

February 27th, 2021

Dear General Assembly Members,

My name is Lori Speelman and I am a Gifted and Talented Resource Teacher at Hollifield Station Elementary School in Howard County. This is my 30th year teaching and my students have been participating in CBF programs for over 10 years.

If I were physically in the room right now with you, I would give you an oyster. I would ask you to inspect it, observe it. What do you notice? What do you wonder? Many of you may ask? How old is the oyster? What role does the oyster play in the Bay? Why is it a keystone species? How does it filter the Bay's water?

This curiosity about the oyster is what we need to foster in our students! Take a moment to look around you. Almost everything you see was created by someone's curiosity!

The truth is, very little happens in the world around us without it.

We learn, grow, and improve from curiosity. This is where CBF comes into play. CBF's Educational programs take students outside to explore the Chesapeake Bay watershed where the curated activities encourage curiosity and a love of the Bay. Over the years, our students have participated in water quality testing, oyster dredging and investigations, trawling and seining for Bay organisms to look for biodiversity. Additionally, they have studied green architecture, and canoed on Black Walnut Creek to study tidal marshes. Students built their knowledge and actively constructed meaning for themselves as they discovered the importance of the Bay's health and how humans can positively and negatively affect their surroundings. What I love about the CBF educators is that they don't seek to provide any particular "right" answer in studying environmental issues with the students; they seek to instruct learners through self discovery as they evaluate different viewpoints.

Not only do the students learn about the Bay, they become stewards of the Bay, wanting to preserve and protect it. CBF programs have inspired our students to take action on their school grounds. Hollifield students have planted 150 trees on the school property to increase animal habitat and to reduce runoff. They made over 20 oyster reef balls to the increase oyster population in the Bay. The students have also reduced plastic bottle waste by raising funds and purchasing 3 water bottle refilling

stations in our school. I could go on and on. Our students truly want to make a difference!

Over the past few summers, our Howard County teachers have also participated in week long CBF summer courses where they designed Meaningful Watershed Educational experiences and integrated them into their existing curriculum. To support them in this role, CBF educators helped build the teachers' background knowledge of environmental issues and watershed concepts, and connected these issues to their curriculum. They shared environmental education pedagogy and gave them the confidence to lead students in the outdoors. After the 2019 Howard County Teacher's Course, one of the teachers summed up our week together: "The course helps one to see the need to teach future generations about the importance of protecting and preserving the watershed. The hands-on experience really modeled what I need to be doing with my students. Rather than just read about good practices, I lived it!"

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation is our oyster! They play a large role in educating our youth and teachers just like oysters are in the Bay! The knowledge of CBF educators is filtered down to our Maryland teachers and their students. If we want students to preserve and protect the Bay, they need to experience it for themselves. WE need CBF programs! Environmental Literacy is critically important for our future generations. **Please Remember the Oyster and restore CBF's State Aided Institution Funding in the Maryland State Department of Education budget!**

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