**Maryland Environmental Literacy Update**

**June, 2019**

**State Working Group Update: Project Green Classrooms**

The **Maryland Project Green Classrooms Initiative** is was established by a 2017 Governor's Executive Order. The coalition of eight state agencies and other government and non-government partners works to mobilize resources to ensure that Maryland's youth experience, understand and learn to conserve the natural environment. The Initiative serves as an advisory body, working collectively and across several sectors to identify gaps and barriers, and make recommendations to decision makers regarding solutions that will bring about change to advance in three main areas: supporting environmental literacy programs in schools; connecting people with green space such as parks and natural areas (addressing equitable access to "nearby nature"); and improving pathways to "green" careers. The group is co-chaired by Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Maryland State Department of Education.  Leadership of the group includes the Departments of Agriculture, Planning, Environment, Transportation, Health, and the Higher Education Commission; working with 14 additional formal partners*.* Although the work of the Initiative is broad in scope, several of the actions from the group’s annual plan are helping to meet the Environmental Literacy commitments for the state. An emphasis this year has been on implementing efforts that work on a statewide scale to help facilitate delivery of environmental literacy programs -- such as raising awareness of public lands that can be used for outdoor learning, improving access to those green spaces, and providing more professional development and instructional resources for educators in a coordinated manner. These efforts are blending needs of schools with those of communities that help create a continuum of capacity to build, support, and nurture environmentally literate Marylanders.

**NAAEE Affiliate Update: The Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE)**

The Maryland Legislature recently passed the Maryland Green Schools Act of 2019, calling for a significant increase in the number of schools statewide that conduct sustainable practices involving students and that become certified as Green Schools. The Act allows for funding to support environmental learning and stewardship efforts beginning in Fiscal Year 2021 to:  (1) support professional development, assist with student transportation to and from environmentally focused activities, or support school projects that incorporate environmental best practices; (2) increase the number of environmental educators in the State who will provide green schools training and assist schools with becoming green schools; (3) support statewide green school events; (4) conduct an annual evaluation by an independent contractor of the impact of the funds provided under the bill on increasing the number of green schools in the State; and (5) create an online application form for a school to apply for funding under the bill.

**Standards of Learning/Curriculum:**

Maryland Environmental Literacy standards are undergoing revision.  A [presentation](http://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/04232019/TabJ-EnvironmentalLiteracyStandards.pdf) to Maryland State Board of Education on April 23, 2019 resulted in draft approval and moving forward with the state protocol surrounding standards review.

**State Efforts to Support Environmental Literacy**

I.  Increasing and coordinating professional development to improve MWEE implementation:

1. MWEE 101 online course support provided by a team of Project Green Classrooms Environmental literacy professional learning committee members.
2. Development of Maryland module focused upon those issues, content standards and particular regulations of the state.  The ideal scenario is that this will be further modified to meet the needs of other states in the region.

II. **Emphasizing Outdoor Learning by Addressing Gaps**:

1. **Funding** is a top barrier to outdoor learning, especially for transportation and site fees for off-campus field experiences, but also for professional development to prepare teachers to facilitate outdoor learning. With funding from the Chesapeake Bay Implementation Grant, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources has opened a competitive solicitation for awards to support these needs among Maryland school systems, with priority for communities of need. Total funding available is a modest $100,000 for the current year, with anticipation of continuing for two more years.
2. **New tool to help schools and others find a park or green space to visit**. This new Story Map, "[Get Kids Outside in Marylan](http://bit.ly/GetKidsOutsideMD)d" (<http://bit.ly/GetKidsOutsideMD>) was developed to help improve awareness of and access to nature. It contains state, local, and Federal parks and facilities, and how to get there (foot paths, bike trails, roads, bus and train routes...). Many of these facilities schedule programs with schools or communities or hold events for families or groups. The map also contains public school locations, to show proximity to nature sites for learning during the school year. The tool was created by the Maryland Department of Transportation, as part of their partnership with Maryland Project Green Classrooms. It will help connect Marylanders with spaces to enjoy, and will help decision-makers to see where there may be gaps to fill in available green space or ways to get to it.
3. **III. Connecting sustainable schools to higher level state goals and commitments:** Gathering information that can be used to help frame and guide sustainable practices so that the 1,382 schools and associated 28,324 acres of property in Maryland can be utilized to help the state achieve its goals as outlined in state policies on renewable energy, greenhouse gas reduction, water and air quality, natural resources restoration and more; with emphasis on integrating best practices into curricular offerings to enhance environmental literacy programs.

**IV.** **Improving Pathways to “Green” Jobs and Careers:** The Chesapeake Youth & Young Professionals Portal, developed by Project Green Classrooms and hosted online by the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay's Chesapeake Network site [www.chesapeakenetwork.org/groups/chesapeake-youth-portal/](https://www.chesapeakenetwork.org/groups/chesapeake-youth-portal/), will serve as a centralized clearinghouse of green career opportunities and resources in Maryland -- especially for youth and people seeking entry-level positions, internships, volunteer opportunities; training; events such as job fairs; and other resources to build awareness, knowledge, skills, experience, and preparedness to enter the green career field. The site will also host a series of job profiles, being written by young people interviewing notable professionals in the field. As a companion effort, these resources will be promoted through K-12 teachers, school counselors, colleges, conservation corps and similar programs.

**Current Challenges**

* How can we best support equity and access while honoring cultural, economic and geographic diversity across the state?
* How do we craft professional learning opportunities that are so compelling that teachers are highly motivated to participate?

**Goals and Opportunities**

* Coordinate state agency resources and partners with CBP efforts to help increase the number of school systems with system-wide sustainability plans in place to guide school stewardship practices.
* Use lessons learned through the Outdoor Learning grants program to help determine needs of schools and opportunities on a larger scale, to aid in garnering increased, dedicated funding for the future.
* Stewardship projects in schools are increasing in terms of numbers and scope.  There is opportunity in providing support to help to facilitate student-driven planning and decision-making clearly connecting the students experiences to the project.

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