

# Maryland Partnership for Children In Nature Progress Report for 2015

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Priority / Action/ Task	Activities / Accomplishments
<b>I. Communities, Planning, and Access to Nature</b>	
Lead contact: Sandi Olek, DNR, sandi.olek@maryland.gov	
<i>Enhance equitable access to nature and other outdoor opportunities by incorporating green space as a factor in state and local planning policy and guidance, including recommendations on access issues, nature play spaces and providing natural areas for outdoor play and learning. Elevate the issue of access to nearby nature as a critical part of developing sustainable communities. Promote Nature Play Spaces as alternatives to traditional playgrounds using natural materials and designs that mirror more natural settings, to provide some exposure to nature and associated benefits to child development, within the more built environment. Promote healthy Maryland children through exploring and promoting means to engage communities in health-focused initiatives that increase physical fitness through nature based recreational activities; and by connecting communities to opportunities to grow their own food and/or access locally grown foods.</i>	
<b>I.A. Park Equity and Access to Nature</b>	
<b>1. Facilitate use of the Park Equity Analysis (PEA) tool to assist decisions on park/green space planning and protection.</b>	
a) Complete 2015 Update of Analysis to include trail heads, updated data and new model protocol.	Trail Data added. New data runs complete. Service is being checked for quality control.
b) Conduct outreach/ workshops to local parks and planning staff for use of PEA in local Land Preservation and Recreation Planning efforts.	Completed a series of regional workshops with every county and Baltimore City in Spring 2015. Six regional meetings were held.
c) Complete local demonstration project with Prince Georges County using park equity data for incorporation into green infrastructure planning.	Prince Georges County data complete. Service is being checked for quality control. Prince Georges County may use the data as part of their Green Infrastructure plan.
<b>2. Develop policy and planning recommendations that will address gaps and challenges in access issues, to provide more opportunities to more children in more communities.</b>	
a) Evaluate access to green space and parks in both revitalization and new development scenarios. Identify barriers, practices and benefits to green spaces as community development tools.	Community Planning group to lead discussion on barriers to green space and develop possible policy recommendations. DNR Urban Team evaluating Cannery Park in Cambridge as potential demonstration project. Engaging MD Dept of Planning as new partner. Potential meeting/ collaboration with Baltimore City as part of State response to Baltimore City and collaboration with the Greater Baltimore Wilderess Coalition.

<b>3. Proactively promote the above recommendations with specific audiences who are positioned to effect change.</b>	
a) Meet with partners and ongoing coalitions to share message and seek feedback on barriers and best practices.	Identify partners/ schedule meetings. Local technical workshops for Land Preservation and Recreation Plan support.
b) Host a green space and community development forum to highlight local and national examples of increased access to nearby nature and community development.	Initial discussions with Montgomery County Parks to host forum. Identify audience, focus and message. Schedule forum and promote workshop (for 2016).
<b>4. Seek stakeholder input regarding children’s health connections, diversity and inclusion, and increasing interest in and opportunities for utilizing parks and other natural areas for outdoor learning, discovery, and recreation. Use this input to identify actions to ensue. [combine this activity with the career-focused action, described below]</b>	DNR presentation at summer MD Municipal League meeting started a dialogue on this topic, provided local partners and opportunity to view green space as an economic and equity tool. Build upon work of July Partnership meeting. Potentially help to identify audience for greening workshop. Integrating this with Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition's workgroups (Equity and Discovery).
<b>I.B. Nature Play Spaces</b>	
<b>1. Lead ongoing promotion activities through presentations to groups, growing the website resources, and connecting partners who can develop demonstration projects.</b>	Completed design studio assistance with Rocky Gap State Park. Initiated technical assistance to Tree of Life pre-school, Calvert County Parks and Fair Hill NRMA. Revision of Nature Play Spaces website pictures and resources.
<b>2. Host a third annual workshop for educators, planners, parks personnel, landscape designers, etc.; explore the possibility of coordinating with a related conference in future years.</b>	Completed evaluation of 2014 Workshop. Developed agenda and theme for workshop, secured funding, promoted and held workshop October 2015.
<b>3. Promote the use of the Land Preservation and Recreation Plan (state and county counterparts) – and the recommendations developed by the Partnership within it – to guide inclusion of nature play spaces and other outdoor nature areas in park facilities.</b>	Completed a series of regional workshops with every County and Baltimore City in Spring 2015. Six regional meetings were held. Continue to provide technical assistance. Conduct future technical workshops for local county parks and recreation planners. Gaithersburg Constitution Gardens project will serve as demonstration project for other locals - ribbon cutting held in September, showcased project at NPS workshop Oct.

## II. Support for Environmental Literacy

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*These initiatives focus primarily on working with schools, preK-20, and non-formal environmental education partners; with consideration for linking environmental learning to activities outside of school (through after school programs and community resources). The main objective is to assist and support Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in the development and improvement of their Environmental Literacy Programs (ELP) and implementation of Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEE). This includes fostering collaboration and connecting school systems with nonformal environmental education (EE) providers, and preparing teachers to provide field experiences for students. This work also supports the following Chesapeake Bay Agreement Environmental Literacy Outcome: Continually increase students' age-appropriate understanding of the watershed through participation in teacher-supported, meaningful watershed educational experiences and rigorous, inquiry-based instruction, with a target of at least one meaningful watershed educational experience in elementary, middle and high school depending on available resources.*

**II.A. Increase student participation in environmental learning** (quantity and social diversity), including outdoor environmental experiences through school, and opportunities for additional enrichment, that improves career and college readiness and leads to STEM careers –

**1.** Identify, promote and help advance policies, resources, and partnerships that support rigorous student learning experiences outdoors (MWEEs). *All of the ensuing actions contribute to this one. CIN is always pushing to encourage and facilitate more.*

Working continually to provide professional development, resources, and good examples to educators statewide, with the ultimate goal of getting more students outdoors and increasing the rigor of these experiences, aligning them to current pedagogy and requirements (such as NGSS, STEM, College and Career Readiness, etc.). (Indirectly affects student participation) Completed six regional workshops for formal and informal educators on MWEE structure, qualities and implementation strategies. A report is being compiled with information shared among the participants.

**2.** Research and promote an environmental careers “pipeline” that increases awareness of environmental and STEM careers, strives for greater inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds, and enables more students to successfully pursue career fields in natural resources. Identify tools and services needed, potential audiences, and partners who can help provide and use these resources to guide students.

Began learning more about diverse programs that work to build awareness of environmental and STEM careers - e.g., PG environmental studies academy - will continue. Participating in/ exploring opportunities to coordinate with career path related activities of the Ches Bay Program Diversity Action Team and the Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition's Equity workgroup.

**II.B. Increase the ability of teachers to provide sustained environmental learning for their students, including meaningful outdoor experiences.**

**1.** Assist and support Local Education Agencies (LEAs), schools, and educators with environmental literacy implementation and integration of new practices and standards (MWEEs, STEM, NGSS, etc.\*) via promotion, support, and outreach

<p>a) Continue to connect and support formal and nonformal educators through briefings, professional learning opportunities, professional learning communities, regional meetings, etc.</p>	<p>(1) Provided sessions demonstrating examples of integrated E-Lit/STEM/NGSS at the summer 2015 MSDE College and Career Readiness conferences.</p> <p>(2) Connect formal and nonformal educators through professional development opportunities supported by Chesapeake Bay Program grant to Maryland. Conducted six regional meetings for LEA E-Lit teams and informal partners (Sept - Nov).</p>
<p>b) Help identify and distribute good models of the integration of E-Lit with STEM/NGSS lessons.</p>	<p>Examples of integrated activities for each LEA posted on MSDE Environmental Literacy website:  <a href="http://news.maryland.gov/msde/environmentalliteracy/">http://news.maryland.gov/msde/environmentalliteracy/</a></p>
<p>c) Agriculture and Food Connections: Continue integrating agriculture education into schools and nonformal education venues...as a component of environmental literacy...; support school garden/greenhouse initiatives as a potential community resource.</p>	<p>Examples of programs/curriculum that are integrating agriculture into schools to be posted on Environmental Literacy site.</p>
<p>d) Contribute to development of the state action plan to achieve Environmental Literacy management strategies set forth under the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, and take on responsibility for implementation of appropriate actions.</p>	<p>Held series of listening sessions among educators and other stakeholders statewide; participated in regional Ches Bay Program environmental literacy meetings. Developed Maryland's 2-year action plan (2016-18) to guide progress toward achievement of management strategies under the Environmental Literacy goal - Dec 2015 submitted final draft for public comment period; will be finalized spring 2016. CIN planning for 2016 and beyond will align with this plan, though CIN work also includes actions in other areas; CIN will determine which of the actions they will implement (subset of action plan).</p>
<p>e) Continue to work with MSDE to develop the 3-year E-Lit implementation Plan; and align it with CIN annual action plans and Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement management strategies, to promote efficiency and effective achievement of all of these plans.</p>	<p>MSDE E-Lit Implementation Plan drafted, reviewed and posted.</p>

<p><b>2.</b> Enhance environmental learning for students and professional learning for teachers, through assisting and supporting nonformal educators in developing programs that are based on, align with and use current practices and formal education requirements (MWEEs, STEM, NGSS, etc.) to best meet schools' needs.</p>	
<p>a) Continue to connect and support formal and nonformal educators through briefings, professional learning opportunities, professional learning communities, regional meetings, etc. – provide opportunities for nonformal educators to become more familiar with new standards and practices, and what teachers are looking for in field experiences and other enrichment programs.</p>	<p>State EE Briefing held in February coinciding with annual MAEOE conference; followup from fall 2014 regional meetings and additional regional meetings planned. Completed six regional workshops for formal and informal educators on MWEE structure, qualities and implementation strategies. A report is being compiled with information shared among the participants.</p>
<p><b>II.C. Work with Institutions of Higher Education (IHE)</b> to enhance teacher pre-service education to prepare teachers to include instructional strategies for Maryland's Environmental Literacy Standards. This will involve use of the outdoors as a classroom and engaging students in investigative learning. Pursue possible collaboration with University System of Maryland on providing environmental literacy teaching/learning experiences to pre-service and certificated teachers.</p>	
<p><b>1.</b> Focus 2015 on embedded experiences for elementary pre-service teachers to learn the content and pedagogy for teaching the Maryland environmental literacy standards through the Next Generation Science Standards.</p>	<p>State Superintendent Lowery focused CIN discussion on the need for pre-service teachers to receive education in E-Lit topics and pedagogy. MSDE science specialist and MCPS Outdoor and EE Supervisor presented E-Lit requirements to MD Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board (PSTEB), requested guidance on how to integrate EE and E-Lit into pre-service teacher requirements. Options include: integration of E-Lit in general ed courses, a separate course requirement, and a mission statement. Followup to occur in 2016.</p>
<p><b>2.</b> Develop grant-funded pilot – interested collaborators [when plan developed] include Notre Dame of MD, Mount St. Mary's, Loyola, and Salisbury.</p>	<p>Montgomery County Public Schools working with Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA), Hood College and Towson Univ. on a pilot through an IWLA program -- pre-service teachers will work with K-12 students on stream studies (stream health and water quality assessment and action projects). Pilot funded by EPA grant through DNR. Project planned and grant proposed/ received. Implementation of MCPS, IWLA, Hood and Towson U pilot in 2015-16 school year.</p>

**II.D. Promote and support sustainable schools initiatives –**

*This work also supports the following Chesapeake Bay Agreement Environmental Literacy Outcome: Continually increase the number of schools in the region that reduce the impact of their buildings and grounds on their local watershed, environment and human health through best practices, including student-led protection and restoration projects.*

**1.** Collaborate with school system wellness councils, PTSAs, and similar entities to embed environmental priorities into their actions [e.g., bike racks, walking school buses, outdoor play, etc.].

Provide technical assistance to US ED Green Ribbon Schools applicants to implement wellness practices among students and staff

School visit and consultation with administration and staff (Northwest HS); CIN members provided assistance in GRS application process.

**2.** Work with MSDE to develop a statewide Sustainable Schools strategy, involving facilities and instructional staff in the process. *[Note : Some school systems have a systemwide strategy in place or are developing one. CIN will use some of these examples to encourage development of other local strategies. Developing a statewide strategy may need to happen at a higher level of authority (and may not, therefore, be feasible in this timeframe). Having LEA-specific strategies in place in eventually all districts is a good goal.]*

a) Establish a process for expressing support for and distributing information, guidance and resources regarding the inclusion of defined outdoor study areas in building new construction and renovation plans. Use/ feature/ promote the Maryland School Grounds for Learning project resources through various means.

Memo from State Superintendent Lowery to LEA Superintendents regarding using Maryland School Grounds for Learning (April 2015) as a tool in new construction and renovations. Presentation to Interagency Committee (IAC) on Public School Construction (September 2015) showcasing resources available to guide development of outdoor study areas on school grounds.

b) Plan and host meeting(s) involving school facilities staff and E-Lit points of contact to discuss models for instruction and facilities collaboration.

A meeting between Prince Georges County Stormwater Program and School system Capital Improvement Program leadership was conducted in June, 2015. This effort, initiated by Prince Georges County, is aiming to establish a streamlined and effective partnership to build stormwater facilities and outdoor classrooms on selected county school grounds. There will be lessons learned for other counties to initiate similar efforts that CIN can help share.

c) Identify funding needs and explore potential funding sources such as grant programs and budget requests, to support outdoor study areas on school grounds.

Completed presentation to Interagency Committee on Public School Construction (IAC) on September 17, 2015 at MSDE Discussion of possible state funding sources (or possible policy / practices to support) may follow (followup to occur 2016).

d) Ensure that MSDE E-Lit Implementation Plan and Chesapeake Bay Agreement strategies include and align with these facilities considerations.	Partnership members are working collaboratively on these pieces - there is a lot of overlap and all are aligned. Meeting held 9/24/2015 at MSDE with various MSDE staff responsible for school facilities administration to discuss sustainable schools in CBP Goal.
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**3. Maryland School Grounds for Learning project through MAEOE – support, promote and assist development and distribution.**

a) Online Resources: Partners will be asked to collaborate as we build comprehensive online resources to help school communities plan, utilize and sustain a variety of environmental projects on school grounds.	Online resources under development, environmental literacy page on MAEOE website <a href="http://www.maeoe.org">www.maeoe.org</a> . Online training and training for districts occurring.
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b) Professional Development: CIN partners will help to promote training offered to teachers, administrators and facilities personnel to encourage school-wide collaboration to effectively design, enhance and use the school grounds with students to learn about the environment and conserve natural resources. Online and in-person training will be available.	Anne Arundel County training and online training under development. This is ongoing work through 2016.
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**III. Outreach and Communications / and overarching and cross-cutting activities**

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*This also encompasses organizing overarching and cross-cutting activities that support and advance Partnership priorities. Develop enhanced communications among the Partnership members to facilitate and advance our work, and to promote initiatives to a wider audience – such as using social media and other outlets, and better coordinating outreach efforts among partners. Explore and pursue opportunities for unique approaches to potentially increasing available funding and policy and/or operational support for priorities identified by the Partnership.*

**III.A. Overarching or Cross-cutting Activities**

1. Intentionally invite additional stakeholders/ potential new partners to participate in all of the above (workgroups, individual initiatives, etc.).	This is an ongoing action that occurs sporadically as needed for various action items; end of 2016, intentional outreach to staff at several state agencies not currently involved, to increase CIN capacity to achieve in new areas -- to be continued in 2016.
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<p><b>2.</b> Serve as lead entity for coordinating and reporting on activities in support of E-Lit goal and outcomes of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.</p>	<p>CIN partners have participated in development of regional management strategies and have been developing MD's 2-year Action Plan (2016-18) toward strategies under the E-Lit goal. Held a series of listening sessions among educators and other stakeholders; participated in regional Ches Bay Program E-Lit meetings. Developed action plan - Dec 2015 submitted final draft for public comment period; will be finalized spring 2016. CIN planning for 2016 and beyond will align with this plan, though CIN work also includes actions in other areas; CIN will determine which of the actions they will implement (subset of action plan).</p>
<p><b>3.</b> Follow up from Transition Recommendations (see full Action Plan) – [Added] Identify opportunities to meet with and provide presentations to key groups about our work/ priorities/ needs (referred to as the "Road Tour").</p>	<p>CIN continues to work to identify specific funding, policy, and operations suggestions to implement the ideas outlined to support the four recommendations* – and use these as the basis for discussions among decision-makers. Because of development of CBP action plan (above), timing of new Administration, and other priorities, this work will continue into 2016, with some intentional outreach to be planned. The presentation in Sept 2015 to the IAC (see items II.D.2.a, c) is one example.</p>
<p><b>4.</b> Seek stakeholder input regarding children’s health connections, diversity and inclusion, and STEM/ environmental careers – convene appropriate group(s) to discuss needs and solutions (possibly one session with two strands, or two separate events).</p>	
<p>a) Convene a gathering of stakeholders, including community leaders, to discuss and seek innovative solutions to increasing interest and opportunities among diverse groups in utilizing parks and other natural areas for outdoor learning, discovery, and recreation that also serves to improve personal health. Use this event to identify actions to ensue. [this supports suggested action under Communities]</p>	<p>Planning, discussions, researching topics - may be combining tasks a and b as a one-day conference in 2016. July quarterly CIN meeting theme was "Communities, Careers and Conservation" with guest speaker to inspire/inform potential further actions -- brainstorming after will be used for 2016 planning.</p>
<p>b) Explore possibility of hosting a forum to address means to enhance interest and success in pursuing environmental careers, including among diverse students – involving and connecting community leaders, school guidance counselors, internship programs, and IHEs. Identify gaps, needs, opportunities for coordination/ collaboration, and develop recommendations for action. [this supports the careers pipeline action under Environmental Literacy]</p>	<p>(see III.A.4.a, above). Also working to coordinate with the Diversity Action Team for the Chesapeake Bay Agreement and the Equity workgroup of the Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition.</p>



<b>III.B. Promoting Outdoor Play &amp; Learning</b>	
<b>1.</b> Engage in outreach to continue to inform and promote audiences about our priorities, connect to good research and other resources, and coordinate with larger (e.g., Federal) initiatives.	
a) Include a section on the CIN website for research and information to support CIN priorities, populated with links from partners and others.	Gathering research links and other informational sources. DNR (host for CIN web page) sites undergoing renovation in 2015, will determine ability to add research, articles, etc in 2016. Partners involved agreed to idea of all posting same link to compiled sources for continuity -- to be continued.
b) Prepare and make available resources, recommendations, and exciting examples for promoting and enhancing use of parks for bilingual, physically challenged, and other special audiences.	[will shift to future year]
c) Leverage momentum from and help promote appropriate Federal initiatives, at the state level, to build support and create incentives to get kids in local and state parks:	(1) the President's Let's Get Every Kid In a Park campaign – prepare information on National Parks in Maryland that qualify for the funding/ discount and promote visitation; clarify and distribute information on how MD schools can participate [for 2016].  (2) the U.S. Forest Service's Discover the Forest campaign pieces, National Recreation and Parks Association efforts (e.g., Meet me at the Park), and similar. -- various parks promotion information has been disseminated periodically, and will continue.
<b>III.C. Ongoing Activities</b>	
<b>1.</b> Continue to promote professional development opportunities through simple communication means.	Continually distribute information on wide variety of PD opportunities (workshops, webinars, courses, etc.) and resources via CIN and other networks.
<b>2.</b> Foster and facilitate information exchange, networking, and collaboration among educators and other related interests statewide.	Continually distributing information on wide variety of opportunities for collaboration, partners, model efforts, resources, etc., via CIN and other networks.
<b>3.</b> Participate in and help promote the Annual Maryland Green Schools Youth Summit.	Provided support on speaker invitations, media outreach, coordination with Gov's office, etc.; many CIN members provided exhibits and activities.
<b>4.</b> Continue promoting/supporting statewide initiatives that provide broad and far-reaching resources for the field of environmental education (e.g., MADE CLEAR [climate change education], Bay Backpack, MD Green Schools Program, etc.).	Some examples: many CIN partners are involved in various MADE CLEAR initiatives, contribute to and promote Bay Backpack, support Green Schools application process and assist/ promote US Green Ribbon Schools in MD.