

Litter Kits in Schools Program

Keep Durham Beautiful

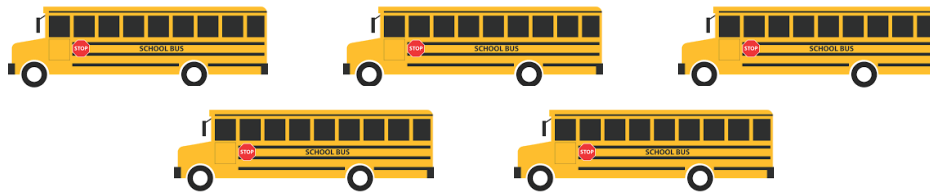
“[Litter Kits in Schools] has given some students their first chance at leadership, community service, and a positive sense of accomplishment.”



From March through December 2022, students from twenty schools in Durham removed

7,714 Pounds of Litter

from their school campuses and surrounding neighborhoods through Keep Durham Beautiful's Litter Kits in Schools Program. That's enough litter to fill approximately **five school busses!**



At Keep Durham Beautiful (KDB), our mission is to build environmentally just and healthy outdoor spaces in cooperation with Durham communities. KDB focuses on litter prevention, waste reduction, and community greening. We envision a community where every neighborhood, school, and workplace — without exception — is a clean, environmentally diverse, and beautiful place to live, where all residents feel a sense of belonging.

At Keep Durham Beautiful we spend a lot of time removing litter from the environment — in 2022 alone, we removed 94,500 pounds from the Durham environment — but it's often hard to find ways to prevent litter before it gets into our waterways, lines the roadsides, or ends up on school playgrounds. Educating and engaging youth in litter prevention and waste reduction builds a generation of students in Durham that have the knowledge, energy, and tools to make a difference.

Our Litter Kits in Schools program began in March 2022 with the goal of fostering environmental responsibility and stewardship in Durham students by providing litter cleanup kits and an accompanying litter and waste reduction curriculum to 20 schools. Litter Kits in Schools provides materials for participating schools to combine the in-class curriculum with an outdoor service-learning component. The kits are reusable, allowing the chance for all students at participating schools to benefit from the outdoor learning experience in a sustainable manner.

Since March 2022, around 1,970 students from Durham elementary, middle, and high schools have participated in the program conducting cleanups of their school campuses and the surrounding neighborhoods. These students have removed 7,714 pounds of litter from the environment — enough to fill approximately five school busses!

Before introducing the Litter Kits in Schools program, KDB frequently worked with Durham public, charter, and private schools and camps conducting litter prevention activities and projects on an inconsistent basis. However, the schools that often took advantage of these opportunities were primarily private or charter schools that had both the flexibility and resources to get students to the location of a service project or purchase a litter kit for their school. While we are still able to offer those kinds of opportunities to interested schools, through the Litter Kits in Schools program we are able to provide more equitable and consistent access to environmental education and outdoor service-learning opportunities.



(Left) Students from Merrick-Moore Elementary School show off the litter they removed following a campus cleanup. (Next Page) Students from Lakewood Elementary and Lakewood Montessori Middle removing trash from their school grounds.

When selecting schools for the program, priority was given to schools with 50% or more of the student population from marginalized communities, 50% or more of the student population eligible for free and reduced lunch, or an average science performance score below the average score for Durham Public Schools. By giving priority to these schools, we are able to distribute program supplies equitably and reach schools that might not regularly have the opportunity to engage in this type of service-learning experience.

Further illuminating the need for the program, we found through an initial needs assessment in October 2019 with 30 Durham Public Schools teachers that over 57% of the teachers had not incorporated environmental stewardship lessons in their classrooms over the previous two years. Moreover, 91% of the teachers expressed an interest in incorporating more stewardship lessons.

The curriculum guide, developed in collaboration with the Clean Water Education Partnership, a program of the Triangle J Council of Governments, contains activities aligned with 3rd-5th grade NC Science standards. The curriculum provides activities and resources for students to learn about recycling, waste reduction, and the impact of litter on the environment. Using the curriculum, students gain a better understanding of the importance of the litter cleanups they conduct on local waterways and ecosystems.

Litter Kits in Schools uniquely allows students to recognize that they can take action on sustainability issues and make tangible change in their communities. Teachers participating in the program have emphasized the sense of ownership Litter Kits in Schools gives their students. One noted that “the kids take a lot of pride in this and it has given some students their first chance at leadership, community service, and a positive sense of accomplishment.”

In June 2022, following the first three months of the program, 85% of the schools reported noticing a positive behavior change in their students as a result of the program. As students and teachers have become more familiar with the program, we have seen many of them develop ways to use the litter kit on a daily basis for small-scale cleanups like having the kits available to students during lunch or recess. Consistent student engagement in litter prevention shows the success of the program and its ability to engage students on sustainability and environmental stewardship in their daily lives.

Moreover, after a few months in the program, some students began to use their litter kits in creative ways including using the grabbers to sort items for their school-wide compost program or diverting litter from the landfill by using it to build found art sculptures in art class. These creative uses of the litter kits exemplify one of the many successes of the program and its ability, as one teacher noted, to build a “sense of community and partnership between students and teachers.”

Though Litter Kits in Schools has had an undeniable quantitative impact on reducing litter on school campuses, one of the biggest impacts of the program is in the ways it has inspired students. Litter Kits in School has “helped students feel empowered to make a difference in their community” and the kits have been a resource for students to connect to their very own outdoor spaces and see them through a stewardship eye,” said one participating teacher. This program instills a greater sense of pride, experience in caring for the community, and provides increased access for Durham students.

“This program helped students feel empowered to make a difference in their community. By cleaning up they became aware of the problem and talked more about the solution to help make our community better.”



Program Links: [LKS StoryMap](#), [Pilot Launch Photos](#), [2022/2023 Photos](#), [Curriculum Guide](#)