



## **Blue Sky Fund FY23 Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences**

Blue Sky Fund's (BSF) mission is to provide transformational experiences for Richmond youth through outdoor education.

Blue Sky is grateful for the funding from the Department of Conservation and Recreation. This funding was used to provide Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences to 584 4th grade students and 40 teachers.

During the 2023-24 academic year, students participated in a series of hands-on experiences as well as meaningful discussion around our impact as individuals and communities on the health of our waterways. Specific to this grant, all our Explorer 4th grade participants had the opportunity to focus on Watershed by taking participants off school grounds into green spaces where they had the opportunity to:

- Utilize an EnviroScape model to demonstrate how pollutants in our neighborhoods and surrounding areas get into the waterways.
- Investigate biotic aspects of riverbanks to determine local ecosystem health and relate it to overall watershed health.
- Participate in discussions including prompts that ultimately lead to ways in which the health of the watershed can be improved
  - Actions by which individuals negatively impact the watershed
  - Positive actions individuals can take to protect the watershed against harmful practices
  - Actions individuals can take that will protect the watershed on a community level

Blue Sky Fund assesses the effectiveness and impact of the Explorers program across four impact areas: Academic Performance, Access to Nature, Resilience, and Educator Support

Through these trips, we continue to receive teacher feedback including: "[Blue Sky Fund] Educators can continue to make learning exciting. My scholars truly enjoyed themselves today."

The Explorers program began in 2008 and each year we continue to build on successes and determine both paths forward to overcome any challenges. During the 2023-24 academic year we have so far provided 1,854 3rd-5th grade students and 110 teachers with outdoor experiential learning.

Between September 2023 and March 2024 BSF participants have collectively experienced over 20,000 hours of experiential, outdoor science education across a total of 162 outdoor experiences as of March 28, 2024.