

# Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature Environmental Literacy Plan

## Summary of Public Comments

### Common Threads

- Great concern on how we are going to fund these initiatives.
- Need a central, web-based location of all resources available to educators (field trips, funding, professional development, etc.)
- Liability is a concern for having kids on private lands and in natural play areas.
- Transportation of students to the facilities is a barrier of getting them outdoors.
- Concern that teachers are being asked to do another task.
- Every Child Every Year is a great idea, but needs to be infused into the VSC.
- Diversity issues should be incorporated throughout all of the recommendations.
- Concern over how this will be tracked and measured.

### On-line Comments

#### Question 2: Definition of Environmental Literacy

Generally accepted the definition with a few recommended edits:

Environmentally literate individuals possess the knowledge, intellectual skills, attitudes, experiences and motivation to make and act upon responsible environmental decisions as individuals and as members of their community. Environmentally literate students:

- Understand environmental and physical process and systems, including human systems;
- Analyze global, social, cultural, political, physical, economic, and environmental relationships;
- Weigh various sides of environmental issues;
- And make responsible decisions as individuals and as member of their community.

Environmental literacy is dependent upon formal and informal education opportunities. It is not simply a body of knowledge, nor is it the result of a collection of experiences. Rather, it results from a marriage of the two and is cultivated over many years in the schools, at home and in the community. The Governor's charge to the Partnership reflects the multiple facets required for development of the "whole child" whose childhood is marked by everyday connections to nature and through free play, as well as more structure and deliberate outdoor and environmental education.

***Question 3: Every Child Every Year:** An annual meaningful outdoor watershed education experience has been defined by the Chesapeake 2000 Agreement and is recommended by this report to be required to occur for every Maryland student every year, pre-K through grade 12. a. Increase the capacity of state, local, and national parks and school systems to provide meaningful watershed education experiences and service learning opportunities. b. Ensure that each of Maryland's school systems owns and operates an Outdoor Environmental Education Center and/or have access to local, high*

quality day and residential outdoor and environmental education programs. c. Develop a comprehensive and searchable catalog of outdoor classrooms, outdoor/environmental education professional development opportunities, and service learning programs. d. Create new funding sources to support transportation, substitute teacher, and programmatic costs. e. Describe strategies for providing an annual meaningful watershed experience to all students and related environmental literacy outcomes in each Local Education Agency's Master Plan.

- Generally supportive but funding is the major concern.
- Most responders did not fully understand what MWEE is and the relevance to other watersheds outside the Chesapeake Bay Watershed
- Broaden MWEE to Meaningful Outdoor Education Experience
- Accommodations made for special needs students
- Advocate the use of local data collected in each County for use in the classroom. Data should also be incorporated into a statewide mapping and data management approach.
- Emphasis for addressing the needs of underserved children and communities.
- Concerns for increased record keeping.
- Change to elementary, middle and high school with follow-up activities.
- Curriculum based interpretive programs need to be developed for use in both parks and schools
- Outdoor education sites are needed in all of the counties and supported by the county. Howard County site is strictly non-profit and does not receive county funding.

**Question 4: High School Graduation Requirement:** *Every student must take and pass at least a one credit high school course/offering in Environmental Literacy in order to graduate. This could be an existing course or an LEA-designed course and must include an action or issue investigation component.*

Mixed and probably evenly split for and against this graduation requirement. Concerns and responses include:

- Will limit students' ability to take other courses such as physics, band, art, or other electives.
- Schools are struggling to have students pass HS assessments and other graduation requirements and are at the breaking point.
- Unless incorporated into other existing graduation requirements it would be difficult to track.
- A one credit course is setting the bar too low.
- Should consider an environmental service learning project.
- Develop standards for these courses and what is expected for students to learn.

**Question 5: Integrate school construction and operation into curricula.** *a. Align school construction and operations to criteria required to assist every Maryland school in achieving and sustaining MAEOE Green Schools status by 2014. b. As required by the*

recently passed *High Performance Building Act*, ensure all new schools or renovations greater than 7500 square feet achieve *LEED Silver* standard or two *Green Globes*. Provide opportunities to tie school operations into classroom curricula. C. Provide the professional development and resources necessary to ensure that *Schoolyard Habitat Programs* are embedded educational experiences within each school; as an integrated component of the curriculum inextricably linked to the academic achievement of the school.

- Provide professional development and resources.
- Students need standards-based activities and pacing guides to follow to meet these standards over time.
- There are at present 1,429 public schools in Maryland and 1175 non-public schools = 2604. There are approximately 190 green schools listed on the MAEOE web site. That means that there are 2414 more school that need to achieve green school status over the next 5 years as well as 190+ who will need to reauthorize their status. It takes two years to plan, develop and document the the green school application. The amount of student and staff time and energy you are suggesting here is immense.
- At this time, most counties cannot afford to fund these initiatives.
- Re-write to better reflect differentiating between school building and grounds.

Suggestion...

#3 Fundamentally change the way school buildings and grounds are designed, used, and managed

add this....

Provide financial, technical, administrative, and facility management support, so that school grounds can be developed into the most interesting and diverse landscapes for child play, formal curriculum use, and informal exploration. School grounds should include natural habitats, conservation landscaping, gardens, art, hardscapes, advanced playground design, advanced stormwater management for Chesapeake Bay protection, and more.

**Question 6: Professional Development** for teachers, state park rangers and naturalists and other service providers to assist with high quality, collaborative implementation of the *Children in Nature Environmental Literacy plan*. a. Require that all Maryland pre-service teacher preparation programs include a course in environmental literacy. b. Establish a 15 credit *Environmental Literacy Endorsement* for all Maryland in-service teachers. c. Demonstrate within the *Master Plan* how each LEA is addressing *Environmental Literacy*. d. Develop a plan to increase diversity among environmental education service providers, and provide training to state, local, and non-government service providers in effectively reaching diverse and underserved audiences.

- Are universities prepared to teach the course?
- Consider our intensely special needs/behavior students. These students rarely get to go on field trips due to the number of safety issues that surround them. Sites need to be designed to work with students who have feeding tubes, catheters, etc.
- Assess all the State environmental agencies for their potential partnership roles.

- 15 credits = a college Minor, that is more than the Reading and Special Ed credit requirements - is Environmental Ed more important than Reading and Special Ed?

***Question 7: Establish a trail system*** in Maryland second to none (as called for in the Governor's transition report) through creation of a statewide trail development office led by a Trails Coordinator responsible for providing programmatic direction to agency trail planners and ensuring ongoing collaboration and strategic planning. Launch the Office through a statewide Trail Summit. a. Increase support for and engagement in trail development and promote public awareness about trail based recreation and transportation opportunities for youth and families. b. Integrate trails into planning at the federal, state, and local levels of government. c. Streamline access to funds for trail design, building, and maintenance.

- Trails can be incorporated at many schools around existing lakes and ponds in urban environments.
- How will trails be maintained? Much of this already exists, and is underutilized.
- Potential for high school/college CCC work programs and introductions to environmental design issues.
- A lot of the newer trails being created are being asphalted which is not environmentally friendly example. Security on these public trails is a large problem.
- Is there a study showing that people want this?
- It is necessary to concentrate on playgrounds for inner city children.

***Question 8: Create and provide access to nature play spaces*** for every child in neighborhoods throughout Maryland. a. Increase awareness of what nature play spaces are and how essential they are to the health and well-being of children. b. Protect, preserve, and reclaim existing play spaces, and create new nature play spaces, including underutilized spaces. c. Ensure physical access to nature play spaces. d. Establish the expectation that nature play spaces are an element of land use planning and community development, parallel to typical infrastructure elements such as transportation, schools, and amenities.

- Majority of the responses were positive
- Safety of children when in play areas was a common thread throughout responses
- Benefits the whole community, but need to get parents, developers, and local governments involved
- Important to build a comprehensive public service/relations program concurrently with partnership
- Make new areas, re-use old areas and make them green (do not over-structure environmental experience)

***Question 9: Expand and improve the existing Civic Justice Corps (CJC) model*** to provide at-risk youth state-wide with opportunities to serve in conservation crews in State Parks and other public lands in partnership with the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services and community non-profit organizations. a. Build capacity and develop the sustainability of Maryland's existing Civic Justice Corps model for statewide application.

*b. Develop and implement new CJC model programs with Partner Providers to increase capacity of CJC program by a minimum of 1,000 youth by 2015. c. Improve sustainability of CJC program by developing alternative funding sources to supplement state funding.*

- Majority of responses were positive
- Proper training of leaders a must
- Should be a holistic program that includes language skills, diet, art and more
- These opportunities critical for all youth of Maryland
- Question: should it be stated here that the youth are exposed to a variety of environmental experiences while in these programs or is this generally understood?

**Question 10: Develop and implement a comprehensive program to increase access and utilization of public lands for underserved communities.** *a. Establish a state-wide grant program that will provide funds to community groups, schools, and non-profits for the purpose of providing at-risk and underserved children with outdoor recreational and learning experiences. b. Establish a mentor program that assists adult leaders of community and school-based youth groups in underserved communities with the knowledge and skills to comfortably and safely provide outdoor experiences to children.*

- Great opportunity to make environmental literacy meaningful to all children throughout the state
- Provision of transportation and access to outlying areas crucial
- Look at other national models...4-H, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts
- Important to bring underserved communities into this program – funding is critical
- There were many questions on funding. Where is the money coming from to fund this?
- Question: Can this be moved to a higher level recommendation?

**Question 11: Increase the number and coordination of state park ranger and naturalist staff** *to support implementation of all elements of the Governor's Children in Nature plan. a. Develop and implement a staffing plan to provide appropriate professional Ranger and seasonal Naturalist staff to plan and direct interpretive programming at all State Parks. b. Enhance existing programs to successfully connect children and families with state park resources. c. Provide greater coordination for children and families to experience a seamless network of opportunities in local, county, state and national parks, and through partnerships with private landowners. d. Provide infrastructure in state parks to support diverse interpretive programming for larger audiences. e. Provide sufficient law enforcement staff to create an environment where parents, teachers and children can feel safe participating in nature-based outdoor activities.*

- A plus is that this one utilizes existing structure to implement the plan - and is the first step to getting families back into our parks - but stakeholders suggests that

utilization of broad array of resource professionals instead of focusing on just Rangers and Naturalist.

- Local parks are the front line with regard to nature and local communities - all funding and planning should consider local and regional parks run by counties and municipalities
- Ensure that all parks have education staff or an appropriate liaison for educational institutions contacting parks for programming options - teachers should not have to make multiple contacts to reach the right person
- Concern regarding the sustainability of this program in light of budget cuts was high - however many suggested that creating more green jobs would be beneficial to the economy as well future job options for young children who get inspired and as a result may want to grow up to be a Park Ranger
- Part of the strategic plan could be to build a regional interactive Maryland Conservation Heritage Center to interpret and preserve the State's rich history in this field
- Implement the findings of the State Parks Budget Study to make the State Park System a national model

***Question 12: Create the Children in Nature STAT (CiNSTAT) program*** charged with ensuring the implementation of the plan, improving coordination of programs, policies and budgets and tracking progress. a. Charge the Partnership to develop CiNSTAT program including: measurement tools and improved planning and coordination of public and private agencies and partners in the implementation of the plan.

- More particulars regarding this aspect of the plan is needed to gauge broader public understanding and support, however a few believe this;
- (creating a measurement plan) was an important step but that it could add another layer to an already burden system. In addition the estimates for evaluation are much too low.
- Establishing a creative and effective system for the building and institution of this plan throughout the state would allow for specific regions to have ownership and responsibility for its success.
- Although it is imperative to develop a CiNSTAT program - it is also important to measure better environmental conditions and personal well being

***Question 13: Additional comments on the Plan as a whole.***

- This is an admirable initiative with long term implications and, if funded and implemented properly, potential national impact. Education agencies, both local and State, will carry the brunt of the load and local school systems will likely view the environmental literacy requirements as “one more thing we have to do”; if not thoughtfully packaged and delivered.

- Consideration should be given to prioritizing tasks rather than trying to implement all recommendations at the same time.
- How do we incorporate private schools into this initiative?
- What is the total cost of these initiatives?
- What is the cost to each stakeholder (K-12, higher ed., etc.)
- I recommend sending this back to the committee for further study and ask them to do the following:
  1. Identify the costs of these initiatives
  2. Identify components of this that would be budget-neutral.
  3. Develop additional budget-neutral initiatives.
- This looks good on paper, but the reality there are children out there who because of illnesses, disabilities, and other concerns simply will not be able to fulfill this “dream”.
- I like the ideas of GREENER schools. Develop an in-service (not 15 credits worth) to help teachers understand what they can do to live the GREEN example at school. Let the science teachers teach ecology, but empower the rest of the faculty to support by example and conduct.
- There are many other groups that have been overlooked - small garden clubs come to mind - who could also provide meaningful environmental experiences.
- How can we get them involved? Can we tap the underused retiree resources instead of burdening the education system and state agencies?

*(This is a very specific set of ideas for plan structure)*

1. Regarding Appendix A, format could be improved if the entire document more closely followed the Outline given on pages 2-3 of Appendix A. Those pages list parts A to F, matching the items in part 2 of the task list in the Executive Order; but then items A to F do not appear later as headings/organizers in the Appendix A document. It might be more clear if each part of the beginning Outline were repeated so they could be more specifically expanded upon.

2. Then since items A to F are not specifically listed in the text of Appendix A, I can't find some of them. Much of Appendix A seems to cover various aspects of item A - a review of current environmental programs - and it does an excellent job of that. But the items listed under Outline items B and C again are about existing programs, nothing new. Does the literacy committee feel that no new curriculum or outdoor programs are needed? Do the current programs result in children getting outdoors as desired by the Executive Order, and if not, does that tell us that changes are needed? Also, some explanation of the “portfolio” might be helpful. Of course, some good changes are recommended in the Executive Summary, but there aren't many specifics in Appendix A, especially compared to the many specifics in Appendix B. It could be said that Appendix A avoids bringing up much new, while Appendix B has so many new things & expenditures, they would perhaps be hard to accomplish.

3. I was unable to find on the MSDE website the draft Maryland State Environmental Literacy Standards mentioned on page 15 of Appendix A, but would be interested in reading them, particularly as they relate to the Children in Nature literacy plans.

- Many who commented feel that the Children in Nature Plan is an absolute need in today's educational process. With money currently as tight as it is, can Maryland afford to implement any new Educational mandates at this time?
- The public needs data and a rationale to understand the importance of outdoor play and learning in the development of healthy children and environmentally literate adults.
- Targeting certain areas and funding some comprehensive professional evaluation, again, not tests, but program evaluation that gets at the core principles - not to find fault but to plan for improvements.

## **Listening Session Comments**

### **School-based Recommendations:**

#### **Plus**

- Strength & diversity of Coalition: community, religion, business organizations – critical
- Maryland: strong education system with ability to do this
- Bold plan

#### **Challenges**

- Funding
- Address fears & barriers by pointing out how alternatives are dangerous (health risks of lack of outdoor activity, etc.) and how this is beneficial.
- Do not want a cookie cutter plan – stifles creativity, not work everywhere
- This feels like adding a lot on to teacher's plates.
- (ES: whole child, MS: tribe, HS: teach curriculum) How make sure we keep teaching whole person? Get away from teaching in silos – EII requires integration of social & natural sciences.
- Liability
- Urban areas need to see the relevance of getting kids outdoors.
- Managing and tracking the data. How do we track EVERY child?
- Resistance from LEAs.
- Transportation and funding.

#### **Help**

- Must figure out low and no-cost alternatives
- If school-grounds diverse and interesting landscapes (or efforts made to make them so i.e./schoolyard habitat), addresses above concern
- Coordinator for each LEA
- Make use of existing Schoolyard Habitats or other tracts of land.

- Put resources in one place.

### **Wish**

- Critical to include professional development for maintenance / grounds staff
- Closing parent involvement gap, closing gap btw home & school; involving community stakeholders (venders/businesses; parents; school working together)
- Publicize movement to our outside audience (not just preach to the choir)
- Need really good examples of integration, where to find how-to's (integrating into curriculum, professional development opportunities, etc.) – give schools contacts and ideas.
- Redo Recommendation #3: Fundamentally change how school grounds used, planned, changed and managed.
- Marketing what we already have available.
- Integration in plan: HS requirement – existing courses can address; integrate this throughout K-12 yrs . Must be in Master Plan. **MUST BE IN CURRICULUM EVERY YEAR** as an integral part of that curriculum. Must be credit class.

### **Public Spaces & Underserved Audiences**

#### **Challenges**

- Biggest challenges will be funding
- Transportation of students to facilities
- Naturalist training
- Maintaining trails
- find creative ways to engage children with disabilities – 1 in 150 has autism 1 in 600 have downs
- Engaging all the generations – from grandparents on through to kindergarten
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#### **Wishes**

- Need a go-to web site where someone can find the resource they need – also a list of experts d what their focus is
  - Using the internet to connect people that has needs / chat rooms
- need more green spaces in neighborhood
- Green space in neighborhoods
- Staffing to facilitate park use
- Remember ops for non interpretive trail walks for youth – to be alone – to interact with nature – time alone

#### **Plus**

- include more understanding of the importance of the adult mentor
- Private land trails (limited access)
- Inner city youth worker – 75% Baltimore youth will not graduate – build connection with underserved – how to get this population to take ownership to say a trail system
- build capacity within existing organizations

## **Evaluation/Tracking**

### **Pluses**

- Every year every student experiences
- Web nesting and networking of programs
- Technology as part of environmental experience
- Working towards a common language
- Use funds for technology, agriculture, community for funding sources

### **Wishes**

- Nonprofit included in capacity building to meet MWEE
- Is there help with insurance/liability coverage for nonprofits
- Benchmark measurement for EE literacy – MWEE experiences
- Standardization of evaluation of MWEE experiences
- Evaluation of programs to their effectiveness
- High school could utilize service to teach younger children (part of the literacy requirement) (helps with management of students)
- Revisit to include beyond ‘watershed’ definition; building on each other – (example of habitat study – not focused on “watershed”
- Communications and coordination of school and provider expectations for standards and experiences – working towards a common language
- Use of technology as tool for learning in the environment
- Change to zoning codes with element to develop a retrofit (cost is shifted) nature play space

### **Challenges**

- Do schools keep track? Nonprofit? Who would keep track to avoid overlapping? Standardization would be important
- How to work with coordination of training and VSC and materials with nonprofits
- Psychology of meet the changing needs (fear of change by teachers, nonprofits, institutions) Program change
- Phasing for students caught before implementation (transition activities requirements)
- Urban areas – how relate to effected by

### **Help**

- School systems or nonprofits help with tracking MWEE experiences?
- Use funds for technology, agriculture, community for funding sources
- STEM; Technology
- Bay STAT
- Using resources and tools to help track (how many hits or downloads)
- Change to zoning codes with element to develop a retrofit (cost is shifted) nature play space
- Mandatory Dedication (PG and Montgomery counties) (Money and land that is set aside- email Grace Fielder for law – fielder@gefielder.com
- Is the evaluation going to occur prior to implementation? Establish baseline;
- Best practices and evaluation of the experiences