The Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative supports schools in prioritizing environmental literacy and prepares leaders to integrate environmental sustainability and climate-resilient practices across a school’s campus, curriculum, community, and culture.

Since its inception in 2017, the initiative has jump-started an array of school environmental programs, received Green Ribbon Awards from the California Department of Education, earned a 2020 Sustainability Award from Sustainable San Mateo County, and made the County Office of Education a state leader in environmental literacy education. Some highlights from 2019-20 and the start of 2020-21 are included below.

**San Mateo County Launches Youth Climate Ambassadors Program**

The County Office of Education’s Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative launched a Youth Climate Ambassadors (YCA) Leadership Program in January 2020 with local partners to help students explore a range of sustainability problems and solutions. Sixty high school students from across the county met virtually throughout the year to design and implement their own community impact project addressing climate change within their school or local community, such as installing rain barrels, planting native gardens, and setting up tri bin waste systems.

**County Office of Education Leads Local Efforts to Develop Outdoor Classrooms**

The County Office of Education partnered with Green Schoolyards America, the Lawrence Hall of Science, and Ten Strands through the National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative to support schools in creating outdoor learning spaces. This initiative formed 11 working groups who met regularly to discuss best practices and solutions for outdoor learning during COVID-19 as a way to reduce the risk of disease transmission and promote equitable learning. The project gained national recognition for support of school districts both within San Mateo County and across the United States. The project continued into the 2020-21 school year as more students returned to campus for in-person learning.

**Administrator Fellowship Expands to Year-Long Program**

In 2020, the Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative transitioned its Administrator Fellowship to a year-long paid program that supports administrators and educational leaders to drive environmental transformation across their school community. Ten fellows from six public school districts and one private school participated in monthly workshops, regular coaching sessions, and bi-annual retreats throughout the year. Each fellow was required to implement a community impact project on creating living schoolyards and outdoor classrooms, developing zero waste programs, and creating sustainability curriculum.

**Teacher Professional Learning Program Expands**

Nearly 120 teachers participated in the 2019-2020 Environmental Literacy Teacher Fellowship Program, which is a capacity-building program where teachers design and deliver solutions-oriented, project-based units on real-world environmental justice issues. In its sixth year, the program enhanced the experiential learning portions of its summer institute, implemented a new problem-project-based learning framework, and piloted more topical tracks, and expanded the number of instructional coaches to support participants. Through the collaborative, ELSI awarded 92 stipends totaling $68,750 to support educators in developing and implementing solutionary units in schools, reaching more than 7,500 students across the county.