

# green schoolyards

FOR HEALTHY  
COMMUNITIES



Photo: Donnie Biggs

## CASE STUDY: Fairfax County Public Schools Get2Green

### MISSION:

Get2Green's mission is to promote student learning and action using the environment as a foundation. We will be model environmental stewards by investing in green infrastructure and resources, utilizing interdisciplinary environmental curriculum, and fostering community partnerships.

### GOAL:

One goal of the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), as stated in their Portrait of a Graduate, is **“for every FCPS graduate to be an ethical and global citizen and good steward of the environment.”**



## OVERVIEW

**(Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) Get2Green** was founded to support county-wide efforts to engage Pre-K-12 students in environmental stewardship and incorporate sustainability in the classroom. It was formed originally by a group of FCPS principals who came together to share and explore methods for engaging in environmental stewardship activities in schools. The concept of environmental stewardship resonates with administrators, teachers, parents, and students throughout the county. The Get2Green program has grown from the few schools that were involved in 2010 to now engage about 150 of the 198 schools in Fairfax County Public Schools. Green schoolyards are only one part of the program overall. Get2Green offers professional development,

access to resources, guidelines for engaging students in environmental stewardship activities, dashboard tools for monitoring energy and recycling, individualized support on a school-by-school basis, and more. Participation in Get2Green is voluntary within FCPS, making it especially compelling that three-quarters of the schools in the district are actively engaged with the program.

### THE WORK

**Get2Green** works in support of this goal by developing and implementing division-wide sustainability goals to guide stewardship work throughout FCPS. Those goals are tied explicitly to the FCPS Strategic Plan. The goals are comprehensive and detailed.

It is important to note that Get2Green approaches its work from a systems perspective. Everything from health and wellness to educational programming to transportation, energy, safety, and security are within the scope of Get2Green. One of the most effective ways in which Get2Green works is through its website. The website provides detailed information on how to start, implement, support, and assess student-driven environmental stewardship projects. It also provides data on energy, greenhouse gas emissions, and trash and recycling. It is not only key to the growing visibility and engagement of educators and community members in FCPS, it is a robust resource for anyone with access to the Internet.

## FUNDING

The major funding for Get2Green comes from within the overall budget of Fairfax County Public Schools, which supports the work of two employees dedicated to Get2Green: one in Instructional Services and the other in Facilities. However, the staff and community members are resourceful in finding additional funding for special projects. For example, Dominion Energy has provided funding for equipment to support the curriculum for a 9th grade environmental science course, including covering the costs of lab equipment. The Community Foundation for Northern Virginia has started an environmental fund and is helping to make it possible to expand the district's participation in the National Wildlife Federation's Eco-Schools USA program.

## WHO IS SERVED

Ultimately, both people and the planet are served by this project. Given its emphasis on developing good and ethical stewards of the environment, everyone benefits.



## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- > At least 150 of 198 schools are currently incorporating environmental studies into their classrooms.
- > There are 114 registered Eco-Schools in FCPS. Of those, more than 40 have received an award, and 15 of those have received the highest award, a Green Flag.
- > There are now nearly 90 edible gardens in the district and more than 100 wildlife habitats.



More information about Fairfax County Public School District's Get2Green initiative is available at [get2green.fcps.edu](http://get2green.fcps.edu)

## LESSONS LEARNED

- > There is passion, energy and commitment to care for the Earth within the daily lives of people of all ages.
- > It is easier for most elementary school teachers to incorporate environmental stewardship concepts within their curricula than it is for many secondary teachers, except science teachers who tend to have an affinity for the topics and approach.
- > Having a dedicated website to provide resources for teachers and others has boosted the visibility and engagement in Get2Green even beyond initial expectations.
- > Work with proven partners and collaborators.
- > Take the time to meet personally with the faculty and administrators in any school that wants to voluntarily incorporate green schoolyards, outdoor wildlife habitats, and energy conservation techniques, for example, because every school and its personnel have different needs and strengths.
- > Annual stakeholder meetings are an effective way to engage principals, teachers, students, partner organizations and community members in the work of Get2Green.



*Climate change, natural resource use, pollution, air and water quality, and other environmental challenges are current issues that will continue to challenge future generations. Student work on these issues lessens our county's environmental impact, brings together the community in pursuit of a common goal, and saves taxpayer dollars. In a county of over 1 million people and a school division that ranks among the largest in the nation, the work FCPS students and staff do can make a big difference in improving our environment and securing a sustainable future.*

—Ali Culhane, Program Specialist, and  
Donna Volkmann, Resource Teacher  
Get2Green