

## Federal Way School District

*Federal Way District Boosts School Garden and Restoration Ecology Projects Through Environmental Literacy Funding*

It's one thing to talk about a restoration project in a classroom, another to get outside and actually do it. Without proper tools and equipment, district Science Facilitator Megan Walker was concerned that middle school students in Federal Way Public Schools would be reduced to planning projects to restore salmon habitat on campus without ever getting their hands dirty. "Because of the Environmental Literacy grant, students will be able to get out and remove invasive species and install native plants on their school grounds," says Walker.

**ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY**



# ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PROJECT

The Federal Way district received Environmental Literacy grant funding for two projects. The first revolves around Storming the Sound with Salmon, a partnership between the district and the City of Federal Way since 2015. Every fourth-grade student participates in an annual salmon release event while secondary school students raise the salmon to be released.

“There are so many streams, rivers and lakes in Federal Way that almost all our schools are near a riparian habitat of some kind,” Walker explains. “We want to get our middle and high school students involved in improving the local environment that will affect the salmon we’re releasing.” Environmental Literacy funds are covering the cost of tools and equipment for middle school teachers to engage their students in restoration ecology.

Those funds will also pay to set up a native plant nursery at the district’s Employment Transition System (ETP) which provides life skills and job training to support scholars with severe disabilities to transition successfully into life after high school. “The restoration ecology project coincides beautifully with the work being done at our ETP site,” Walker notes. “It was a natural fit to have them start raising some of the native plants that can then be used by the middle school scholars when they do their restoration.”

The second project involves school gardens. Currently, six of the district’s 23 elementary schools have gardens and at four of those schools, approximately 600 students attend summer classes that incorporate a unit around gardening and reciprocity informed by Indigenous wisdom. Several new schools have also expressed interest in starting gardens.

Environmental Literacy funds will cover three components of this project. The first is garden kits to help new schools start gardens and create long-term plans that align with curricula and ensure staff and family buy-in. Next, signage will support GRUB’s Tend Gather Grow curriculum being integrated into a piloted exploratory CTE STEM Garden course in two middle schools in 2022-23 and will also reinforce lessons on native plants. Finally, Environmental Literacy funds will provide every first-grade student in the district with their own strawberry plant as part of a Strawberry Native American Storytelling unit. Last year, only a handful of schools had a plant for each student while the rest had to make do with one plant per classroom.

“The garden toolkits have shovels, wheelbarrows and fertilizer,” says School Garden Specialist Danielle Harrington. “They’re going to make it much easier for our schools to launch gardens next fall. Some funding also went to seeds and plants so it enabled us to get more perennials and replace plants that died in the greenhouse. Our elementary school gardens will be robust and beautiful, especially the four that will be hosting 600 kids for summer school.”

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Lacking outside funding, the plan was for individual schools to seek donations to build up infrastructure and purchase tools and equipment, according to. "None of that money comes from our departments, so it would have been a long-term budget planning process to work these projects in," Harrington explains. "The Environmental Literacy grant has streamlined the process and got us moving forward a lot quicker."