



ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PLANNING OUTCOME [STEWARDSHIP GIT/EDUCATION WORKGROUP]

2014 WATERSHED AGREEMENT: GOAL & OUTCOME LANGUAGE

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PLANNING OUTCOME: Each participating Bay jurisdiction should develop a comprehensive and systemic approach to environmental literacy for all students in the region that includes policies, practices and voluntary metrics that support the environmental literacy Goals and Outcomes of this Agreement.

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:

UPDATE

Recommendation: Update to ensure that the outcome is SMART and reflects the current needs and priorities of state and federal agencies and other formal and nonformal education partners in the region. Specific recommendations for this outcome are as follows:

1. Clarify that school districts are the unit of change for this outcome.
2. Identify and track metrics that capture a broader set of actions that indicate progress towards the outcome, including those that serve as early markers of progress.
3. Identify measurable and realistic targets based on review of 2015-2024 data collected through the Environmental Literacy Indicator Tool (ELIT) and conversations with state leaders. The tool measures schools' capacity and progress towards meeting the Environmental Literacy Goal.

Draft outcome language recommended by the Education Workgroup is as follows:

Continually increase the number of school districts that have policies and practices to support environmental education and sustainable schools. By 2035, the number of school districts in each state that are more prepared to deliver a comprehensive and systemic approach to environmental literacy will increase by XX% points, with a state target of XX% being well prepared.

Environmentally Literate Population is Essential to Meet Clean Water and Living Resource Goals

The Environmental Literacy Goal supports all other Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) goals by building knowledge, understanding, and opportunities for future generations of environmentally literate leaders, skilled workers, and engaged community members. An environmentally literate population not only achieves environmental goals but is also a precursor to sustaining those goals for the long term. A key partner recently posed the questions, "We can produce science on the Bay, but if there is no one to read it, will it matter?" and "We can invent new strategies to improve water quality, but if no one cares about the benefits, will anyone implement them?"

Regional support for environmental education through the Planning Outcome is key to achieving the Chesapeake Executive Council's goal of **engaging all communities** as active stewards of a healthy and resilient Chesapeake Bay. Continuing to work through this outcome with school districts at the most local level aligns with Recommendation 2 from the People Small Group, "Ensure the priorities of the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership reflect the needs of people and the impacts of a changing environment at the most local level." The Environmental Literacy Goal and outcomes, and the partners engaged in their implementation, are a unique lever in the systems change model required to restore and protect the Chesapeake Bay.

Bay Program Adds Significant Value to Environmental Literacy Efforts Across Jurisdictions

Many decisions for schools are made at the local level, by the school districts, especially regarding curriculum development, administration, funding, and other priorities. The Education Workgroup recognizes that due to the local-control nature of school operations, districts are the fundamental unit of change for systemic and sustainable environmental literacy efforts. Analysis from the forthcoming 2024 ELIT report shows that while many districts report inquiry-based environmental instruction, including MWEEs, is embedded into their curriculum, many districts still struggle to implement it. Under NOAA's leadership, the Education Workgroup works to address this gap by facilitating regional coordination, state network support and knowledge-sharing, accelerating progress toward improving environmental literacy through collaboration and cross-boundary information exchange among state and local leaders. In addition, the NOAA Bay Watershed Education & Training (B-WET) Program, the Chesapeake Bay Trust, and the Pisces Foundation provide critical support for environmental literacy efforts in the region, including state and local capacity building funding to support MWEEs. State partners also recognize this value and have championed efforts that positively reinforce the Environmental Literacy Outcomes and build on successes among partner states – for example:

- [Maryland Outdoor Learning Partnership](#) – co-led by Maryland State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Natural Resources; partnership guidance includes a specific recommendation around implementation of CBP priorities.
- Virginia Environmental Literacy Plan (draft) – led by Virginia Department of Conservation; references the CBP goal and is strongly oriented towards the MWEE framework and district environmental literacy planning. The Department of Education also maintains [resources](#).
- Pennsylvania's [Science, Technology, Engineering, Environmental Literacy, and Sustainability \(STEELS\)](#) Standards – developed by Pennsylvania Department of Education; state and local partners are working with districts to support their implementation of these standards by which every PA teacher is expected to teach.

High Level of Support for Updated Outcomes Across the Agreement's Jurisdictions

The Education Workgroup's extensive community engagement and feedback process revealed **strong support for keeping the Environmental Literacy Planning Outcome with revisions**. Due to differences in school district numbers and population distributions across the jurisdictions, it is important to ensure that a revised Outcome would serve each jurisdiction effectively. The Workgroup identified that state level support (i.e., learning standards, frameworks, staffing, networks, and funding) is a prerequisite for advancing both the Planning and Student Outcomes. **The Education Workgroup has helped develop state-level networks with regional hubs which are well positioned to help district leaders evolve and strengthen their environmental literacy planning efforts**. Therefore, a district-level focus for the Outcome both uplifts the key coordination and support capacity of the Education Workgroup's network-of-networks approach and is most effective at advancing change within our partner jurisdictions.

Continued Focus on Planning Outcome is Needed to Maintain State and Local Momentum

The local-control nature of education makes working with school districts necessary. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, focusing on planning at the district level allows for local priorities (e.g., agriculture education, sustainable schools, career and technology education, etc.) to shine through, while funding and technical assistance help districts understand and advance state priorities. ELIT data has helped the Education Workgroup better understand what early actions, like identifying an environmental literacy lead, help move the work forward efficiently. These and other lessons learned are being used by the growing state networks to provide critical support and accelerate progress.

References:

- [Maryland Outdoor Learning Partnership](#) – Maryland Department of Natural Resources & Maryland State Department of Education
- Pennsylvania's Science, Technology & Engineering, Environmental Literacy & Sustainability [\(STEELS\) Standards](#)
- [Virginia Environmental Literacy](#) - Virginia Department of Education