

Maryland Partnership for Children In Nature  
**PROGRESS REPORT – January - June 2014**

Highlights of recent actions and achievements.

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All reports are available online at [www.dnr.state.md.us/cin](http://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](mailto:laurie_c_jenkins@mcpsmd.org);

**Co-Lead:** Joe Harbor, National Aquarium, [jharber@aqua.org](mailto:jharber@aqua.org)

(1) Assist and support Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in the development and improvement of their Environmental Literacy Programs (ELP), including fostering collaboration with EE providers.

- *MSDE environmental education briefings and opportunities for collaboration:*
  - MSDE hosted a briefing in conjunction with the MAEOE conference in February, involving LEA points of contact and informal providers, updates on statewide initiatives. Two additional major environmental education briefings are being planned for November 2014 and February 2015. Non-formal partners will be invited to attend the latter.
  - College and Career Readiness Workshops occurring in various locations statewide began in June and will continue throughout the summer. These 2-day conferences include a variety of sessions that inform participants of new standards and practices, and demonstrate the integration of math, Next Generation Science Standards, STEM, social studies, and disciplinary literacy.
  - MSDE will continue to collaborate with statewide programs (such as MELP and MADE-CLEAR, both described below; the Governor’s “Schoolshed” program; and many others) that can help schools improve the LEA’s ELPs.
- *Chesapeake Bay Program plans to pilot a metrics tool that will show the effectiveness of EL programs across the region.*
  - Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) plans to pilot a metrics tracking tool across the region in the summer. Several LEAs have volunteered to fill out a draft self-assessment, to help pilot test the metrics tool. The tool will measure the effectiveness of EL programs, and will be followed by a full inventory of all schools in fall 2014. National Geographic’s FieldScope is the program that will run the tracking system. MSDE will use the new CBP tracking tool as the way to report the status and progress on their Environmental Literacy Plan to the State Superintendent of Schools.
  - Several Partnership members participated through the Bay Program Mid-Atlantic Environmental Literacy Workgroup to assist with drafting language for the Environmental Literacy goal and outcomes of the new Bay Agreement, signed in June 2014. The final Agreement includes outcomes for students, sustainable schools, and environmental literacy planning which includes metrics tracking.

(continued...)

(2) Connect school systems with non-formal environmental education providers and prepare teachers to provide field experiences for students.

- Work continues on identifying and facilitating regional opportunities for non-formal partners to assist LEA's in the development of environmental literacy plans.
- NOAA BWET funds to MSDE are supporting Eastern Shore LEA watershed projects. Eastern Shore counties are applying for funds for off-site and on-site programs, and collaborating with non-formal partners and institutes of higher education.

(3) Work with institutions of higher education to implement environmental literacy training in pre-service teacher education degree programs, to prepare teachers to meet environmental literacy standards before they are employed in classrooms. This includes exploring ways to provide training and experiences in teaching students out-of-doors.

- The Higher Education Connection workgroup, which includes representatives from a variety of institutions of higher learning, are developing specific plans for two to three strategies/initiatives and recommendations that will work to provide means to integrate Environmental Literacy into pre-service programs and internship opportunities:
  - University of Maryland College Park is planning a pilot two-day environmental literacy workshop for pre-service teachers (elementary education students) in August 2014.
  - Towson University piloted a pre-service teacher experience in which two content area instructors – one in methods and one in application of science content – collaborated to provide a student practicum involving stream assessment with elementary students.

(4) Support the *Maryland School Grounds for Learning* project through Partnership resources (*regarding the design, enhancement and use of the school grounds to learn about the environment and conserve natural resources*).

- Guide and website planning: Progress has been made on planning for content of the guide, including revisions and updates on the original guide “Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment: a guide for planning, design, construction, and maintenance on new and existing school sites (1999);” and developing a framework for the interactive online web resource. Case studies are currently being identified and collected (will continue through 2014).
- Professional development planning: Both web-based and in-person trainings are planned, for facilities staff and teachers. Online tutorials are under development, to be used as a supplemental tool. The first pilot PD workshop (for facilities) will be conducted fall 2014.

(5) Continue promoting/supporting major statewide programs such as the following:

- The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is continuing the Governor's “**Explore and Restore your Schoolshed**” stream study and action initiative, with ongoing support among the environmental education community. Several workshops for elementary and secondary school teachers have been planned for late summer and fall; nearly all are at capacity. DNR is making competitive grants available for LEA's or partners, to support professional learning and field experiences for students including costs for transportation and equipment (request for proposals to be released by fall 2014).
- **MELP (Maryland Environmental Literacy Partnership)**, CBF's initiative which focuses on assisting counties with implementing E-Lit Standard 1 (issues investigation), is in the second phase of the project. A second cohort of lead teachers is being trained this summer and then will engage in the process of differentiating the statewide modules for local implementation. This will

involve writing in local sites, resources, providers and programs that fit with a particular module, and piloting those modules during the 2014-15 school year.

- **National Geographic** began hosting webinars on FieldScope this spring to help teachers and non-formal partners learn to use FieldScope and upload data to the project site – additional webinars are planned.
- The **MADE CLEAR** initiative is ready to conduct its second multi-day summer summit, this time at **University of DE** for teachers (grades 6 -9) and supervisors from selected MD counties in July. Application of content will be to the local environment and local resources. The plan is that this cohort will write lessons to be piloted in the classroom.

## **Communities and Community Planning**

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

(1) Enhance equitable access to green space and outdoor opportunities by incorporating green space planning and access...into state and local planning policy and guidance, because access to nearby nature is a critical part of developing sustainable communities.

- **State and local planning:** In follow-up to providing recommendations for inclusion in the state's **Land Preservation and Recreation Plan (LPRP)**, the workgroup hosted a technical guidance meeting for the plan. The group worked to analyze and discuss the challenges, opportunities and strategies for each of the CIN recommendations for the LPRP. Case studies and successful examples were also discussed. The group is working to develop a guidance document based on the discussion, and is planning to develop an on-line resource to include the recommendations (fall 2014). This ***on-line technical guidance tool*** will help to establish the link between state and local planning and the goals of the Partnership for Children in Nature.

(2) Continue promotion of Nature Play Spaces as alternatives to traditional playgrounds...

- **Implementing demonstration projects:** The workgroup is facilitating and contributing to development of demonstration projects for the Cities of Annapolis and Gaithersburg at municipal parks. DNR provided technical assistance with concept renderings for the City of Annapolis for a new space at Truxtun Park, scheduled to be installed this summer (2014). Background materials were provided to the City of Gaithersburg to include in the City's bid invitation for the design of a nature play space at Constitution Gardens Park. The project was out for bid in June and will be awarded for design in summer 2014.
- **Providing technical guidance:** Worked with Baltimore City Schools to develop technical guidance for construction and re-development of school grounds in Baltimore City. The guidance includes detailed recommendations on how to establish places for students to learn, explore and play on school grounds.
- **Building a professional community:**
  - A new MD Nature Play Spaces Facebook page was established to promote nature play spaces in MD and to spark communication with the community interested in learning and sharing experiences. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Nature-Play-Spaces-Maryland/785461278145423>
  - A second Nature Play Spaces workshop is being planned for fall 2014.

**Connecting healthy communities with community planning** – a decision was made to combine some efforts among these two workgroups as their goals overlap in many ways. See below for information.

## **Health and Food (Agriculture) Connections**

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

**Food/ Agriculture** – Karen Fedor, Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), [karen.fedor@maryland.gov](mailto:karen.fedor@maryland.gov)

(1) **Healthy Maryland Children:** Explore means to engage communities in health-focused initiatives to increase physical fitness through nature based recreational activities.

- In coordination with the Community Planning workgroup, the Health workgroup is developing plans to host a technical guidance brainstorming meeting. The group will solicit input on several key health policy areas, and seek to identify specific challenges, strategies and recommendations to promote active time spent outdoors with nature. The workgroup is seeking participants and suggestions for stakeholders, and will schedule the meeting for late summer.

(2) **Agriculture/Food Connections:** Continue integrating agriculture education into schools and nonformal education venues as a component of environmental literacy:

- Farm-based Educators (FBE) workshops: Three workshops have been hosted this year on environmental literacy for FBEs, with the Mid-Atlantic Farm-Based Education Network.
- New ag-ed curriculum: Maryland Agriculture Education Foundation (MAEF) received grant support for the *Chesapeake Food, Farm and Bay* curriculum project. MAEF is currently forming a working group (pairing classroom teachers with FBE's) to begin the first phase of development, which includes writing the food-systems experiential farm-based curriculum for grades 3-5. If interested in participating, contact Peggy Eppig, [peppig@maefonline.com](mailto:peppig@maefonline.com).
- Farm to School program: Continued work to expand the program includes promoting and hosting Maryland Homegrown School Lunch Week, September 15-19, 2014. This event helps to integrate learning about agriculture and food sources, and to spread the importance of bringing fresh, local foods to students in schools.

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

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

(1) Develop enhanced communications among the Partnership members and to promote initiatives to a wider audience.

- Ongoing support is provided for all Partnership actions through a variety of communications means. Cooperation and collaboration throughout the professional community is our best resource, with all helping to promote events and actions through social media and other communications networks.
- Celebrate Maryland Outdoors Days was not held this year due to other priorities. A decision was made to consider the possibility of promoting International Mud Day next year (June 2015).

(2) Explore and pursue opportunities for unique approaches to potentially increasing available funding and policy and/or operational support for priorities identified by the Partnership.

- The Partnership's leadership has held several meetings to explore opportunities and is working toward developing recommendations for transition materials for new State administration for 2015 and beyond. This work will continue throughout 2014.