

MID ATLANTIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY STRATEGY TALKING POINTS

THREE THINGS YOU MUST KNOW:

- The Chesapeake Education Workgroup defined the Meaningful Watershed Education Experience (MWEE) in 2000 and the Executive Council approved it as a “keystone commitment” in 2000. The Strategy builds on the MWEE commitment and does not replace it.
- Coordination for the Strategy will occur through the Mid-Atlantic Education Workgroup—an interjurisdictional group comprised of federal, state, academic, and nongovernmental partners convened under the Chesapeake Bay Program.
- The Strategy was developed with significant input from state departments of education (MD, PA, VA, DE) and natural resource agencies (MD, PA, VA, DC, DE), as well as academic and nongovernmental organizations.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR STATES:

- New federal resources (programs, data, etc.) to support MWEE keystone commitment
- Acknowledgement for robust partnership effort of key state, federal, and non-governmental partners
- More support for identifying and embedding research-based best practices in environmental education programs
- Not an unfunded mandate and does not commit partners to specific actions they may not be able to afford, rather outlines vision and guidance on shared priorities that states helped to create

PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

- The Mid Atlantic Elementary and Secondary Environmental Literacy Strategy (Strategy) draws on the full strength of the federal government to support state efforts to transform their schools to provide the next generation of citizen stewards the knowledge and skills they need to make informed environmental decisions.
- The Strategy outlines interdependent actions that federal, state, academic, and non-governmental partners should pursue to achieve the vision of developing environmental literacy in the region.

GOALS OF THE STRATEGY

- Goal 1: Every student in the region graduates with the knowledge and skills to make informed environmental decisions
- Goal 2: All educators in the region responsible for instruction about or in the environment have access to sustained professional development opportunities, tools, and resources that support their efforts to provide students with high-quality environmental education
- Goal 3: Every school in the region maintains its buildings, grounds, and operations to support positive environmental and human health outcomes
- Goal 4: The education community in the region functions in a unified manner and coordinates with key national, regional, and state programs to represent the full suite of information and opportunities available for PK-12 audiences

CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM EDUCATION WORKGROUP AND MWEEs

- The Strategy builds on the MWEE commitment of the Chesapeake Bay Program—expanding the focus of both audience (from students to students, teachers, and schools) and scope (from watershed education to environmental education affecting the Chesapeake Bay watershed).
- CBP has formally supported environmental education in the region since 1998, when the Education Directive 98-1 was signed forming the Chesapeake Bay Education Workgroup. The Workgroup is made up of federal, state, academic, and nongovernmental partners and is tasked with evaluating and recommending policies related to PK-12 watershed and environmental education, maintaining the Bay Backpack website, and ensuring state coordination of and reporting on progress towards the implementation of Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEE).

- The MWEE is a pedagogical student experience that includes classroom preparation, outdoor learning, and reflection on the outdoor learning experience.
- In 2000, the MWEE was identified as a keystone commitment and signed onto by the states of PA, VA, MD, and DC. By adopting the MWEE keystone commitment, states agreed to provide one experience per student prior to their high school graduation. States have since expanded that goal to providing three MWEEs (elementary, middle, and high school) as suggested in the definition document.
- The Workgroup tracked progress toward the MWEE goal from 2005-2009 by gathering information from the state departments of education and resource agencies. At last count, approximately 81% of elementary, 81% of middle, and 80% of high school students were reported as receiving MWEEs. Tracking was discontinued in 2009 in recognition of the inconsistency of the data resulting from non-uniform methods and rigor used by states to gather MWEE numbers.

STATUS OF STATE ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PLANS

Many of the states in the region have had a focus on environmental education for many years. However, over the past several years there has been an effort to renew and strengthen these programs. Recent state actions towards student environmental literacy are outlined below.

- In 2011, Maryland passed the nation's first environmental literacy graduation requirement mandating schools to implement a multidisciplinary environmental education program, with a specific focus on the state's natural resources. This solidified work began in 2008 by a gubernatorial Executive Order that established the Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature, which is co-chaired by the Maryland State Department of Education and the Department of Natural Resources. That Executive Order also called for a comprehensive environmental literacy plan, which was completed in 2010.
- In 2010, the Council of the District of Columbia signed into law the *Healthy Schools Act of 2010*. This act requires District Department of the Environment to draft an environmental literacy plan as part of a broad effort to "substantially improve the health, wellness, and nutrition of the public and charter school students in the District of Columbia." The final plan was submitted to the Council in June 2012.
- Delaware passed a resolution in 2011 supporting the Delaware No Child Left Inside/Children in Nature Initiative. A taskforce with representatives from the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, Department of Education, and other public and nongovernmental organizations formed "to develop a statewide plan to increase opportunities for children to engage in nature, both in school, at home, and on public lands." The final plan will be released in October 2012.
- The Virginia Science Standards of Learning adopted in 2003 and revised in 2010 integrate environmental literacy concepts throughout K-12 education. The Virginia Resource-Use Education Council, an interagency team of state and federal partners led by the Virginia Department of Education, works to implement the standards through Virginia Naturally, the Commonwealth's environmental education program. Measurable goals for specific Virginia Naturally projects—Meaningful Watershed Experiences, Classroom Grants, Professional Development and School Recognition—are outlined in the state's Business Plan for Environmental Education.
- Pennsylvania long has had rigorous, stand-alone environment and ecology standards, which include content about the Chesapeake, watersheds, and the environment. This content is included in standardized tests in the state. The Pennsylvania Advisory Council on Environmental Education completed an environmental literacy plan in July 2012.
- West Virginia recently established a green school certification program and is in the early stages of development for an environmental literacy plan.
- In addition to the state plans, the state affiliates of the North American Association for Environmental Education have completed a plan that outlines how they will support the Strategy.