

Project Title EcoTeam Educators Club

School Campbell Elementary

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Brief summary of the project

Students in grade 3-5 applied to become EcoTeam Educators. This club meets once a month after school to learn about an environmental issue and how to teach their peers within the school about it. I.e. reducing, reusing, recycling, composting, consumerism, etc. Following the after-school meeting, students report to assigned classrooms throughout the rest of the week to lead morning meetings and teach classes about the content they have just learned. In the end, each class in the school chooses an environmental goal for the month that relates to the content learned.

Getting Going

How did the project start? I wanted a way for students to lead the way on the work the sustainability liaisons had been championing. If I wanted the buy-in I needed the message to be coming from their peers and not from me or other teachers.

Who were important people to contact at the beginning? I needed to coordinate with my principal and assistant principal in order to have approval for keeping kids after school. I also needed a teammate in this because it is a lot to coordinate so I asked my friend who is also our school's science-lead teacher. Lastly, I reached out to the rest of the teachers at a staff meeting to let them know this was my plan and to gauge their interest in having students take over their classrooms once a month during morning meetings. We also needed buy-in from the upper-grade classroom teachers to allow the EcoTeam members to miss morning meetings a few times a month to go teach in other classrooms.

What are the threshold resources that need to be identified at the beginning before proceeding further? (For example, robust parent volunteer network, elevated loading docks, nearby outdoor spigot). Access to a space to meet after school is needed.

What are the policies (if any) from APS or elsewhere that may affect the project and need to be considered? Certain topics, like composting, led to increased engagement. Many classes wanted to compost school-wide, even though schools county-wide have faced hurdles when trying to do this.

**Our school has a compost pile in our courtyard that allows us to compost snacks from the classrooms but it cannot sustain food from lunches as well. We are still looking into ways of

meeting that need. I have done extensive research with private composting companies as well as within the school district and have been told by APS Waste Management that recycling is the top priority and once that has been handled better then the district may be willing to open up an existing composting program.**

What budget and/or funding sources were needed? Little to no money is needed to coordinate this club because all materials needed are common household or classroom materials. We also asked students to bring low-waste snacks to our after-school meetings so we didn't need a budget for snacks.

Implementation

Did you pilot or test the project and then scale it up? If so, describe your process.

We began our first after-school meeting with a plan that quickly went awry. We learned quickly that the timeframe we gave ourselves after school was too short for students to learn the content and then learn how to teach it to their peers. We made adjustments and thereafter modeled the lesson students would teach each meeting and then allowed them to immediately begin practicing with the necessary materials. With this, they were able to see what the lesson should look like and then practice with a simple, pre-written script and the materials so they would be ready to do it the following days.

As you rolled the project out, how did you present this to students and encourage their participation?

EcoTeam Educators (students) learned the content and then everything was immediately turned over to them. They practiced their scripts, organized who would hold what materials, and even learned how to handle managing a room full of kids while trying to teach a lesson. I.e. attention-grabbing techniques, how to pair kids up, etc.

The rest of the school was encouraged to get involved during each lesson in their classrooms, whether it was through conversations, quick activities that modeled the environmental concepts, or setting a class goal that they all worked on throughout the rest of the month.

What obstacles were overcome? Are there continuing obstacles? What lessons did you learn from doing this?

Organizing the pairs or trios of students who would be going into various classrooms each morning throughout the week was challenging as both my partner and I are classroom teachers and were also managing our own classes at the same time. To try to keep things simple, we made a schedule for the kids so they knew the classrooms they would go to and on what days. They were encouraged to make a note to put in their locker so they could keep track but we also

emailed their teachers the schedule so they could help with reminders. If a student was absent we quickly subbed in a child who wasn't scheduled to teach that day.

On the day that they were scheduled to teach, they would report to my partner's classroom (across the hall from me) and would grab a pre-filled reusable bag. The bag would include all the materials needed to teach the lesson as well as an extra copy of the script. **It is important to note that these bags were filled BY the students at the after-school meeting so they knew exactly what was in the bags and how it had to be set up to be successful. After their lesson was completed, the students would return back to my partner's classroom and reorganize the materials in the bag to be ready for the next day's lesson.

This aspect was the most complicated because it relied heavily on students being organized and willing to put in the effort to organize the bag for someone else the next day. Over time it was getting better so I think that if we were able to continue through June and COVID didn't end school we would be doing this much more fluidly.

It might also be helpful to have at least one adult who isn't a classroom teacher available to help coordinate EcoTeam members in the mornings as they head to their classrooms to teach. It is challenging for a classroom teacher to do this part while also monitoring the students in their own class.

Will the project continue into future years? If so, how will you keep continuity? Do you plan modifications?

Yes, this project will continue next year. We will open the application process in the fall hopefully. We have decided to focus on independence and responsibility during the application process. Students who apply will have to provide short responses to why they should be chosen for EcoTeam as well as how they will show responsibility and independence.

What effect has it had on the school?

Students across all grades have learned more about the environment and about the waste problem facing humanity. Each class has worked successfully toward their goals.

Are there photos that could help others visualize how this worked for you? If so, please insert them here.



Replication

Do you have resources you used that would be helpful for someone trying to replicate this project? Would you be willing to share them?

We already have a Google Drive Folder with the slideshows we have prepared as well as scripts for the students and materials lists. Some resources we used were purchased from the Teachers Pay Teachers website prior to the club starting and happened to come in handy when we planned the lessons. (These resources are posters and not necessarily activities or videos)

It's important to note that we decided on the monthly topics when we realized that most kids think recycling is what the chasing arrows symbol means and is what is most important when caring for the Earth. We wanted to debunk this idea by teaching them the 3 R's in order and push heavily on the reducing and reusing in order for students to understand that those are the

first steps for a reason. Our activities were designed specifically for students to understand why each of these steps are important more so than recycling and the lessons that we can share with you in our Google Drive folder can help shed more light on what I mean.

Resource development got cut short due to COVID so it is not complete, but we would be happy to share the folder with anyone interested in replicating this project. We will continue to update the folder when we begin again in the fall.

Just email me: nicole.johnson@apsva.us and I will add you to the folder.

What else should someone wanting to implement a similar project at their school know?

This project takes some time to coordinate but if your staff is okay with kids coming in to teach and you have some enthusiastic students this club is great. It has led to more engagement and an increase in environmental knowledge, work, and enthusiasm across the school.