

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



MAEOE

## Annual Evaluation of the Maryland Green Schools Program

2024-2025



# MARYLAND GREEN SCHOOLS PROGRAM

## About Maryland Green Schools

Since 1999, the Maryland Green Schools (MDGS) program has been the signature program of the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE), with current participation from schools in 23 of Maryland's 24 counties. The process to become a Green School is rigorous, and schools must reapply every four years to maintain status. The MDGS program assists new and active schools by providing structural, logistical and financial support, as well as facilitating school progress through the application process. If schools are awarded, they carry the recognition of being certified as a Maryland Green School.

By integrating environmental education and sustainability into school curricula, the MDGS program supports schools to pursue and achieve the state of Maryland's education requirements for environmental literacy put forth by the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.04.17–Environmental Literacy Instructional Programs for Grades Pre-kindergarten–12). The MDGS program also helps to facilitate progress toward broader goals of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.

## Context for this Evaluation Report

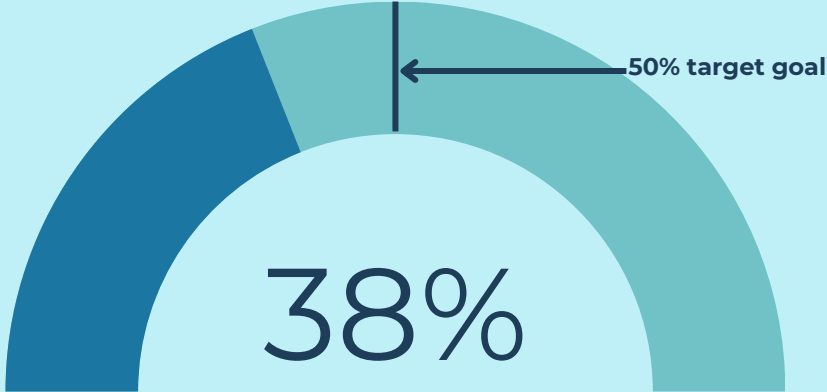
In both 2019 and 2022, the Maryland state legislature allocated funding to MAEOE to expand the contributions of Green Schools toward statewide sustainability goals. MAEOE set an ambitious goal to achieve a 50% school award rate in the Maryland Green Schools program by 2028. To achieve this target, three key objectives include 1) increasing support for school recruitment and sustainment in the program, 2) providing professional development and training to teachers and staff, and 3) increasing student environmental literacy.

This evaluation aims to explore these objectives. First, it examines progress towards expansion of MDGS awards statewide. This includes changes to award status over time and how program engagement and award status are influenced by demographic, geographic, and other factors. Second, it explores the impact of MDGS funding and training support on school engagement in the program. Finally, the evaluation assesses the environmental impact of the Green School program through institutional and individual student participation in a series of sustainability practices.

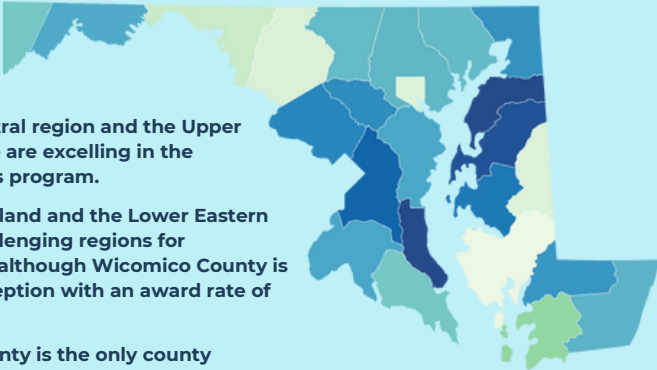
# PROGRESS TOWARD GOAL



In the 2024-25 academic year, 38% of all schools in the state – including both public and private – are awarded Maryland Green Schools, showcasing a 2.5% increase from the previous year.



Public Schools Awarded (%)



Both the Central region and the Upper Eastern Shore are excelling in the Green Schools program.

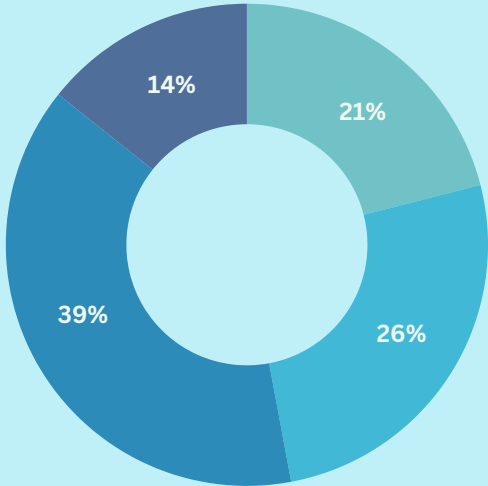
Western Maryland and the Lower Eastern shore are challenging regions for engagement, although Wicomico County is a notable exception with an award rate of 48%.

Somerset County is the only county without any Green Schools.



Green School awards are not uniformly distributed across Maryland, with hotspots of both high and low program engagement. Several counties improved their award rates in 2024-25, while others saw regressions caused by schools lapsing out of the program.

● Green Center    ● Green Ambassador  
● Both programs    ● Neither program



Applying schools supported by a Green Center or Green Ambassador in 2024-25.

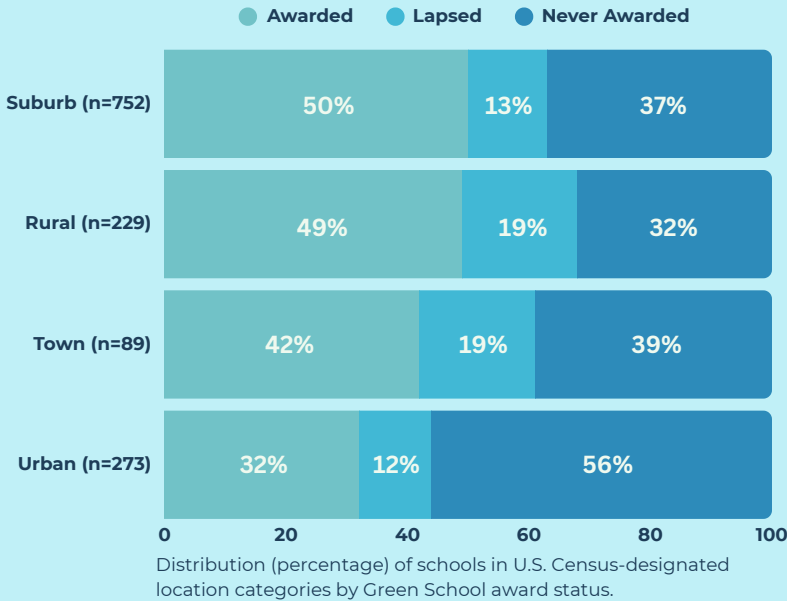


MDGS-sponsored support for Green Schools greatly contributes to their success in the program. Of schools with applications due in 2025, 86% were supported by a Green Center and/or a Green Ambassador. Further, MDGS Mini-grants were particularly helpful for newly-applying schools. Of all schools awarded in 2025, 20 received mini-grants, and of these, 12 were first-time applicants.

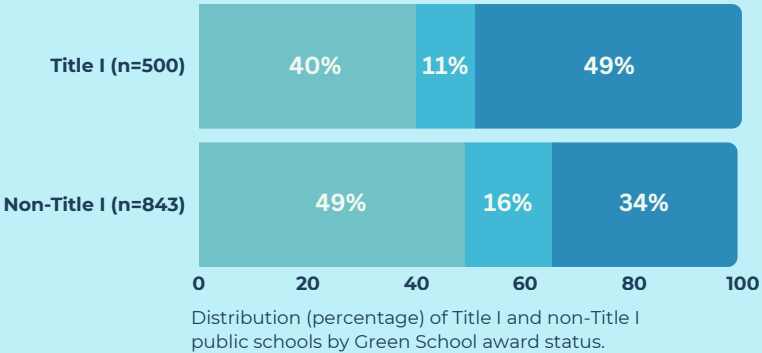
# CHALLENGES TO PROGRESS



Year over year, the MDGS program continues to have greatest success recruiting and awarding public schools in suburban locations, with continued opportunity to reach more urban schools. Targeted outreach to schools in urban areas may improve engagement.



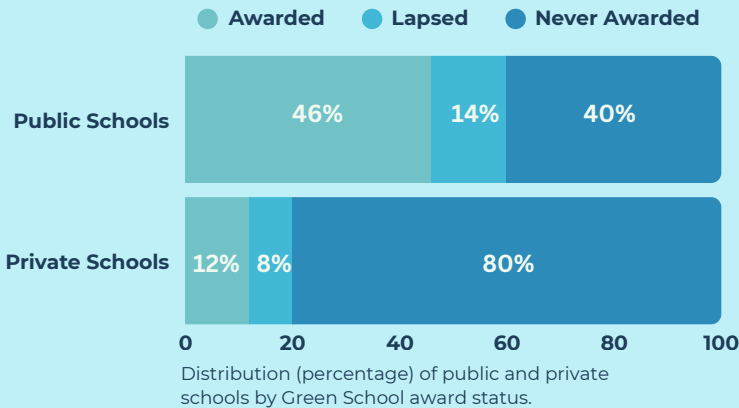
Awarded Lapsed Never Awarded



School participation in the MDGS program decreases as eligibility for Title I and Free and Reduced Meal (FARM) programs, both indicators of low socioeconomic status, increases in Maryland public schools. More financial support may be required.



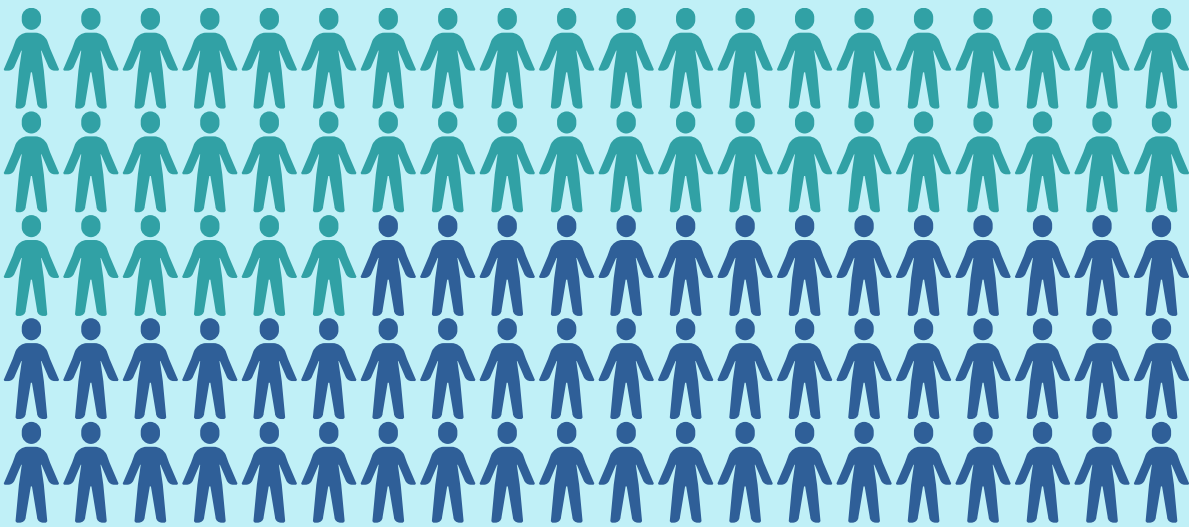
The MDGS program continues to have higher Green School award rates in public schools than private schools. Private schools remain the most critical opportunity to increase the number of awarded Green Schools statewide, but may not be a priority demographic for the program.



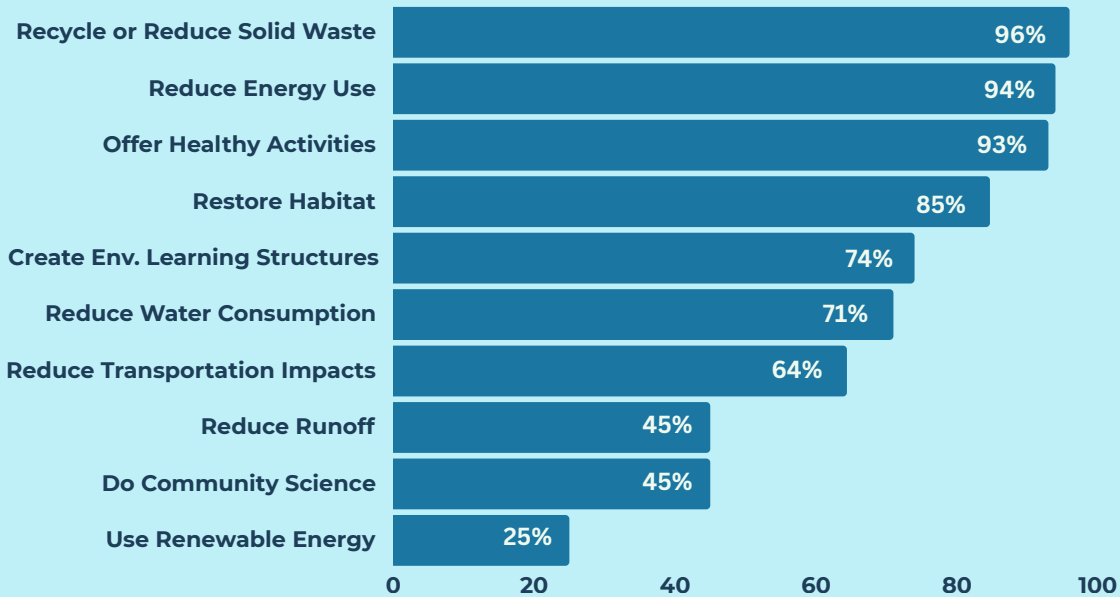
# MDGS PROGRAM IMPACT



Though MDGS is reaching 38% of schools across the state, they are reaching 46% of the total number of enrolled students in Maryland - a figure much closer to the statewide target rate of 50%. This is a function of larger schools maintaining a higher award rate than smaller schools.



Self-reported data from 119 Green Schools showcase high participation in a series of sustainable practices, though there is lower participation in activities that require approval and/or high levels of training and resources.



Self-reported participation (% of schools who answered yes) in a series of green practices Across Maryland Green Schools (n=119) in 2024-25.

# PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS



## Clarify program goals to provide evidence-based support to target schools and regions

Currently, MDGS is not on track to meet the 50% Green School target award rate unless significant advances are made in the next three years. This goal is achievable so long as future strategies and funding allocation are clarified around desired program outcomes. The MDGS team must revisit their program goals in order to strategically guide future outreach efforts, guided by a key question: **Is it more important to 1) achieve the 50% target award rate, or to 2) reach a greater diversity of schools?**

For the first goal, develop an outreach strategy targeted at schools with the greatest likelihood of seeking and maintaining Green School awards. This likely includes larger, suburban schools, but will be further informed by an in-depth cross-sectional analysis.

For the second goal, develop an outreach strategy targeted at schools least likely to be reached by the program. This could involve school and community needs assessments to identify schools most in need of support and the development of case-specific approaches.



## Improve quality of sustainability impact data

Collecting sustainability metrics data from Green Schools has the potential to quantify the environmental impact of the program, further motivate both individuals and schools to engage in green practices, and secure additional funding for the MDGS program. These outcomes, however, are dependent on the reliability and accuracy of the data. It is critical that MDGS identify and tackle the necessary **improvements to survey design**, as well as to offer a **training program** for teachers and staff that provides instruction on how to collect and report these data.

Further, availability of certain data (such as renewable energy usage) required to complete the sustainability metrics survey is currently a challenge for schools. A priority for MDGS is to work with utility companies or school districts to readily provide these data to schools in a clear and concise format.



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