

## Environmental Literacy in Pennsylvania

### Why environmental literacy?

The well-being of the Chesapeake Bay watershed will soon rest in the hands of its youngest citizens: 2.7 million students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Establishing strong environmental education programs now provides a vital foundation for these future stewards.

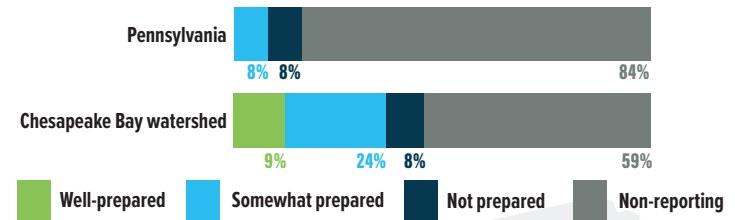
Along with Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania has committed to helping its students graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to act responsibly to protect and restore their local watersheds. They will do this through:

- **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.

The portion of Pennsylvania that lies within the Chesapeake Bay watershed is home to 193 school districts serving 555,000 students. In 2017, 31 Pennsylvania school districts responded to the Chesapeake Bay Program's survey to measure environmental literacy preparedness and MWEE availability in public schools.

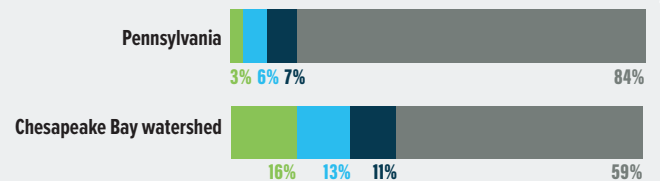
### How does Pennsylvania compare to the Chesapeake Bay watershed?

**Environmental Literacy Planning: School districts' self-identified preparedness to put environmental literacy programs in place**

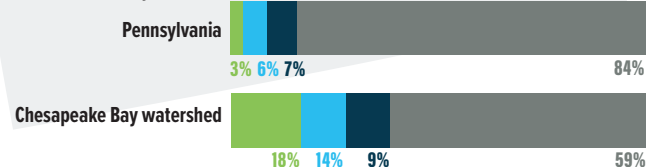


**Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs): School districts that reported providing MWEEs to their students**

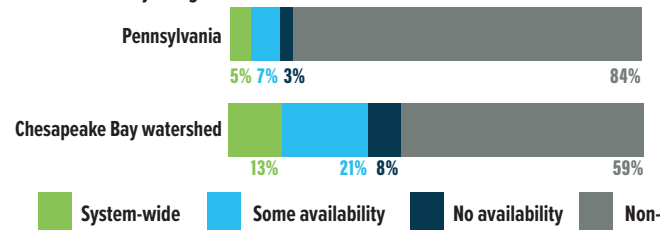
**MWEE Availability in Elementary Schools**



**MWEE Availability in Middle Schools**



**MWEE Availability in High Schools**



**Sustainable Schools: Schools that are recognized as sustainable by U.S. Green Ribbon Schools, Eco-Schools USA, Maryland Green Schools, Pennsylvania Pathways to Green Schools or Virginia Naturally Schools**



Chesapeake Bay Program  
410 Severn Ave, Suite 109  
Annapolis, MD 21403  
(800) YOUR-BAY

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### School snapshot

Jen Fetter at Penn State Extension has teamed up with the Harrisburg School District GEAR UP program to expose students to water science issues, opportunities, careers and more.

The students of Harrisburg's class of 2020 have participated in water-themed units every year, beginning in 2015 during their eighth grade. The units cover important topics that make classroom science concepts relate to real life current issues in the community. Examples include storm water management, flooding, stream water quality, urban biodiversity and safe drinking water. Each year the students get to complete lab activities in the classroom, outdoor field studies on school property and culminating field trips with advanced learning experiences at unique sites right in their own community.

The students have also worked with community partners to complete water-related service projects, including planting trees in eroding school yard areas, painting educational storm drain murals, potting tree seedlings for future community plantings and reporting and assisting with cleaning out clogged storm drains.

### Educator resources

Bay Backpack is a free, online resource that supports hands-on environmental learning and provides educators with information on funding opportunities, field studies, curriculum guides and lesson plans.

Bay Backpack is also home to *An Educator's Guide to the Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience*. Through MWEEs, students of all ages begin to develop a stewardship ethic that will support a lifelong relationship with the environment.

Learn more at [baybackpack.com](http://baybackpack.com).



Environmental literacy in action: Chemistry students from Warwick High School sampled Lititz Run in Lancaster County, Pa., during a biannual field trip that visited eight sites along the stream.