



A Multi Media Exhibition Program
As Told Through the Eyes of Students

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Story of Our Schools celebrates the role of schools within our city's rich history. We facilitate a process of self-discovery for students and local communities by creating permanent, history-based exhibits in D.C. schools. These interactive learning projects engage current and future students, instill a sense of pride in the school community, excite prospective families and local residents, and leave a positive legacy for future generations.

The District of Columbia schools are in the national spotlight for reform and innovation. Nestled in a vibrant urban setting, our schools are anchors and reflections of their communities and the city as a whole. Despite significant social and economic challenges, DC schools have made positive contributions to historical desegregation, evolving neighborhoods, changing demographics, and the architectural cityscape. They have produced great leaders, innovators, and scholars. Each school has a unique story that deserves to be told and used as an ongoing educational tool.

Neighborhoods change, residents move, and students often commute to schools distant from where they live. New students, parents, and community members have, in many cases, never considered the roots of their school and the neighborhood it historically served. By preserving and displaying the community's history, we can enrich our newcomers as well as long-term residents with a dynamic cultural and historical understanding of their school. We walk through historical stories every day in Washington, DC. We believe that schools are places that tell a critical part of the DC story.

**THE EDUCATIONAL
POWER of
SCHOOL-BASED
EXHIBITS**

Exhibits are excellent tools for teaching history, culture, and critical thinking skills. They are big and bold and engage the senses on a level not often encountered in our daily print and digital worlds. They attract interest, introduce new topics, and encourage further study and conversation. Washington, D.C. already has a rich environment of traveling and permanent exhibits. The Story of Our Schools brings the exhibit experience directly into communities by helping local students develop unique storylines focused on their schools. In schools, exhibits create welcoming spaces designed for learning, improve aesthetics, promote community, provide opportunities for enhancing curriculum, inspire further research projects, and spark engaging conversations.

**ACCURATE &
ENGAGING
STORIES –
THROUGH
STUDENTS’ EYES**

With the guidance of dedicated teachers and standards-aligned curriculum, students have the opportunity to participate throughout the exhibit development process, gaining critical analytical writing and creative skills. The Story of Our Schools’ approach is grounded in experiential or project-based learning strategies that seek to create student-centered, hands-on learning environments. Students collaborate with classmates to develop meaningful questions to explore, research the answers, develop their ideas, and present their work to others. At each step in the process, teachers act as facilitators, providing guidance with regard to the core skills (such as researching, writing, and presenting), while allowing student self-direction at a high level.

By teaming with DC historical institutions, students learn research techniques and experience precious historical collections and artifacts first hand. If audio or video elements are selected, students have the opportunity to interview community members or family members for a documentary presentation. Ultimately, the final story is approved and produced by a coordinated effort of The Story of Our Schools team (which includes curators, exhibit designers, and exhibit fabricators), historical institutions and/or libraries, community members, and the school’s teachers and principal. The collaborative process ensures that the story is appropriate for the school, factually accurate, and lends itself to exhibition.

EACH SCHOOL HAS A UNIQUE STORY

Each school's exhibit has a unique story to tell. Some might portray the school's historic role in relation to broader sociological changes. Some might tell stories of successful graduates, both celebrities and ordinary people, to give students an image of the possible. Some might tell the stories of the people the schools are named after. The possibilities are endless.

Exhibits are defined by themes, physical space, and available resources. Introductory texts present overviews; the exhibits that follow draw people into the story with techniques such as wall-sized murals; photographs and graphics; artifacts such as pennants, trophies, athletic gear, and art projects; technology to showcase oral histories and other audio and video; interactive elements such as flip-books or touch-screen computer modules; or a "Junior Historian's Corner," to allow students to further investigate topics and display additional work. Schools are busy places, so the exhibits must be made of durable, high-quality materials that allow easy cleaning and are, as much as possible, otherwise maintenance-free.

BENEFITS of THE STORY of OUR SCHOOLS PROGRAM

STUDENTS

- Reinforces research, analytic, and writing skills in a real-world setting
- Incorporates multimedia into projects
- Instills a sense of pride in the school community
- Teaches teamwork, communication, and collaboration skills
- Provides experiential learning opportunities through field trips
- Creates a positive legacy for students
- Increases social and cultural capital

TEACHERS

- Provides curriculum for a year-long research-based learning program
- Facilitates students' leadership throughout the research and development process
- Incorporates project-based learning with support from expert educators, curators, and historians
- Aligns with rigorous DC standards
- Invests new partners in the school
- Provides opportunities to engage members of the broader community in the learning process

SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY

- Creates a new learning and visitor space
- Tells a unique story that the school community wants to share
- Brings unique elements to school building modernizations
- Brings history alive
- Engages the broader school community
- Informs prospective families
- Excites long-term residents

THE STORY of OUR SCHOOLS SITES

We are honored to partner with two District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) on our first two sites - Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan (CHML) in Ward 6 and Marie Reed Elementary School (Marie Reed) in Ward 1. Even though our pilot schools are a part of DCPS, our programming is available to all DC schools, both public and private.

Starting in the fall of 2015, The Story of Our Schools partnered with CHML and the students of The Logan Club, an after-school history club that met once a week for an hour and a half. Guided by two CHML teachers, approximately 25 students in 1st - 8th grades participated in the program. Their mission was to research their school's namesake and the history of their school and its surrounding community. Our students experienced hands-on primary research, student-led interviews with long-term community members and alumni, field trips to local museums and archives, historical photo research, and a wide range of guest speakers including curators, collection managers, exhibit designers, civil war reenactors, historians, and librarians. The students unearthed a wealth of content, and their permanent exhibit was revealed during a widely attended community event in October 2017.

During the 2016 - 2017 school year, Marie Reed underwent a full modernization to restore the building's original intent - a space that brings together learning and the community. The new school building includes a Legacy Walk, a prominently located space for museum-quality exhibits developed through The Story of Our Schools program. Approximately 10 Marie Reed students in 2nd - 5th grades participated in an after-school club that met for an hour each week. As with CHML, the students' mission was to research their school's namesake, dive into their school's history, and engage area residents with similar experiences and guidance from a Marie Reed teacher. Our programming has successfully ended, producing enough content to design an exhibit housed in the Legacy Walk. With a targeted reveal of 2018, the exhibit will engage the entire school community.

SUPPORTERS

- District of Columbia Public Schools
- Penn Hill Group
- National Capital Bank
- Capitol Hill Community Foundation
- Capitol Hill Montessori @ Logan PTSO
- ANC6c
- Appointed
- ANC1c

**CONTACT
INFORMATION**

Jen Harris
306 16th Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003

www.storyofourschools.org

410.703.3812
jen@storyofourschools.org