC Plan 2.0 now includes education as a stand-alone topic area for sustainability implementation. The plan includes the goal to ensure every student in the District graduates with the knowledge to protect and restore their local environment, with a target of teaching 100 percent of children in the District about environmental and sustainability concepts by 2032.
- Released the updated state environmental literacy plan in January 2021. The 2020 plan builds upon progress that has been made in the eight years since the first plan was written and continues to encourage collaboration across agencies to promote quality environmental education programs for students.
- Piloted Capital LEAF (Leaders in Environmental Actions for our Future), a state-level program for green, healthy, sustainable schools. As a result, two schools have been recognized as US Green Ribbon Schools in 2021.

CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

Existing Environmental Education Efforts/Priorities

- Continued support for improved capacity of schools to provide healthy and safe environments for learning. In FY22, OSSE will leverage school investments in outdoor learning spaces to promote long-term instructional experiences and social-emotional learning opportunities, provide technical assistance, and develop resources.
- Overnight MWEE (OMWEE) Program: Traditionally, a free program that offers 5th graders attending District of Columbia Public or Charter Schools with a three-day, two-night overnight field study on watersheds and sustainability during the school year. Pivoted to a virtual model with three Virtual MWEE options for teachers to choose from were created with aligned Activity Boxes for students.
- The new [Nature Near Schools MWEE](#) pilot for SY22 will be allocated in 5 grants for grantees to run MWEE programming at or near school grounds. The emphasis is on MWEE programs that can easily be administered at schools and encourages students to be outdoors.
- Middle School Watershed Education are free multi-day programs that teach students about their local watersheds and the Chesapeake Bay.
- RiverSmart Schools for free installation of a schoolyard green space and Trash Free Schools that provides resources and education, all to reduce waste and improve water quality.
- DOEE Aquatic Resources Education Center (AREC) Student Field Trips and River Explorers Programs.
- Green Zone Environmental Program (focused on youth and young adults) and River Corps (adults) provides free field experience and classroom instruction, with a focus on green careers.
- Watershed Stewards Academy is a free 8-week hands-on certification course to District residents seeking to address local pollution problems in their local watersheds.

Existing Climate Change Education Efforts/Priorities

- [1-Minute Climate Change Films Challenge](#) (on hiatus) uses film and media arts as tools to explore the local impact of climate change.
- The Sustainable DC 2.0 Plan has a number of goals and priorities underneath both climate and education:
 - Climate: Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from all local sources to put us on track to eliminate emissions by 2050; advance physical adaptation and human preparedness to increase the District's resilience to climate change.
 - Education: Ensure every student in the District graduates with the knowledge to protect and restore their local environment; expand community education and engagement on sustainability practices that will help residents live green lifestyles and save money.

Connections with Natural Resource agencies

- [Community Stormwater Solutions Grants](#) provide start-up funding for innovative, community-oriented projects is administered with a collaboration between DOEE and the Chesapeake Bay Trust.
- The new DOEE [Nature Near Schools MWEE](#) emphasizes MWEE programs that can easily be administered at schools and encourages students to be outdoors so that more students can be reached by a MWEE program.
- Anacostia Region's Chesapeake Bay Capacity Assessment, funded by the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network (CBFN), is a regional 5-year capacity building effort to establish or enhance existing collaborative models to advance clean water and community health objectives in the Anacostia region. DOEE intends to promote stronger partnerships with programs like the Anacostia Capacity Assessment so that additional ways to support communities can be created.

Existing Educational Equity Efforts/Priorities

- OSSE's Guiding Principles for Continuous Education three recovery priorities: Safe Reopening, Student and Staff Well-Being, and Accelerated Learning. Within these priorities are several topics, which collectively set a vision of excellence and equity in the context of continuous education. There may be opportunities to connect environmental literacy efforts related to providing safe learning environments, ensuring access to high-quality grade-level content, and retaining effective practices used during distance learning.

- [Community Stormwater Solutions Grants](#) provide start-up funding for innovative, community-oriented projects aimed at improving water quality in the District, reducing trash, and raising awareness about what citizens can do to restore our rivers, streams, and parks.
- Watershed Partners Meetings: Bi-annual Watershed Partners Meeting was held virtually on March 18, 2021. The theme of the meeting was Environmental Education Success Stories and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice.
- Kingman and Heritage Island Redesign: a collaborative, community driven effort to develop a design and infrastructure to increase access and environmental education use of Kingman and Heritage Islands.

Opportunities

- Collaboration with environmental education partners to develop distance learning resources, such as a virtual livestream series with environmental experts, provides the opportunity to reach a greater number of students.
- The focus on [outdoor learning](#) plus an investment in technical assistance may result in increased interest in use of outdoor learning spaces past the recovery phase.

Challenges

- As an all-volunteer organization, the DC Environmental Education Consortium is finding it challenging to maintain a strong connection among current members, conduct outreach with newer organizations, and collaborate on emerging opportunities.
- Ensuring continuing funding for environmental education programs and initiatives into the future
- Hesitation for outdoor education and programming from schools or school administration that are unfamiliar with how it can be implemented on their campuses. In addition, schools appear to recognize systematic barriers or difficulty in accessing funding or programs, and are discouraged from pursuing opportunities.

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY NETWORK

State Working Group: Environmental Literacy Advisory Committee

NAAEE Affiliate: DC Environmental Education Consortium

FUNDING

Major State Funding Programs Supporting MWEE

- [Outdoor learning technical assistance](#) is funded by the federal ESSER II grant.
- [Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Fund](#): The monies deposited into the fund are used to implement projects and programs working to protect and restore District waterways, including education and outreach.
- [Overnight MWEE](#): provide a 3day/2night MWEE to at least 2,200 fifth grade students and their teachers in DC Public Schools and DC Public Charter Schools. This funding was temporarily suspended for SY22 due to the uncertainty posed by COVID-19 to make overnight, multi-day field trips possible.
- [New Nature Near Schools MWEE](#) pilot for SY22: This program will be allocated in 5 grants for grantees to run MWEE programming at or near school grounds. Lessons from this pilot will be utilized for a new RFA that encompasses OMWEE in 2022.
- [Middle School MWEE](#): Due to school distance learning, program was administered virtually and with action kits.

Active NOAA B-WET Grants

- No active B-WET grants between FY18-20 in DC

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