

2024-2025 Virginia Watershed Educational Programs Grant

This school year, 2024-25, Prince William Soil and Water Conservation District (PWSWCD), Prince William County Schools (PWCS) Office of Energy and Sustainability, and Envirocatalysts, LLC, offered two separate days of Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (MWEE) Teacher Trainings to increase the opportunity for teachers to be trained. We chose to work with High School teachers; a group that rarely does a MWEE. Each training was 8 hours long and instructed teachers and volunteers in facilitation of an on-site MWEE and student-led action project.

Our goal for these trainings was to educate and help connect teachers with the resources in our community. County school teachers and Prince William Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists spent the day learning about MWEEs, watersheds, natural resources, macroinvertebrates, and how their school fits in with all of those concepts. We had discussions on how students can use the knowledge they learned at a MWEE event and what types of action projects they can implement.

Teachers received materials and lesson plans to do activities with their students. All participants were fully engaged and interested in the activities, and there was lively discussion on how they would use those lessons for students in High School. We talked about how the activities are cross-curricular and could even be used for reading, math, science, social studies, and history. Overall, we received positive feedback about the 2024-25 MWEE trainings and had a measurably improved understanding of MWEE concepts. We asked the same assessment questions before and after the training, and found teachers had a better understanding of MWEE and watershed education concepts after the training was complete. After training, more attendees could correctly define watershed and indicator species; attendees were able to give more examples of pollutants and environmental action projects for students; and there was a much higher rate of teachers who felt comfortable hosting their own MWEE event. When we requested additional feedback on the training's effectiveness, we also received positive feedback. One teacher when asked if the activities were helpful in implementing a complete MWEE responded, "The training made me feel more confident about completing my own MWEE because I better understand how to include high school learners."

Our MWEE focused trainings gave teachers a much better understanding of how our partner organizations can help them host a successful and ongoing MWEE event. We realized that students going on a field trip to do a MWEE was counterproductive to the end goal of a student-led action project. The transportation and time constraints to do a field trip has always been a hurdle; case in point, we attempted to run a field trip MWEE as requested by a teacher this spring and it was cancelled due to bussing issues.

We are hugely appreciative to DCR for this opportunity to bring MWEEs to the classroom. These trainings were a great way to introduce teachers and community partners to hosting MWEEs at the students' schools and help them accomplish their projects locally.