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Innovative Water Education Program Starts in D.C. Schools
Be Water Wise DC Underway at 15 Elementary, Middle & High Schools

Washington, D.C. - Engaging students to help solve a real-world challenge facing the Washington area is the focus of a unique program underway at 15 participating schools. The program, Be Water Wise DC, kicked off with a workshop Saturday for teachers and facilities staff from the schools. A hallmark of the program is a public-private partnership among D.C. schools, city agencies, businesses and local organizations.

“Participating in Be Water Wise DC challenges students to develop their own solutions to the problem of stormwater runoff, which affects us as members of an urban community,” said D.C. Public Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson. “We’re excited to have schools in our district participate in the program this year and apply the problem-solving skills they have developed in the classroom to improve the local environment.”

Teacher Tameka Smallwood, who teaches 10th grade biology at H.D. Woodson STEM High School, attended the workshop at the Casey Trees headquarters. “Be Water Wise DC helps students understand the environment around them and connects what they are learning to the real world,” she said. “The program will be engaging, challenging and fulfilling for students.”

Be Water Wise DC was established by the nonprofit National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) and includes lesson plans and activities such as measuring water flow rates and determining total water use in school buildings and grounds. The program is made possible through the support of companies such as lead sponsor HSBC Bank, as well as local agencies and nonprofit organizations committed to protecting the region’s natural resources.

Managing stormwater is a challenge for D.C. and the region. When it rains, water flows across streets, sidewalks and parking lots. Along the way, the rainwater picks up oil, trash and other contaminants, carrying them to streams and rivers including the Anacostia and Potomac and, ultimately, the Chesapeake Bay.

Students participating in Be Water Wise DC will develop projects at their schools and in their local communities, such as planting rain gardens, installing rain barrels and other projects to reduce runoff and help rainwater soak into the ground. At the end of their projects next spring, students will present to city officials what they have learned and the solutions they have developed to understand how they could contribute to their local communities as adults.

“Be Water Wise DC serves as a model for public-private educational partnerships,” said Diane Wood, president of NEEF. “The program is able to tap into the technical expertise of companies like Johnson Controls and provide support to teachers so students can participate in science-based activities and projects using math, science and other academic skills with real-world applications to improve the environment.”

“Through our support for Be Water Wise DC we hope to make a positive contribution to environmental knowledge and water resource management to schools in and around our nation’s capital,” said Loretta Abrams, Senior Vice President of Community Investment, HSBC Bank USA. “Be Water Wise DC highlights the role we all can play in protecting local water resources in our community.”

Johnson Controls, Inc. is supporting Be Water Wise DC by providing technical support with engineers to train teachers and facilities staff to help students perform water measurement activities. “Innovative programs like Be Water Wise DC reap long-term benefits for the entire community as well as D.C. schools,” said Chuck Farina, Mid-Atlantic Regional Manager - Education, Johnson Controls, Inc. “Students see how simple steps save school resources and protect the environment at the same time.”

The Be Water Wise program was launched in Miami in the 2009-2010 school year at 14 schools. Based on the success in Miami, NEEF launched the program in Atlanta with 14 schools for 2010-2011 and now D.C. for 2011-2012.

In addition to HSBC Bank and Johnson Controls, Inc., other Be Water Wise DC partners include the Anacostia Watershed Society, Casey Trees, Clean Water America Alliance, DC Greenworks, DC Water, District of Columbia Public Schools, the District Department of the Environment, EnvironMentors, National Geographic Education, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Navy.

Participating schools include:

Ballou High School
Capital City Public Charter School
Cardozo High School
E.L. Haynes Public Charter School
H.D. Woodson STEM High School
John Eaton Elementary School
Mann Elementary School
Maury Elementary School
McKinley Technology High School
Seaton Elementary School
Sharpe Health School
Smothers Elementary School
Takoma Education Campus
Thomson Elementary School
Washington Latin Public Charter School

For more information about Be Water Wise, please visit www.eeweek.org/be_water_wise.

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