

# Chesapeake Bay Program

## PLANNING FOR 2025 AND BEYOND

### Modified Outcome Review



#### SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS OUTCOME [STEWARDSHIP GIT/EDUCATION WORKGROUP]

##### 2014 WATERSHED AGREEMENT: GOAL & OUTCOME LANGUAGE

**OUTCOME:** Continually increase the number of schools in the region that reduce the impact of their buildings and grounds on their local watershed, environment and human health through best practices, including student-led protection and restoration projects.

**ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY GOAL:** Enable every student in the region to graduate with the knowledge and skills to act responsibly to protect and restore their local watershed.

##### OUTCOME DISPOSITION ADVICE TO MANAGEMENT BOARD:

**RECLASSIFY**

##### **Recommendation:**

***Reclassify** as an indicator of the Environmental Literacy Planning Outcome. The Bay Program partnership is not currently well positioned to add significant value towards achieving the Sustainable Schools Outcome as it is currently represented.*

##### **Community Feedback Process Revealed Sustainable Schools Outcome Lacks Significant Partner Engagement**

In the summer of 2024, the Education Workgroup held twelve listening sessions with a total of 156 participants and distributed an asynchronous feedback form, which received 56 responses, to collect community input on progress toward the Environmental Literacy Goal, and community aspirations for the future of environmental literacy in the region. In addition, in December 2024 the Workgroup received 35 responses to Outcome Assessment questions asked by the Stewardship Goal Team. These findings were discussed with state agency representatives from DC, DE, MD, PA, and VA as well as the Mid-Atlantic Environmental Literacy Network Advisory Team (NAT), to ensure that the proposed outcome revisions aligned with state priorities.

This outcome received significantly less feedback than the Student and Environmental Literacy Planning Outcomes. The participants who responded expressed general support for updating this outcome, however, few people provided input and there was little specificity around what updates could improve the outcome.

##### **Sustainable Schools Outcome lacks CBP Champions and Funding**

This outcome has experienced several key challenges:

1. Strong partnerships with leaders and decision-makers in facilities and operations at both the state and local level are essential to achieve this outcome, however, these entities are not well represented in the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership and have been difficult to recruit.
2. Federal programs that support this work are not represented in the Chesapeake Bay Program and have proven difficult to engage as part of the partnership.

3. Sustainable Schools efforts fall outside of the mandate of the NOAA Bay Watershed Education & Training (B-WET) Program, which funds work in the Student and Planning outcomes. Other major funding sources have not been identified to advance this work.
4. Current partnerships focus on engaging students in learning and small-scale action projects about sustainable schools rather than focusing on large scale facilities efforts needed for schools to meaningfully impact water quality, habitat, and other environmental outcomes.

### **Sustainable Schools Support Environmental Literacy Preparedness and Restoration Outcomes**

Despite these challenges, the Education Workgroup acknowledges that sustainable schools' programs can be an important building block for school and district environmental literacy efforts and provide significant co-benefits for restoration outcomes. Sustainable schools provide students, staff, and communities with inspiration and real-world examples of sustainability practices. They also provide opportunities and spaces to engage students in inquiry-based learning and action projects that support MWEs and other environmental literacy programming. In addition, sustainably managing school buildings and grounds can achieve significant environmental and human health improvements while also saving money for school districts.

For these reasons, the Education Workgroup recommends reclassifying the Sustainable Schools Outcome as an indicator under the Environmental Literacy Planning Outcome. Specifically, tracking the implementation of school sustainability policies and green certifications (e.g., LEED, Green Ribbon Schools) will demonstrate progress towards school district preparedness to deliver a comprehensive and systemic approach to environmental literacy. This approach is preferable to removing the outcome because several states have existing sustainable schools' programs that provide significant support to schools and school districts. Accounting for this work as an indicator demonstrates the interconnectedness of sustainable schools to the Environmental Literacy Goal, providing an important driver for these programs to access funding and other critical resources and improving their ability to communicate the importance of their programs to schools and school districts.