



## community development partnership

*Creating opportunities for people to live, work, and thrive on the Lower Cape*

### What's young and smart and green all over?

***"Recycling is important because it helps keep the earth alive."***

Ella, 6

Founded in 1982, The Laurel School is a small innovative learning environment that serves children from pre-school to 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Located on a wooded lot, down a dirt road in Brewster, the school has sought to fulfill its mission of "...nature, service, community connections...helping (their students) to become responsible architects of positive change in the world."



As part of that change, the school's leadership wanted to do more in the way of recycling and the "greening" of how they went about their day to day business. Last summer, one of the parents mentioned to Courtney Mills, Director of Operations and Admissions, that the CDP offered a Cape & Islands Green Certification Program. When Mills took the course in October, she was pleased to learn that the school was already doing a number of the things that were discussed during the training. There were, of course, plenty of opportunities for improvement.

"There is so much waste in a school," remarks Mills. She realized that it is important to "Just take baby steps, do one thing at a time. If you look at the big picture it can be overwhelming."

In pre-K they chose to focus on using a paper bags for trash, with the goal of reducing the quantity of trash to one full bag per week. While quite a big challenge for four-year-olds, little changes add up. In Ms. Walsh's pre-school class, for example, children were pulling out large amounts of paper towels to dry their small hands. So, she put a green line below the dispenser which provides the children with a visual aid to limit the number of towels that are used. Teachers also encourage students to switch to re-usables in their lunchboxes. Lilli-Marie, 8, a student in Ms. Pearce-Small's class, says her mother is already trying to get rid of plastics in the house, "I told her I wanted to start using silverware."

The school has implemented a number of other strategies, including the purchase of an energy-efficient printer/copier. "We do a lot of composting and I switched to an all-natural cleaning service," says Mills. "We're also conscious about the packaging that our commercial vendors use and that helps guide our decisions."

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3 Main Street Mercantile, Unit 7 Eastham, MA 02642  
P 508.240.7873 F 508.240.5085 E [contact@capecdp.org](mailto:contact@capecdp.org)

[www.capecdp.org](http://www.capecdp.org)



One of the big adjustments was related to the teacher's coffee breaks. They all agreed that the use of K-cups was not upholding the ideals that they were setting for themselves or the school, so they switched to recycled containers which are emptied of grinds and then composted. The cups themselves, although compostable, are often used in projects.

Recycling has incorporated itself into the curriculum as well – whether it is a color wheel being created as part of a science lesson or a mixed-media work of art made from trash. Plans are underway to increase composting efforts for their greenhouse horticulture program.

The concept of being thoughtful environmentalists pervades the school culture. According to Mills, faculty is great about sharing and getting the kids on board. Last year the students were studying about plastics in the ocean and on their own decided to support the marine mammal rescue efforts of a local nonprofit.

In December during the holiday break, the school completed a number of upgrades through the Cape Light Compact. New lights, thermostats and motion sensors we're all replaced. "Within the next year we would love to go to a Level II certification," notes Mills. "Our goal is to get to a point where we only need one dumpster and not two! Zero to minimal waste would be good!"

Mills' advice to others considering becoming certified, "Baby steps. Take it one week at a time. It is worth it."

The next Cape & Islands Green Certification will take place on October 30. If your business or organization is interested in adopting green business practice and becoming Cape & Islands Green, contact Pam Andersen, Director of the CDP's Business & Credit Programs at [pam@capecdp.org](mailto:pam@capecdp.org)

