

Environmental Literacy

Background

In 1998, the Chesapeake Executive Council adopted Directive 98-1 formally recognizing the importance of education to the partnership. It outlined environmental education commitments by the Chesapeake Bay Program, departments of education and interagency education groups in each jurisdiction.

In the 2014 *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C. committed to helping their students graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to act responsibly to protect and restore their local watersheds. They will do this by achieving three outcomes:

- **Environmental Literacy Planning:** Developing a comprehensive and systemic approach to environmental literacy for students that includes policies, practices and voluntary metrics.
- **Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs):** Continually increasing students' understanding of the watershed through participation in teacher-supported Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences and rigorous, inquiry-based instruction.
- **Sustainable Schools:** Continually increasing the number of schools that reduce the impact of their buildings and grounds on the environment and human health.

Progress

In 2017, Chesapeake Bay Program partners have made the following progress:

- **Environmental Literacy Planning:** At least 22 percent of surveyed school districts identified as well-prepared to put environmental literacy programming in place. About half of these school districts are located in Virginia, and the other half in Maryland.
- **Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs):** At least one-third of the Chesapeake Bay watershed's public-school students were enrolled in a district providing system-wide MWEEs. At least 72 percent of responding districts reported providing MWEEs to at least some of their elementary students; at least 77 percent reported providing MWEEs to at least some of their middle school students; and at least 82 percent reported providing MWEEs to at least some of their high school students.
- **Sustainable Schools:** Fourteen percent of all public and charter schools in the Chesapeake Bay watershed—a total of 613 schools—were certified sustainable.

Since state departments of education set expectations, encourage innovation and oversee accountability for school districts and schools, their leadership is essential to achieving Environmental Literacy goal and outcomes. To better engage them, the Chesapeake Bay Program's Principals' Staff Committee, which is comprised of state secretaries of natural resources and agriculture, committed to convening with their education counterparts every two years to discuss progress towards meeting these goals and outcomes.