

Maryland Partnership for Children In Nature
QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT
for January – April, 2013

April 2013

The full 2013 Action Plan is being updated and will soon be available online at www.dnr.state.md.us/cin.

Environmental Literacy – Support for EL in Schools and the Community

Lead: Laurie Jenkins, Montgomery County Public Schools, laurie_c_jenkins@mcpsmd.org;

Co-Lead: Joe Harbor, National Aquarium, jharber@aqua.rog

- The committee is working to make connections with the **higher education** community to bring professional development experiences in environmental education (EE) to pre-service and in-service teachers. Recently, the group met with a state Certification coordinator to learn about EE certification and endorsement, and presented EL higher ed ideas to the Deans of Higher Ed professional development schools.
- To assist and support Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in the development and improvement of their **Environmental Literacy Programs (ELP)**, including to foster **collaboration with EE providers**:
 - A series of **regional meetings** with formal educators from LEAs and non-formal environmental education providers was completed this spring. This is a third round of the regional meetings that began in early 2012. MSDE is working with a contracted evaluator to provide a detailed report on the status of LEA environmental literacy programs. Portions of the preliminary findings were shared at the January Partnership meeting and the final report is expected to be available by July 2013.
 - The Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE) and partners hosted a series of three **EE provider workshops** to build providers' capacity to understand and contribute to EL instructional strategies and align their programs well with formal curricula.
- To foster **regional collaboration on EE/ EL** and development of metrics that show the effectiveness of EL and accomplishments across the state, the group ensured that MD EL priorities were embedded in the draft goal statement for the new Chesapeake Bay Program agreement; and drafted an RFP to seek contract evaluators to develop metrics.
- To improve the use of **schoolyards for outdoor learning**, a small committee has been planning a project to refresh and enhance a 1999 MSDE guide, "Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment...on School Sites" (aka, "the Green Book"). An updated version is slated to include more current practices and add sections on using school grounds for outdoor learning. In late 2012, the group submitted a proposal for funding that would help to support professional development workshops to develop a holistic, interactive community including school facilities staff and contractors, administrators, educators, and others in the planning, development, maintenance and instructional use of more natural features on school grounds. The workshops would be focused on the guide contents but would also contribute to the revision of the guide, in an iterative process. Funding for the first year looks promising.

Health and Food (Agriculture) Connections

Leads: Health – Kim Martinez, National Wildlife Federation (NWF), martinezk@nwf.org

Food/ Agriculture – Karen Fedor, Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), karen.fedor@maryland.gov

- **Healthy Maryland Children:** Connecting kids' health to time spent in nature is a "cross-cutting" goal of organizations which make up the Partnership. The **Community Health Initiative** intends to engage as many of the CIN Partners and outside partners as possible, to bring all avenues of the issue and a diversity of resources to one selected urban community in Baltimore, for the pilot phase of this project. In consultation with Baltimore City Department of Health, and with Baltimore City Recreation and Parks, the workgroup has chosen to focus pilot efforts on the neighborhoods surrounding (within ~ ½ mile of) **Carroll Park**, in southwest Baltimore. The pilot will test methods to get more families outside to improve the health and well

being of their children, and a goal is to increase awareness and enthusiasm for nature-oriented activities at the park; and then to help the community to build longer-term capability to support those activities through partners and engaging community mentors. Members of the workgroup have met with community leaders (e.g. Friends of Carroll Park, Samuel Morse Elementary School Administrator) to survey existing programs and community needs. The workgroup will collaborate with a variety of community leaders to develop a full program strategy, with a timeline for implementation in 2013. Feedback from the pilot project will inform the workgroup's next steps in creating a set of recommendations to be used as a **“blue print” for replication** in other Maryland communities.

Agriculture\Food Connections:

- The Mid-Atlantic Farm-Based Educator's Network (non-formal education providers) met on March 6 to discuss how to structure and align farm-based education activities to meet standards (E-Lit, Next Generation Science, STEM, Common Core), sharing and developing curriculum (with an emphasis on expanding to middle and high school grades), and introducing some evaluation methods into pre/post and in- field experiences. The workshop was hosted by Montpelier Farms in Prince George's County.
- MD Agricultural Education Foundation (MAEF) and MDA hosted *Farm-Based Education: Taking Students to the Field and Greenhouse!* a workshop at the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education Annual Conference in February. At this all day workshop, participants visited a hydroponic greenhouse facility and a winery to demonstrate how to connect with and utilize community farmers and their farms as fantastic outdoor classrooms for science and social studies.

Communities and Community Planning

Lead: Sandi Olek, Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), solek@dnr.state.md.us

- To meet the goal of engaging parks staff (state/ county/ local) in identifying and addressing needs for improving access to nature and interpretive/ recreational programs:
 - The Maryland Park Service (MPS, part of DNR) continues to **enhance their program offerings for schools in several state parks**. A team of seasoned environmental educators from MPS and DNR are working to provide training opportunities for staff that are newer to EE, including seasonal Maryland Conservation Corps members who assist with programs. Rangers have met with school administrators in a number of counties to determine how they can best meet schools' needs for meaningful outdoor learning experiences in state parks.
 - A technical advisory team has been established to develop a **review of local** (e.g., county) **Long Range Parks and Recreation Plans and/or policy guidance** to determine best practices which can be incorporated into the Statewide Land Preservation and Recreation Plan, and to assist future county practices in providing/ utilizing nature areas in parks. The team is participating in a series of three meetings to establish barriers, local best practices and compile a list of new and innovative ideas.
- The **Nature Play Spaces** (NPS) workgroup continues promotion of NPS through outreach, distribution of guidance and establishment of demonstration projects, including the following:
 - **Urban NPS demonstration projects** are in the works for the towns of Centreville and Sykesville, and conversations have begun with Greenbelt. A new NPS is being established at the Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary in southern Anne Arundel County (construction/ planting set for mid-May).
 - **Presentations** were made about NPS at the February MAEOE conference, and on urban NPS to the Maryland Main Street Program, with more presentations planned through fall 2013.
- The workgroup has been **supporting the Community Health Initiative** by providing coordination with ongoing community revitalization work, developing best practices and building partnerships.

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Promoting Outdoor Play & Learning (i.e. Outreach and Communication)

Lead: Britt Slattery, Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), bslattery@dnr.state.md.us

- As a contribution to Maryland's promotion of Great Outdoors Month (in June), the Partnership is hosting its second annual **Celebrate Maryland Outdoors Days, June 8 – 22**. This “non-event event” is a two-week celebration meant to share promotion of any and all outdoor activities offered statewide. Like last year, the event's kickoff coincides with National Get Outdoors Day and it culminates on the last day with National Wildlife Federation's Great American Backyard Campout, and will promote activities throughout the two weeks. The effort aims to help connect, children, families and others to nature, increase awareness of Maryland's rich diversity of great places to go and things to do outdoors, promote and support participation in and family skill-building in outdoor nature activities across the state, and demonstrate that spending time in nature is a shared cultural value here. Parks, nature areas, outdoor centers, after school programs, faith or community centers, watershed organizations, and others are encouraged to submit information about their offerings online via www.dnr.state.md.us/cin.
- April was again designated as **Environmental Education Month**. The Governor's Proclamation was promoted via a press release and posting copies of the proclamation in various strategic locations.
- A **display about the Partnership** has been exhibited during the month of April at Quiet Waters Park in Annapolis, as part of the park's Earth Month celebration.
- CIN Steering Committee members collaborated to submit four **presentation proposals to the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) conference**, an international gathering being held this year in Baltimore, October 9-12. If accepted, the presentations will convey the array of efforts that Maryland, through and/or enhanced by the Partnership, conducts to develop environmentally literate students/citizens and connect children to nature. Because Maryland is looked to as a leader in this arena, we wanted our work to be well-represented at the conference in our own state.

Funding Strategy

Lead: Jamie Baxter, Chesapeake Bay Trust, jbaxter@cbtrust.org

In February, several Partnership members, mostly representatives of the Steering Committee and Leadership Team, met to kick off the development of a funding strategy to support the Partnership's priorities. The group provided valuable insight on specific funding gaps and high priority needs, and brainstormed a wide array of possible funding initiatives to address them that would leverage federal, state and local and private resources. Proposed next steps were outlined and further discussed at an April meeting. The group has determined that a gap analysis should be conducted first, consisting of a quick assessment of current spending and funding needs for school and community based programs supporting Environmental Literacy. An action plan with a timeline is now being finalized, with tasks and leads identified.