

Making a Splash with Kids

A Virginia utility's award-winning online learning program with mascots Drip and Drop helps educators teach students about water

By Sandra Buettner

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Hearts and Minds



Elementary school students take part in an exercise called the Water Cycle Dance.

The Prince William County Service Authority has had a varied and engaging education program for years.

But when COVID hit, staff members knew they had to help teachers keep carrying the torch for water education. So they created the H2Go Kids! online learning program for educators and students in K-6. Materials use cartoon characters Drip (K-3) and Drop (4-6) to teach students about water and wastewater.

“There was a period right when the pandemic hit where even virtual learning was restricted,” recalls Kathy Bentz, director of communications and community engagement. “So we needed something to keep the children entertained and interested in water conservation.

“For that reason, our community outreach group created H2Go Kids! It includes experiments, videos, games, activity and coloring sheets and comics, all related to water.” Parents learned along with the children during COVID time, and they continue to work alongside their kids using the program.

WORKS OF ART

The Prince William County Service Authority, on the Potomac River, serves Virginia’s second most populous county, with 506,000 residents. The authority’s H.L. Mooney Advanced Water Reclamation Facility has a design capacity of 24 mgd.

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In H2Go Kids!, the community outreach and graphic arts department created a program with fun characters that the kids could relate to. “Hence the birth of Drip and Drop,” says Michelle Miranda, community outreach supervisor. “The characters have a distinct look and are featured throughout the activities.”

Later more characters were created, including drops of water wearing hard hats, men and women, with different skin tones, making them diverse and so more relatable. The program was tested on staff members to see what activities their kids enjoyed and what they liked about them. H2Go Kids! is promoted through social media, emails to educators and news releases.

MESHING WITH THE CURRICULUM

The H2Go Kids! modules include various activities, all tied to Standard of Learning requirements for the grade levels and coinciding with the educators’ curriculum.

The modules include:

Experiments. This section is the most popular section with kids and teachers. The experiments can be done at home and include determining the real weight of water, what to flush and not flush, creating a mini water cycle and creating a water filter.

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Videos. Building on the lessons learned in the experiments, videos show students how to create their own experiments at home.

Activity sheets. These items teach students how much water is used for everyday functions like washing dishes and taking a shower. They also include mazes and word search games.

Coloring sheets. Kids can color characters who show them why we need water; how to use water wisely; why fats, oils and grease do not belong in the drain; and more.

Writing prompts and comics. This section includes comic characters who teach about good water practices in fun and amusing ways.

Pipeline Pals. Clever cartoon characters use games to show the children how to be good water stewards.

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Classroom presentations. Recorded and live classroom presentations via Zoom are available to teachers. The lessons align with the Standards of Learning for elementary students and cover content including aquifers, watersheds and pollution prevention.

WINNING RECOGNITION

H2Go Kids! won the 2023 National Environmental Achievement Award in the Public Information and Education in the E-Media category from the National Association for Clean Water Agencies.

Miranda notes that the program has been picking up steam and in the last four years has been viewed and used by some 40,000 educators and students. “The educators help us keep track of the numbers,” she says. Some teachers who have relocated still contact the authority to use the program in their new positions.

“Our partnership with Prince William County schools is what makes this thing tick,” says Bentz. “The schools have a foundation called SPARK, for Supporting Partnerships and Resources for Kids, that connects our community to the schools. It’s an amazing foundation with the educators.”

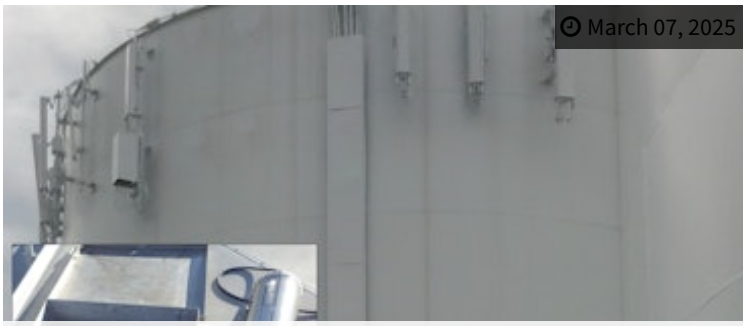
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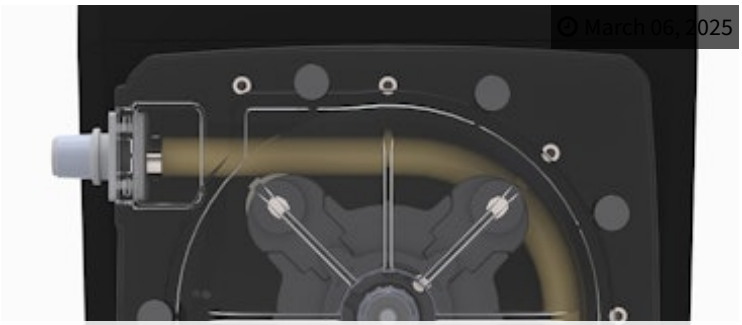
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