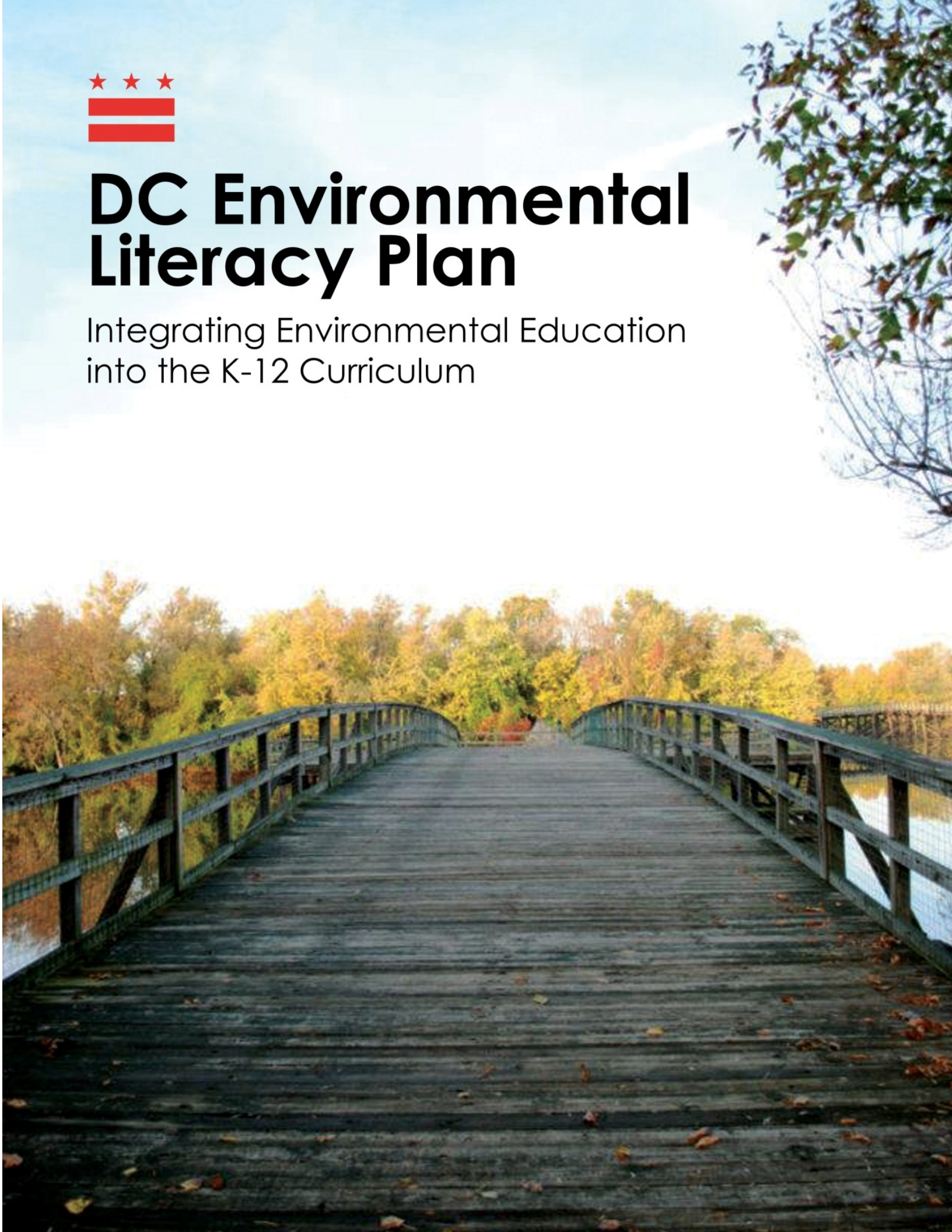
DC Environmental Literacy Plan

Integrating Environmental Education into the K-12 Curriculum



PREPARED BY THE DC ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PLAN WORKGROUP

Project Lead
District Department of the Environment

Partner Agencies and Organizations
DC Public Schools
DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education
DC Public Charter School Board
DC State Board of Education
DC Department of Parks and Recreation
University of the District of Columbia
DC Environmental Education Consortium

See Appendix A for a complete list of collaborators.

PHOTO CREDITS

Alice Ferguson Foundation
Anacostia Watershed Society
DC Environmental Education Consortium
District Department of the Environment
Earth Force
Living Classrooms – National Capital Region*
Project Learning Tree
Saturday Environmental Academy
Student Conservation Association
The Washington Post
Washington Youth Garden

* Cover Photo – Kingman Island Bridge

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We live in an age of increasing change and interdependency. Across the world, opportunities and challenges present themselves on almost a daily basis. Yet today's students – the future leaders of our country – often do not receive the education necessary to meet the demands of our competitive world. However, we can change this situation. In the District of Columbia, students deserve an education that addresses the relevant health, economic, and environmental concerns of our local and global community. They also deserve an education that creates opportunities for innovation and success. The DC Environmental Literacy Plan seeks to address many of these interrelated concerns and also empower today's students with the knowledge, skills, and environment worthy of a world-class education.

Environmental literacy is defined as the development of knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to make informed decisions concerning the relationships among natural and urban systems. In the District, an environmentally literate person discusses and describes ecological and environmental systems and human impacts on these systems; engages in hands-on, outdoor learning experiences that involve discovery, inquiry, and problem solving; formulates questions and analyzes information pertaining to his or her surrounding environment; and understands how to take actions that respect, restore, protect, and sustain the health and well-being of human communities and environmental systems.

With the unanimous passage of the Healthy Schools Act of 2010, the Council of the District of Columbia instituted legislation that prioritized the health and wellness of students throughout the District. This landmark piece of legislation addresses poor nutrition and inadequate physical activity. It also asserts that the environment plays a central role in supporting learning outcomes and maintaining life-long healthy behaviors.

As a result, the Healthy Schools Act calls for an environmental literacy plan for the District – a road map *that will lay the foundation for* District-wide implementation and integration of environmental education into the K-12 curriculum. This initiative facilitates the collaboration between key community stakeholders, including District education agencies, District schools, environmental education providers, health advocates and many others. The DC Environmental Literacy Plan provides a framework to further guide these efforts and ensure that District students will be prepared to make informed decisions concerning the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century.

The District Department of the Environment has led this effort, and has collaborated with District agencies, non-profit organizations, and other community members to create the DC Environmental Literacy Plan. Furthermore, the plan is the local component for regional and national environmental literacy efforts, such as the Chesapeake Bay Executive Order 13508 (issued on May 12, 2009) Citizen Stewardship mandate and the No Child Left Inside Act of 2011 (introduced into both chambers of Congress on July 14, 2011). These initiatives seek to empower future generations to make effective environmental decisions and become caretakers of our shared community.

The DC Environmental Literacy Plan (ELP) outlines the following objectives and goals for reaching them:

1) Integrate environmental literacy concepts into the K-12 curriculum.

- Align environmental literacy concepts with current standards.
- Engage every student in at least one Meaningful Outdoor Educational Experience at each grade level.
- Provide downloadable materials and on-line access to environmental literacy resources.
- Create a strategy for integrating environmental literacy into Next Generation Science Standards roll-out to schools.

2) Increase and improve environmental education and training for all stakeholders.

- Prepare pre-service and in-service teachers to be able to teach environmental education and foster environmental literacy.
- Provide workshops and training for environmental education professionals.
- Develop communities of practice to foster dialogue and capacity for environmental literacy.

3) Integrate environmental literacy into the secondary school experience.

- Increase the number of high school students enrolled in an environmental science course.
- Ensure that environmental literacy and meaningful outdoor educational experiences are discussed and addressed during revisions of the science graduation requirements.
- Increase participation in environmental service-learning as part of the community service graduation requirement.

4) Create meaningful measures of student environmental literacy.

- Collect baseline information of student performance in environmental literacy concepts within current science standards.
- Create environmental literacy assessment opportunities that are not test-driven.
- Incorporate environmental literacy into future student assessment tools.

5) Maximize school facilities and grounds to create learning opportunities for all students.

- School facilities support environmental concepts and practices.
- Create and maintain outdoor schoolyards spaces to encourage and support outdoor learning experiences.
- Encourage schools to apply to the U.S. Green Ribbon Schools program.

6) Encourage collaboration and engagement across all sectors involved in implementation.

- Cultivate and foster the knowledge and awareness necessary for the development and implementation of the DC Environmental Literacy Plan at Local Education Agencies (LEAs).
- Individual LEAs develop an Environmental Literacy Scope of Work and Implementation Plan.
- Each District agency demonstrates commitment and ownership of an Environmental Literacy Scope of Work and Implementation Plan.
- Create state infrastructure for implementation of the DC Environmental Literacy Plan.

To read the complete plan, please visit: http://ddoe.dc.gov.