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Maryland Commission on Climate Change and Maryland Teacher of the Year Kickoff Maryland Climate Education Week

Annapolis, MD – The fervent drive for climate education took center stage today as the Maryland Commission on Climate Change, in collaboration with the Maryland Teacher of the Year Mary Kay Connerton, kicked-off the Second Annual "Maryland Climate Education Teach-In, in observation of "Maryland Climate Education Week." Connerton is the spokesperson for this year's statewide Teach-In. Held at Annapolis High, where Connerton serves as the health and wellness coordinator, the event was hosted by Audra Whaland, AHS Principal, who served as master of ceremonies. Commission Chair Serena McIlwain, Secretary of the Maryland Department of the Environment, set the event's tone with compelling opening remarks.

Secretary McIlwain presented a framed Governor's proclamation to Connerton, emphasizing the significance of the Teach-Ins as part of Governor Moore's "Climate Education Week." McIlwain said, "The Commission on Climate Change's sponsored Teach-Ins all around the state coincide with Governor Moore's proclamation that the first week of April is 'Climate Education Week.' The Commission established the annual Climate Teach-In to encourage all Marylanders, especially young people, to think and talk about something incredibly important: the climate crisis." McIlwain also presented a Red Bud tree to the school to plant on the grounds.

The event featured an enlightening keynote address titled "Food Waste as a Frontier for Action, Legislation, and Education" delivered by Advika Agarwal, Co-founder and Co-president of Compostology. Agarwal, along with co-president Angelina Xu, initiated Compostology during their high school years in 2020, aiming to introduce food rescue

and diversion to every school in their county (Montgomery) in Maryland. What began as a local endeavor has now blossomed into a nationwide movement, as their nonprofit actively champions food waste consciousness and helps schools and other institutions implement sustainable composting practices.

Agarwal said, "While teaching K-12 youth about environmental action and civic engagement over the past five years, Compostology has seen that cultivating a generation of youth who genuinely care for our planet is a key path forward. The Teach-In and Maryland Climate Education Week are important milestones in our goal to make environmental leadership accessible."

After the keynote, Connerton, a certified yoga instructor, guided attendees through a meditative yoga session. Then the school assembly engaged in a lively discussion with a panel comprising climate professionals from the Commission's Education, Communication, and Outreach Working Group, alongside "green ambassadors" from Bowie State University and "Green Club" members of Annapolis High.

Speaking on the significance of Climate Education Week and the Teach-Ins, Connerton emphasized, "During Climate Education Week and through the Teach-Ins, students gain critical thinking skills to evaluate solutions to the climate crisis. They also develop empathy for the most vulnerable communities bearing the brunt of droughts, sea level rise and pollution caused by Climate Change."

As a good faith effort, educators and organizations are encouraged to pledge their commitment to "Make Climate a Class" or adopt other avenues to discuss Climate Change during the first week of April. The Commission invites participants to register their plans to celebrate the week, with more than 75 schools and organizations participating this week. To register a plan, and for more information and plentiful resources to create a Teach-In, visit the Climate Teach-In page via mde.maryland.gov/MCCC.

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