

## Environmental Literacy in Virginia

### 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.

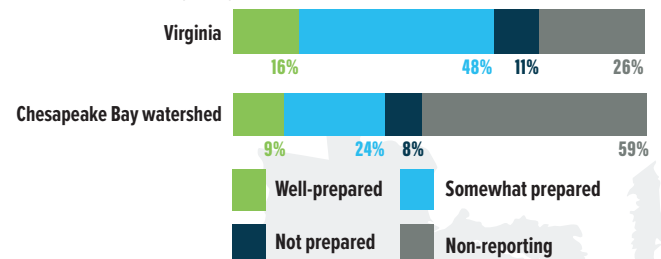
Along with Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C., Virginia has committed to helping its students graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to act responsibly to protect and restore their local watersheds. They will do this through:

- **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 Virginia that lies within the Chesapeake Bay watershed is home to 94 school districts serving 1.1 million students. In 2017, 70 Virginia school districts responded to the Chesapeake Bay Program's survey to measure environmental literacy preparedness and MWEE availability in public schools.

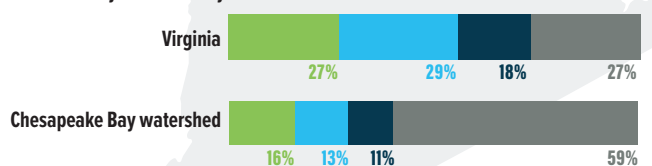
### How does Virginia compare to the Chesapeake Bay watershed?

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

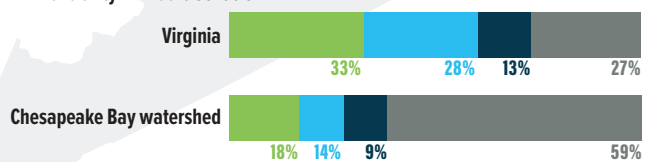


**Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs): School districts that reported providing MWEEs to their students**

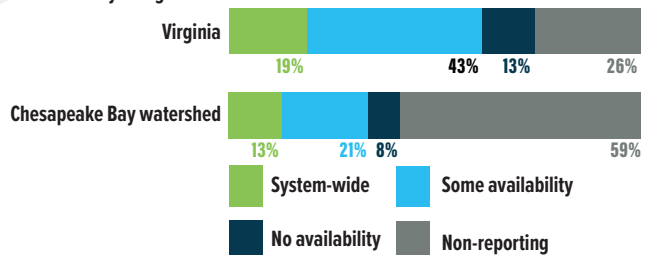
MWEE Availability in Elementary Schools



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**



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### School snapshot

Lanier Middle School in Fairfax, Virginia, embraces environmental literacy through its sustainable school practices, its focus on nutrition and wellness, and the emphasis it places on environmental education.

Recognized as a 2018 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School, Lanier has nine water bottle filling stations, a recycling program and students sign the “Entering a Green Zone” pledge, committing to reducing waste and recycling in their classrooms. During a food sharing drive of cafeteria food, students learned to reduce waste and share with the neediest in the community by donating over 1,000 food items to the local shelter. Students also complete stewardship projects that have all them explore environmental topics and issues.

By participating in activities that focus on the environment and sustainability, Lanier students increase their understanding of the human footprint and its impact on the local watershed.

### 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 MWEs, 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: Fourth grade students from Granby Elementary School in Norfolk, Va., emulate osprey nests with sticks at the Shore Savers station on the Learning Barge docked at Grandy Village Learning Center in Norfolk on Oct. 23, 2015. Learning stations on the barge featured science lessons on topics such as water quality and wildlife.