

*EPA notice about Jacqueline Omania's Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators:*

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Subject: U.S. EPA - Teacher in Congresswoman Barbara Lee's District Selected for Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators

Office of Congresswoman Barbara Lee

Dear Colleagues:

The Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators is a prestigious award that recognizes outstanding kindergarten through grade 12 teachers who employ innovative approaches to environmental education and use the environment as a context for learning for their students. The White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administers this award to honor, support and encourage educators who incorporate environmental education in their classrooms and teaching methods. Winners receive a \$5,000 award for classroom supplies and professional development. **This year, we had a winner in Congresswoman Barbara Lee's District, Ms. Jacqueline Omania a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher from Oxford Elementary School in Berkeley.**

Ms. Omania has gone above and beyond in her teaching career to better her student's understanding of our natural world and conservation of its precious resources. Around 15 years ago, she was involved in the development of the well known Edible Schoolyard program founded by Alice Waters of the world famous Chez Panisse. More recently, Ms. Omania has focused her environmental education efforts on getting her students to think critically about how they generate waste in their daily lives and ways to reduce it. She created the Plastic Free Planet curriculum and leads an environmental club for students that meets weekly during lunch and provides a space for students to connect, practice public speaking and learn about the environment.

After learning about how landfill waste and its contribution to climate change affect our environment, Ms. Omania's class decided to challenge themselves to adopt a zero waste classroom ethos. This mentality involved changing many personal habits to live more sustainably and included using reusable utensils, opting to bake treats for birthdays instead bringing pre-packaged items, and purchasing classroom supplies in bulk with minimal packaging. The student's efforts were wildly successful as they only generated one quart sized jar of waste for the school year! These efforts saved around 360 gallons of landfill waste and 4,132 plastic disposable utensils. The student's full embracement of a zero waste classroom helped shift the paradigm on waste reduction from *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle* to *Reuse, Rethink Refuse*. Ms. Omania's class was also involved in helping the City of Berkeley pass its Plastic Free Resolution by collecting signatures at the Berkeley farmers' market and speaking at various venues about zero waste. Students spoke at press conferences, UC Berkeley's Brower Environmental Center and before the Berkeley City Council in support of the new law. Ms. Omania's dedication to her

students has rippled throughout the community as her students reach out to friends, parents and siblings to share what they have learned.

Link to Information on EPA's Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators Program: <https://www.epa.gov/education/presidential-innovation-award-environmental-educators>

**EPA Priority Area:** Preventing human contributions to ocean liter