

Thurgood Marshall Academy and Earth Day Network

For the last two years, Earth Day Network has worked with teachers at [Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter High School](#) (TMA) in [Anacostia, Washington, DC](#) to start a Green Club, begin a school garden, raise environmental awareness in the school and community, and integrate environmental lessons into the school's curriculum.

Since its creation two years ago, the TMA Green Club has made major changes to the landscape and the culture of the school, and students, teachers, and community members have joined together to build the school garden, install solar panels, paint an eco mural, and institute a variety of ecologically sound practices from worm composting to more vigorous recycling.

On Tuesday, May 5, 2009, the Education team from Earth Day Network completed an extensive school greening project at TMA – with partners from the University of Phoenix and the National Audubon Society's [TogetherGreen](#) program and TMA teachers, students, and community volunteers - to add several improvements to the school's building and grounds. In addition, local environmental organizations convened at TMA for an afternoon hands-on educational Earth Fair event geared towards students. In addition to being featured in several media outlets, this project received letters of support from DC Mayor Adrian M. Fenty and US (shadow) Senator Paul Strauss (DC), who visited the school that day.

Earth Day Network chose this urban school in Southeastern, DC because it would benefit greatly from the donations and increase environmental awareness in the community, and because of success working with this school in the past. Since the May school greening event, Earth Day Network has continued to work with and provide support for TMA teachers and students over the summer, for this coming school year, and beyond.

School Background

Thurgood Marshall Academy

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Thurgood Marshall Academy opened in 2001 and resides in a renovated landmark facility in Historic Anacostia, a neighborhood in Southeast, DC. [This area](#) has the highest rates of poverty (36%) and child poverty (47%) in Washington, DC, as well as the lowest high school (33% in five years) and college (5% in five years) graduation rates in the District. In addition, children in TMA's vicinity have access to approximately 1/10 the social support organizations available to children in a similar neighborhood in Northwest, DC. These combined factors mean that students enter the 9th grade at TMA with skills averaging in the 5th – 6th grade range. As the area's first law-themed public charter high school, TMA was founded to meet critical community needs, and combines a comprehensive, standards-based curricula with education concerning law, democracy, and human rights. The school currently enrolls approximately 400 students in grades 9 –

12, with 99% of the student body being African American. 69% of these students qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch programs in 2007-2008. Student test scores have remained over three times higher than those of students in surrounding public high schools, and TMA holds a remarkable 100% college acceptance rate of graduates.

We were inspired to choose this school because of [past work with three teachers](#) at TMA through Earth Day Network's [National Civic Education Project \(NCEP\)](#). These teachers have shown great interest and effort in improving their school and providing environmental educational experiences for their students.

As indicators of environmental and social well-being continue to point to problems in this community, the TMA Garden has been a powerful local solution. Healthy eating, sustainable practices, and an appreciation for life are essential to the pursuit of social and environmental justice and education.

Basic Overview

Through Earth Day Network's National Civic Education Program, we have accomplished the following with TMA during the 2008-09 school year:

- Student-produced documentary about school lunch and healthy food has been filmed and edited throughout the year, previewed at the TMA greening event in May and to be aired at various local events this fall and beyond.
- Expansion of school garden increased the food production and exposure of the school garden, and increased students' ownership of garden maintenance and operation.
- Getting students outside through a field Trip to National Scenic Rivers and Wilderness Act Event.
- A field Trip to Accokeek Ecosystem Farm, where students learned the importance of sustainable land management and agriculture.
- Attended [Power Shift 2009](#), the largest-ever youth gathering of climate change.
- Sold and marketed twenty-five 300oz bags of worm castings at the Farmers Market to support Green Club.
- Used sustainable and organic gardening methods to protect the nearby (and heavily polluted) Anacostia River and promote green practices to students and community.
- Garden, solar panels, and other green initiatives have been implemented into several classroom curricula.
- Student awareness and attitude and overall school culture towards environmental issues has changed greatly in the last two years.

The May 5, 2009 greening project included the following:

- Installing 85 "smart" powerstrips to reduce energy usage in all classrooms and computer labs.
- Conducting US-EPA EnergySTAR Rating Program energy audit to show benefits of school greening and allow teachers and students to track their energy generation and savings.
- Painting a large student-designed, non-toxic eco-mural to be hung on a prominent wall of the school.

- Building raised beds to expand existing schoolyard vegetable garden, from three beds to thirteen.
- Building cold frames from locally salvaged construction materials to extend the garden's growing season.
- Creating educational garden labels and markers.
- Convening 14 eco-minded organizations to showcase and highlight greening features and educate the students and community about their work with engaging, hands-on activities at the afternoon Earth Fair.
- Unveiling the installation of 2.8 k/W solar panel system and educational energy monitoring display for use in the classroom. This will save the school approximately \$35,000 and 150,000 pounds of CO₂ over the 25 year warranty life of the system. The school's educational website and monitoring system can be viewed here:
<http://view2.fatspaniel.net/PV2Web/merge?&view=PV/standard/Simple&eid=265522>.
- Storm drain marking within school's vicinity to remind local residents not to pollute, since waste ends up in the local watershed.

Earth Day Network will continue to sponsor these and other efforts throughout the following school year with our National Civic Education Project. This will continue the creation and implementation of classroom education, garden maintenance, and other projects aimed at raising environmental awareness in the students, school, and community.

TMA teachers have already been working together to integrate the school garden into the curriculum. For example, Biology students already learn about plants, animals, and ecological cycles by tending the garden and creating compost from garden waste and worm castings. They have also taught lessons about the local urban watershed, using sustainable school gardening practices to illustrate the concepts of run-off, eutrophication, organic agriculture, soil health, etc. The English teacher has reserved a plot of the garden in order to create a "Literature Garden" and will be choosing this school year's reading list around books with flower, plant, garden or botanical themes. As the 2009-10 school year begins, the next main focus will be on facilitating the following major initiatives: a gardening mentor program that connects TMA students to a local middle school to teach younger students how to care for a garden and eat more healthily, a cooking classroom that helps community members utilize the produce, a cross-curricular guide for teachers that helps faculty introduce the garden into their classrooms at TMA and other local schools, and a business model that connects the students to the broader community and sustains the garden economically. They also plan to look for nearby garden sites to expand their garden and get more people involved.

Earth Day Network has also continued to communicate directly with TMA students, especially the officers of the Green Club. For example, Green Club Public Relations Officer Keith Jenkins, was a contributor to Earth Day Network's High School Activist Toolkit (website to go live in late August), providing his expertise on starting and caring for a school garden to other students across the country and beyond. We have also remained connected to 2009 Thurgood Marshall Academy graduate Dayna Hudson who

[was awarded the Stephen J. Trachtenberg Scholarship to the George Washington University](#), worth more than \$200,000 and was featured in *USA Today*. She was chosen for her class rank, GPA, SAT scores, course of study, teacher recommendations, leadership qualities, community service, and other extracurricular activities and achievements, including serving as President of TMA's Green Club.



TMA students and Earth Day Network staff building raised garden beds.



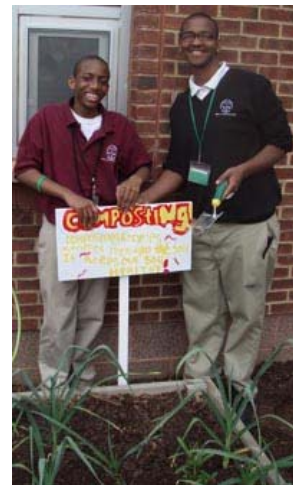
TMA students plant garden beds.



TMA students creating educational garden labels and plant markers.



TMA teachers, students and their families have worked to keep the garden flourishing all summer long.



Green Club members installing educational signs in and around garden beds.

