



Department of Wildlife Resources' Virginia Naturally School Recognition Program

Welcome:

Virginia Naturally Schools is the official environmental education school recognition program of the Commonwealth, administered by the Department of Wildlife Resources.. This program recognizes the wonderful efforts of many Virginia schools to increase the environmental awareness and stewardship of our youngest citizens.

If your school has already been working with its community, resource agencies and businesses to include education about the environment in the curriculum then read on and apply for the Virginia Naturally School Recognition Award. This is not a one-time award but one upon which you may build and achieve additional recognitions each year you participate for up to ten years. It is our hope that you use the Virginia Naturally Program as a starting point on your journey to larger recognition programs such as The Virginia Department of Education's [Green Ribbon Schools](#) or the National Wildlife Federation's [Eco-Schools USA](#).

Goal:

To recognize those exemplary efforts undertaken by Virginia schools to increase the environmental awareness and stewardship of its students.

Award:

A tiered recognition program has been developed to award Virginia's schools:

- ❑ First year schools meeting the minimum requirements will receive a **Virginia Naturally** plaque.
- ❑ Schools maintaining and continuing their efforts in upcoming years will receive a pennant featuring one of Virginia's state symbols to hang in the school. A different pennant will be available for each additional year the school participates. Photos of the awards can be seen at <https://dwr.virginia.gov/education/school-recognition/awards/>

Application process:

Schools may submit applications between May 1 and June 30 of each school year. The recognition will be awarded in the following school year. Please read through the following pages that describe the application requirements for each application year. Once you have read through the requirements for each year of recognition, please click on the online application at the bottom of the [Virginia Naturally website](#). Since the application has moved online this year, we suggest answering each application in a savable document then copying and pasting your answers into the online form.

*Please be sure to include links to any relevant news articles/videos in your answers. If you have photos you would like to share, please upload all photos into a single document and attach it to your online application. Submitted photos may be used on to promote this program in print, on our website, or on social media. It is important that you have parent/guardian permission for each child that appears in the photographs that you upload.

****For applicants who completed conservation and environmental education work during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, when DWR was not accepting VAN applications-** If you would like to share your efforts, please include a summary of your work during these years when answering the question: "Describe the environmental efforts your school has undertaken within the last year. This will be the first short answer question in the Year 1 application and the second question in the Year 2-9 application. Year 10 applicants, feel free to attach a narrative or work it into your other application answers.*

Virginia Naturally School Recognition Program Criteria

To receive a plaque, first year schools need to complete activities that fall in the top 4 categories. The additional requirements added for each additional year a school participates in the program are noted below. By Year 6 you will be including requirements 1-7 in each additional application year.

1. **ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT:** There are measurable indicators of administrative support for conservation and environmental education programs. Indicators vary with the number of years the school participates. The administration should support field investigations and continued in-service related to Virginia's natural resources. Levels of support **may** include:
 - The scheduling of EE in-service workshops for staff.
 - The conservation and environmental-related state standards are part of overall school goals.
 - Support for staffs' efforts to include EE in their curriculum.
 - Majority of school is involved in conservation and environmental education efforts.
 - **Must include a new letter of recommendation from the school principal each application cycle.**
2. **STAFF DEVELOPMENT/ CURRICULUM INTEGRATION:** *High Quality* Professional Development that supports the integration of conservation and environmental education into the core areas of the curriculum such as:
 - The environmental-related objectives found in the VA Standards of Learning constitute a critical focus in the overall curriculum of the school.
 - Training on integrating the Outdoors (schoolyards, gardens and/or outdoor lab sites, etc.) as part of the overall program at all grade levels.
3. **RESOURCE CONSERVATION:** School has an action plan for the reduction of and the conservation of resources such as:
 - Energy and water conservation audits are conducted on an annual basis.
 - The school participates in school and/or community recycling programs.
 - The environmental health of the students, teachers and community is considered as part of the plan.
4. **MEANINGFUL FIELD EXPERIENCES:** The students are involved in grade level appropriate conservation and environmental education field experiences and action projects as defined by the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. *For example:*
 - Group has an official school or community-based project.
 - Students are involved in field investigations on and/or off the school grounds.
 - Student driven action projects and activities are supported and encouraged.

Resources:

https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/3915/1373/0920/ConEd-2015-Revision-Field_Investigations_.pdf

https://www.chesapeakebay.net/documents/Revised_MWEE_definition_-_FINAL.pdf

<https://www.cbf.org/document-library/education/teachers-guide-to-meaningful-watershed-education-experience.pdf>

Additional year recognitions require that schools also meet the criteria listed below

5. **Year 2+ new Requirement: LIBRARY/MEDIA CENTER, EQUIPMENT RESOURCES:** Additional resources have been made available to support conservation and environmental education efforts. *For example:*
 - The school maintains an inventory of up-to-date print and manipulative Environmental Education resource materials for teachers and students,
 - The school maintains an inventory of appropriate equipment for field observations and environmental monitoring such as field guides, insect nets and other field equipment.

Resources

https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/8615/1373/0948/Con-Ed-AFWA-PhotoPointMonitoring-Field_Investigations-Technology-Supplement_.pdf

https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/6715/1373/1342/Technology_for_Field_Investigations-CE_Strategy.pdf
6. **Year 3+ new Requirement INSTRUCTIONAL SETTING OR OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS:** The school recognizes that conservation and environmental education may take place outside of the classroom. *For example:*
 - The school grounds or nature area are developed in a manner that they provide for wildlife and are used for outdoor studies
 - The school maintains an inventory of animals and plants growing on the school grounds, and has a long-term plan for increasing species diversity.
 - School grounds Maintenance and Custodial staff are involved with the planning and implementation of the school's environmental program.
 - Teachers use the school grounds for field investigations

Resources:

<https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/4815/1373/1123/ConEd-Schoolyard-Biodiversity-Guide.pdf>

<https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/8515/1373/1089/ConEd-Fostering-Outdoor-Observation-Skills.pdf>

<https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/5615/1373/1150/ConEd-Landscape-Investigation-Guidelines.pdf>

7. Year 4+ new Requirement COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND SUPPORT:

- School works with a diversity of partners such as the PTA, civic groups, school alumni, parks, and corporations to support programs either with volunteers, materials or financial assistance.
- Each year, the school schedules personnel from public and/or private conservation or resource agencies to serve as classroom or assembly speakers, site consultants, or in-service or curriculum workshop leaders.
- School develops a long-term strategy for community involvement. (application years 5 and beyond)
- **Must include a Letter of Recommendation from a community partner each time for applications years 4-9**

Year 5+ Application is identical to Year 4 but asks you how your school has achieved additional growth in each of the 7 areas above and about your long term strategy for community involvement.

Applications for Years 6-9 ask you how your school has achieved additional growth in each of the 7 areas above each additional year you apply and asks how your school is specifically meeting the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement's goal of students across the Commonwealth having at least one [Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience](#) before they leave your school building.

Year 10 application: Congratulations you did it! This year your school will take its place alongside other VAN schools that have met the goals of the Virginia Naturally School Recognition program for a decade. You have worked hard and we want to hear your "success stories" – the experiences you shared as you worked together to achieve the goals that define your school's environmental stewardship efforts. For this application you will be asked to list three environmental goals your school addressed during the past year. The goal may be to begin a new initiative or to "tweak" activities in place that support a well-established project. For example, "School A" might determine to: "Increase grade level participation in our recycling program," while "School B" might determine to: "Begin work on establishing a school recycling program." Then for each goal we want to hear about your successes and challenges. Tell us what went right and/or describe a shared positive experience enjoyed by the students as they work on each of the goals listed. These experiences should reflect events that occurred during the past year. Be brief. A short paragraph per goal will suffice. When appropriate, student quotes about what working on that goal meant to them should be used here. Describe any challenges the students or staff faced as you worked to reach your stewardship goals. If these challenges were resolved, explain how. Now that you have completed 10 application cycles of VAN recognition we encourage you to also consider applying to larger recognition programs such as the [VDOE Green Ribbon Schools](#) or the [NWF's Eco-Schools USA](#).