**Summary of Activities**

The Green School program at Veterans Elementary School (VES) has grown from small, individual efforts into permanent changes in how the school functions.  The overall goal was to make Green School efforts sustainable - both for the environment and so they could continue and thrive at VES.  We think we have met that challenge.  Being "green" at VES has become integrated into the school, rather than dependent upon a few individuals.  Some ways that VES has evolved into a Green School can be summarized in four categories, Facilities, Students, Teachers, and Community.

**Facilities**

Some examples of integrating "green" ideas into the way the VES facility runs are in recycling and waste reduction.  Recycling started at VES with the GT teachers and a student club.  The GT teachers ordered cardboard boxes for the classrooms and students were responsible for collecting paper from classrooms.  Now, six years later, as the program has evolved we have gone from paper only to a full recycling program. Gone are the cardboard boxes.  We now have more durable plastic bins throughout the building.  In addition, we have a student led group picking up recycling throughout the building on a weekly basis.  This has lead to an increase in recycling and a decrease in trash.  Staff members who work in the cafeteria encourage recycling.  At VES, we can recycle at school everything that Howard County residents can recycle at home.

Waste reduction efforts have also become mainstream.  To save money and paper, the main office requires that school handouts are given to "youngest and only" students instead of one to each student.  The weekly newsletter has gone from a paper copy to each family to a system of electronic newsletters with the option of receiving a paper copy.  As of 2014, this has reduced the weekly notices sent home from 839 to 65 families.

As part of the Howard County School System's initiative, Veterans has installed motion-sensored lighting in each classroom to save energy.  These sensors automatically turn the lights off after a certain period of time if there is no motion detected.  Custodial staff are using "greener," less toxic cleaning chemicals.  These are some highlights, and there are more examples in the application.

**Students**

At VES, students in each grade have an opportunity to do environment-themed learning and projects.  They are also introduced to conservation concepts in related arts classes through using recycled materials in art and singing Earth friendly songs in music.  The "green" projects each grade has done are outlined in the Environmental Issue Instruction section of this application.

Also, there are student clubs for students who have an extra interest in the environment.  These clubs include and Save the Sharks - a group that promote shark conservation, the Energy Savers encourage turning lights off when not in use, and the Waste Patrol goes around the building weekly to empty recycle bins.  The Green Team promotes recycling at VES and this year participated in preparing this re-certification website!!!   Student also stenciled "Don't Dump, Chesapeake Bay Drainage" on all of the storms drains on VES property, helped maintain the butterfly garden, and monitored bluebird nesting boxes.

**Teachers**

The Green School initiative at VES started with the GT program. Then a few teachers formed a loose group of interested individuals.  Now, each grades' team of teachers incorporates green projects into the classroom.  The county has incorporated environment literacy through developing a science curriculum promotes students going outside to investigate.  In addition to the county mandated curriculum, projects with an environmental theme have been done by every grade as well as art and music.

**Community**

Another goal of the VES Green School initiative was to involve the wider community.  Our expertise is in education, so it made sense to recruit outside help for environmental issues.  Also, we wanted to reach beyond the school walls and have students make a difference in the community.  The VES program has brought in Master Gardeners, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Howard County Recycling Division, and Howard County Office of Environmental Services employees, and parent volunteers to help create several of the green school projects detailed in the application.

VES has enhanced the environment beyond the school by sponsoring "green" charities such as the clean water group Blue Planet Run and by removing litter on school grounds and beyond.  VES students have also monitored and expanded the butterfly garden with the help of the Howard County Master Gardeners. Students have also continued to monitor bluebird boxes.

**Top Five Activities**

1. Integration of Green School concepts into operation and instruction at VES.  Examples include the PTA funding a Green School committee, and having all students involved in environment-themed learning projects each year.

2.  Cafeteria Program.  Recycling was improved from close to none when the school opened, to the ability to recycle everything that residents can recycle at home.  Recycling education had continued and improved.  In the Trash Free Tuesday program students developed and gave presentations at lunchtime educating students about creating less waste by using reusable containers to pack lunch.  Students also recycle drink pouches in a separate collection through Terracycle.

3.  Paper Recycling and Reduction.  Paper recycling is fully integrated into the school.  Individual grade teams and the central office have instituted paper reduction policies.  Recycling bins were also upgraded.

4.  Native Garden Butterfly Habitat.  Students, teachers, and community partners worked together to research, design, and plant a butterfly garden.  The garden with an instructional sign is a lovely symbol of VES' green commitment.  The garden has been used and maintained every year.  The garden is being expanded this year.

5.  Community Involvement.  The annual 20 Minute Cleanup and involvement in global charities show VES' environmental commitment outside of the school.  This empowers students to really make a difference.  VES teachers have also done a great job of bringing in outside experts for presentations and projects.