

Project Green Classrooms
Leadership Meeting 5/13/2020 -- Summary

Theme: Equity in Environmental Education

A special Leadership Team meeting was organized as a short opportunity for the partners to consider the equity gaps that have been brought to light with the COVID-19 pandemic Governor's Stay at Home Order and the shift to digital resources during Continuity of Learning implementation for schools.

Co-chairs Dr. Carol Williamson and Secretary Jeannie Riccio opened the meeting with remarks focused upon ensuring that students continue to receive environmental education during this time of distance learning. Steering Committee members noted some examples of how their environmental education work is transitioning to support educators, parents, and students to continue learning while schools are closed.

Two brief presentations were provided to highlight decision-support tools to address gaps in equitable access to Maryland's parks and green spaces and the resources they offer: The Park Equity Mapper Tool (developed by the University of Maryland School of Public Health and partners) and the Maryland Department of Transportation's [Get Kids Outside in Maryland](#) storymap. The Park Equity Mapper is more technical, using various indicators such as ease of access and community demographics to give green spaces an equity score; and featuring an environmental justice context layer that shows patterns of inequality across the state. The storymap is more user-friendly for educators and families as well as decision-makers, to show where green spaces exist and available routes to access them by bus, car, bike, on foot, etc.

Discussion centered around how tools such as these can be used and expanded for multiple purposes, including planning decisions to identify gaps and increase access, and to improve awareness among the public about where there are green spaces to visit and how to get there. In Project Green Classrooms' advisory capacity, some action items suggested include:

- (1) Using the tools to help narrow the focus on select communities most in need of improved access to green space, and provide additional resources or attention to closing the gaps. It is already being used for local and state park planning, and for steering funding opportunities, though these can be expanded.
- (2) Use the tools to help find creative solutions to transportation issues and costs for schools:
 - (a) Enhance the storymap with features that would help schools to identify nearby nature areas for specific outdoor learning activities such as stream study, that could be accessed without a bus (or at lower cost if nearby), and pilot test it with schools.
 - (b) Consider the feasibility of allowing schools / students to access parks using public transportation.
- (3) Continue developing and expanding the storymap and promote it, so it can become more of a community resource, more widely known and used. This is especially important during the transition while a lot of learning is happening at home and in the community.
- (4) These resources can also be used with students as mapping activities, incorporating a lot of different skills, for excellent lessons about their state, and helping students to identify positive civic action projects.

- (5) Look into engaging new audiences to use and help improve the tools for planning park features -- such as health care providers to consult on best practices/features for social distancing, does urban canopy provide the same health benefits as a wooded trail, etc.; consider maintenance needs and capacities; community groups to assist with care.

The Steering Committee will consider these action items and address them as feasible through our ongoing work.

Secretary Riccio and Dr. Williamson reminded participants to keep working towards the [recommendations](#) set forth by this advisory body and to not lose the momentum and progress that has been made in environmental education and literacy. During this time of distance learning, the environmental education community was urged to continue providing support for parents and caregivers as they help to facilitate environmental education remotely, with families and households maximizing resources to interact with nature within their immediate environment.