



REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM OF
MARYLAND AFRICAN
AMERICAN HISTORY
& CULTURE



Maryland's First Ever High School Earth Optimism Club celebrates African American Heritage and History Month with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at the Chesapeake Math and IT Academy North High School

Educational partnership builds environmental literacy, leadership skills, and civic engagement

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Laurel, Maryland - Today, students at the Chesapeake Math and IT Academy North High School (CMIT), showcased their campus and community environmental work to officials from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Students in the Earth Optimism Club, the first in Maryland, are part of the Earth Optimism Youth Action and Leadership (EOYAL) program, an educational partnership that establishes a network of national and local organizations to advance youth-led conservation and environmental justice projects. The presentation was part of a school-wide Black History Month celebration.

Through the EOYAL program, high school students across the country are introduced to environmental literacy and leadership skills to inspire positive change in their communities. Part of a partnership between the Smithsonian Institution, the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History, Baltimore, Md., and the World Wildlife Fund, the students in CMIT's Earth Optimism Club identified environmental issues in their community, then created and executed project-based, community-focused solutions to those issues.

Students' solutions were made possible through seed funding provided by the Chesapeake Bay Trust. Examples of student projects include stormwater pollution, addressed through environmental art and litter excluders on storm drains; biodiversity loss, addressed by installing bird boxes and pollinator gardens with native plants; food waste, addressed by establishing a school-wide pilot compost program with Prince George's County; electronic waste, addressed by instituting e-waste collection program and using recycled e-art to help change behaviors.

Since spring 2022, students in the Earth Optimism Club have had the opportunity to work directly with and be mentored by subject matter experts from the Reginald F. Lewis Museum, the Smithsonian, and the World Wildlife Fund, as well as participate in varied field trips with local environmental groups, supported by funding from the Chesapeake Bay Trust. Through these experiences, students have learned about environmental concerns and solutions, environmental justice, and the power of community stewardship.

“We are honored to be part of this day celebrating African American History and bringing focus to the strong ties between students, communities, and our natural landscape,” said Dr. Kandis Boyd, Director of the EPA Chesapeake Bay Program. “Young people are our future, and I learned so much from these young people today about what they are doing to play a role in the future of our planet.’

By collaborating with young people on student-led solutions to the issues that are most meaningful to them, the EOYAL partners strive to achieve the program’s mission - demonstrating to students the power of their voices and ideas as agents of change who will conserve the Chesapeake Bay for generations to come.

“We are committed to helping the students of Maryland in their pursuit of environmentally just solutions to conserve the Chesapeake Bay,” said Terry Taylor, educator at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture in Baltimore. “CMIT’s Earth Optimism club has inspired the way that the program’s partners work with additional high schools across the state. Together we are nurturing Maryland’s future generation of environmental stewards.”

This is the first Earth Optimism Club in Maryland, joining a network of motivated young people in over 15 states being mentored by the Smithsonian since 2019, and the program’s partners have already begun scaling the model to other high schools in Maryland. As part of the EOYAL program, students make presentations to a panel of reviewers including scientists, government officials, and community leaders, to compete for seed funding for civic environmental action. The students also go on field trips, meet their local environmental leaders, learn about internship and career opportunities in environmental conservation (including paid internships with the Smithsonian), and gain volunteer service hours and leadership experience. Students deepen their understanding of the effects of local and global environmental change and human behavior on the health of their communities, as well as how they can affect sustainable behavior at the community level.

“We are excited by the work of the Earth Optimism club at Chesapeake Math and IT Academy North. Their success demonstrates the core message of the Smithsonian’s Earth Optimism initiative,” said Jennifer Brundage and Brian Coyle, co-directors of the EOYAL program. “With hope and positive action, EVERYONE can make a difference for our future on a sustainable planet.”

This award is one of many provided by the Chesapeake Bay Trust to engage students through regional K-12 environmental education programs. “We are so proud of and inspired by these students,” said Jana Davis, president of the Chesapeake Bay Trust. “Young people show us every day what is possible, and how each one of us can show Earth Optimism!”

About the Chesapeake Math and IT

Chesapeake Math and IT (CMIT) Academy North High School is a Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) public charter school in northern Prince George's County serving grades 9-12 with an academic program focusing on mathematics and information technologies (IT). CMIT Academy is home to a thriving education community in Prince George's County, serving all levels of primary education, from elementary to high school. The high school is the final step in the CMIT educational system with many STEM programs and initiatives, including the ITEC program, Science Olympiad, and robotics programs, among others, dedicated to enriching the education of the next generation of STEM students and professionals. The fundamental goal at CMIT Academy is to emphasize mathematics and IT education and to meet the needs of the Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) system to provide unique opportunities for Prince George's County youth to pursue professional careers as well as a college education in the high paying and ever-growing field of information technologies. Its core belief is that each child has an inherent curiosity, and a love of learning, as well as a unique intelligence, level of capability, and learning style. CMIT Academy, therefore, places great emphasis on fully motivating its students and guiding them to efficiently realize their fullest potential.

About the Smithsonian Institution

Established in 1846, the Smithsonian Institution is the world's largest museum, education, and research complex and one of the world's foremost research centers in science, the arts, and the humanities. The Smithsonian is widely recognized as a global scientific leader in ecology, biodiversity, and conservation, providing critical information for Earth's resilience and sustainability in the face of global change. The Smithsonian is committed to using all channels and innovative approaches to engage and educate all audiences about what life on a sustainable planet means and provide equitable opportunities for people from all backgrounds and communities to participate in important ways. The Smithsonian's Earth Optimism initiative is a movement that focuses on inspiring action and mobilizing a global community to work towards a sustainable future.

About the Reginald F Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History

Located two blocks from Inner Harbor in Downtown Baltimore, the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture – a Smithsonian Affiliate – documents, interprets, and preserves the complex experiences, contributions, and culture of Black people. It serves as a catalyst of sustained change by providing robust programs and exhibitions and bold conversations that educate and challenge. Founded in 2005, the 82,000-square-foot facility accommodates over 13,000 square feet of permanent and temporary exhibition space, hosting more than 10,000 objects in its permanent collection, special exhibitions, educational programs, and public events. For up-to-date information regarding programs and exhibits, visit www.lewismuseum.org, or follow on Instagram and Twitter at @LewisMuseum or on Facebook @RFLewisMuseum.

About the World Wildlife Fund

WWF is one of the world's leading conservation organizations, working in nearly 100 countries for over half a century to help people and nature thrive. With the support of more than 5 million members worldwide, WWF is dedicated to delivering science-based solutions to preserve the diversity and abundance of life on Earth, halt the degradation of the environment, and combat the climate crisis. Visit <http://www.worldwildlife.org> to learn more

and keep up with the latest conservation news by following [@WWFNews](#) on Twitter and signing up for newsletter and news alerts [here](#).

About the EPA Chesapeake Bay Program

EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program Office (CBPO) provides core management and leadership support for the [Chesapeake Bay Program](#), a unique regional partnership that has coordinated the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed since 1983. Bay Program partners include:

- the states of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia;
- the District of Columbia;
- the Chesapeake Bay Commission, a tri-state legislative body;
- EPA, representing the federal government;

The work of the Chesapeake Bay Program is guided by the 2014 *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*, which establishes 10 goals and 31 outcomes including sustainable fisheries, water quality, vital habitats, climate change, and toxic contaminants. The CBPO manages the partnership for EPA and is staffed by employees from several federal and state agencies, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions.

About the Chesapeake Bay Trust

The Chesapeake Bay Trust (www.cbtrust.org) envisions a restored and protected Chesapeake Bay watershed and other natural resources in our area, from the Coastal Bays to the Chesapeake to the Youghiogheny River. We empower local community-based groups on the ground with the resources they need to take on a meaningful and measurable role in restoring forests, streams, rivers, bays, wildlife, and more in their communities. Every year, the Trust empowers about 400 groups by providing grants and technical assistance to accomplish environmental education, community outreach, and local watershed restoration projects. The Trust is supported by the sale of the Chesapeake Bay license plate; donations to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund on the Maryland State income tax form; donations made by hunters, fishers, and boaters in the Maryland online natural resource licensing system; donations from individuals and corporations; and partnerships with private foundations and federal, state, and local governments. The Trust has received the highest rating from Charity Navigator for over two decades. On average, 90% of the Trust's expenditures are directed to its restoration and education programs.

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