

Environmental Literacy

Background

The well-being of the Chesapeake Bay watershed will soon rest in the hands of our youngest residents: students in grades K-12. Establishing strong environmental education programs now provides a vital foundation for these future stewards. The *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* commits to helping students within the watershed graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to act responsibly to protect and restore their local waterways. 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.
- **Sustainable Schools:** Continually increasing the number of schools that reduce the impact of their buildings and grounds on the environment and human health.
- **Student:** Continually increasing students' understanding of the watershed through participation in teacher-supported Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences and rigorous, inquiry-based instruction.

MWEE

Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences, or MWEEs, are the cornerstone upon which the region's environmental literacy efforts have been built. MWEEs connect standards-based classroom learning with outdoor field experiences to create a deeper understanding of the environment. Through MWEEs, students of all ages develop a sense of environmental ethics and stewardship that will be essential to the long-term sustainability of our local watersheds and will serve as the foundation of a lifelong relationship with the environment.

Progress

Both the Environmental Literacy Planning and the Student Outcomes are measured using the Chesapeake Bay Program's Environmental Literacy Indicator Tool (ELIT). In 2019, local education agencies—55% of the total (when combined with a small subset of 2017 data)—responded to the ELIT to provide the following data.

Environmental Literacy Planning:

- Twenty-seven percent of respondents self-identified as “well-prepared” to put a comprehensive and systemic approach to environmental literacy in place.
- Fifty-two percent of respondents self-identified as “somewhat prepared” to put a comprehensive and systemic approach to environmental literacy in place.
- Twenty-two percent of respondents self-identified as “not prepared” to put a comprehensive and systemic approach to environmental literacy in place.

Student:

- Elementary School Level: 35% reported providing system-wide MWEEs to at least one grade level while 32% reported providing some MWEEs to at least one grade level.
- Middle School Level: 39% reported providing system-wide MWEEs to at least one grade level while 38% reported providing some MWEEs to at least one grade level.
- High School Level: 35% reported providing system-wide MWEEs in at least one required course while 43% reported providing some MWEEs in at least one required course.

Environmental Literacy Planning:

In 2019, 15% of public and charter schools in the Chesapeake Bay watershed—634 schools in all—were certified sustainable. This marks a 4% increase from the number of sustainable schools in the watershed in 2017.

Chesapeake Bay Program

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