

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Annual Evaluation of the Maryland Green Schools Program

2025-2026



MARYLAND GREEN SCHOOLS PROGRAM

About Maryland Green Schools

The Maryland Green Schools (MDGS) program is the signature program of the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE). The program was initiated in 1999 and has since expanded to 23 of Maryland's 24 Local Education Agencies (LEAs)*.

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 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 outlined in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.

Context for this Evaluation

Over the past year, MAEOE experienced atypical staffing transitions and funding limitations that reduced available capacity of the MDGS program to provide direct support to schools. During this period, MAEOE's focus was retaining at-risk schools while preventing another cohort of schools from expiring out of the program as a result of pandemic-related or other long-term effects.

Despite these challenges, MAEOE shifted resources to maintain MDGS program participation while planning strategically for future growth. For example, MAEOE formalized a process for recruiting new schools.

This evaluation aims to assess progress towards several program 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, it assesses the environmental impact of the Green School program through institutional and individual student participation in sustainability practices.

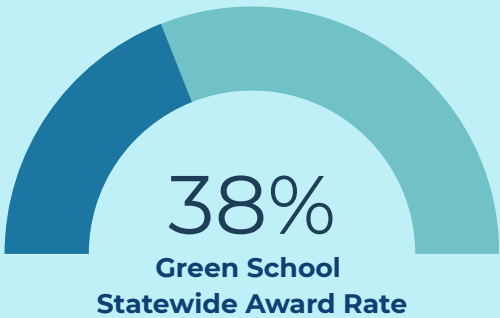
Please see the full Annual Evaluation report for details on methods and data analysis.

*In Maryland, a Local Education Agency (LEA) is the county-level school district. The term "county" is used throughout this report to refer to Maryland's LEAs.

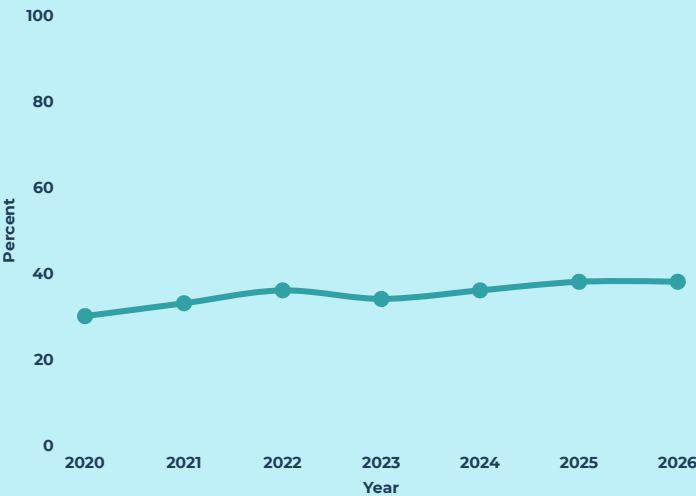
PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS



In the 2025-26 academic year, **38% of all schools in Maryland are Green Schools**, and the award rate is even higher in public schools (45%). A total of 702 Maryland schools are Green Schools.



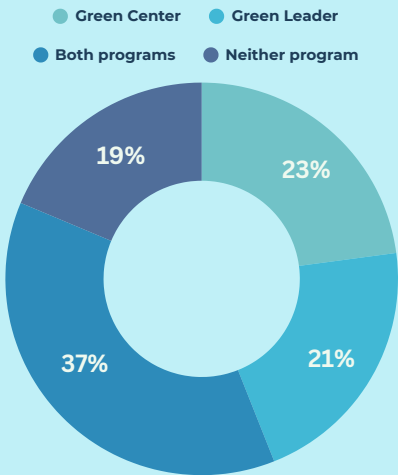
Green School Statewide Award Rate



The statewide Green School award rate has fluctuated between 30-38% over the past several years, but incremental progress has been achieved recently and was maintained this year.



Financial support for schools provided by MAEOE contributes to their success in the Green Schools program, as does a broader support network comprised of not just MAEOE staff, but also Maryland Green Centers, MAEOE Green Leaders, environmental education organizations, and LEAs. Both forms of support were critical lifelines for schools this year, and the statewide award rate was maintained despite reduced operational capacity within MAEOE.



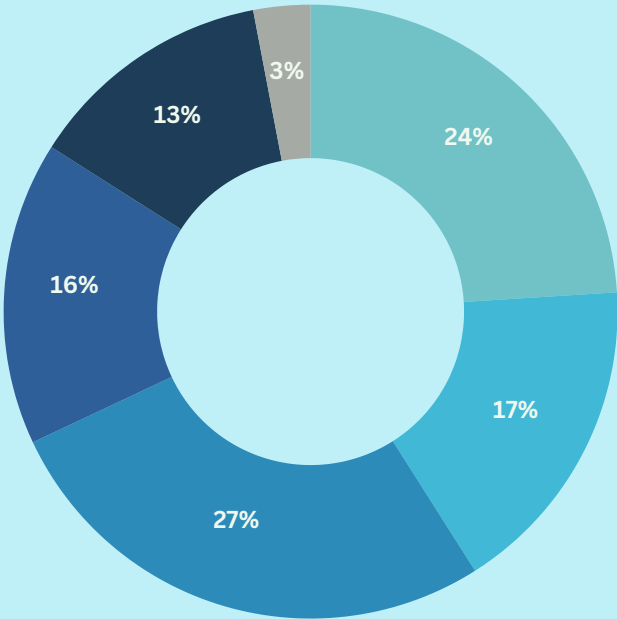
Support received by Green Schools that successfully submitted program applications in 2025-26.

GREEN SCHOOLS PROGRAM IMPACT

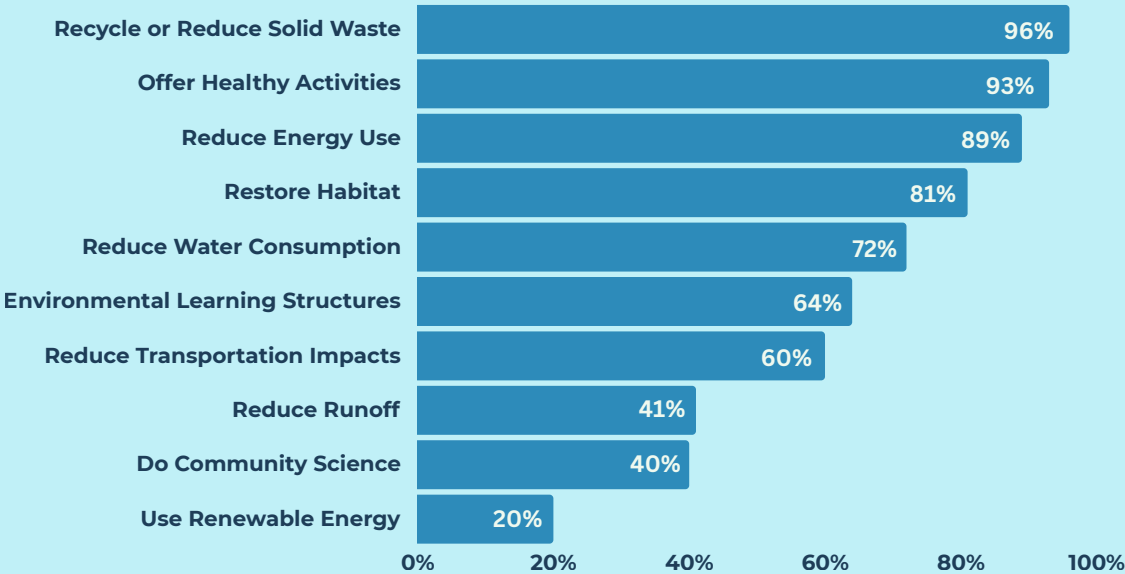


The MDGS program has been recruiting and supporting schools for decades, and the long-term impact of the program was perhaps best illustrated this year by seeing the first cohort of schools achieve Sustainable Silver award status. This means that these schools have maintained their Green School credentials for 20+ years.

- First Award
- Second Award
- Third Award
- Fourth Award (Sustainable)
- Fifth Award (Sustainable Bronze)
- Sixth Award (Sustainable Silver)



Self-reported data from 166 Green Schools showcase high participation in a series of green practices, though there is lower participation in activities that require approval and/or significant training and resources.

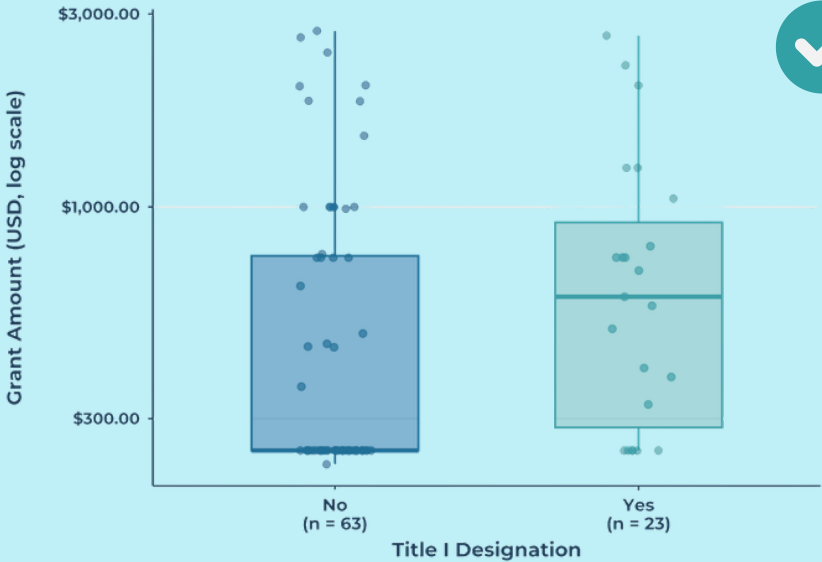
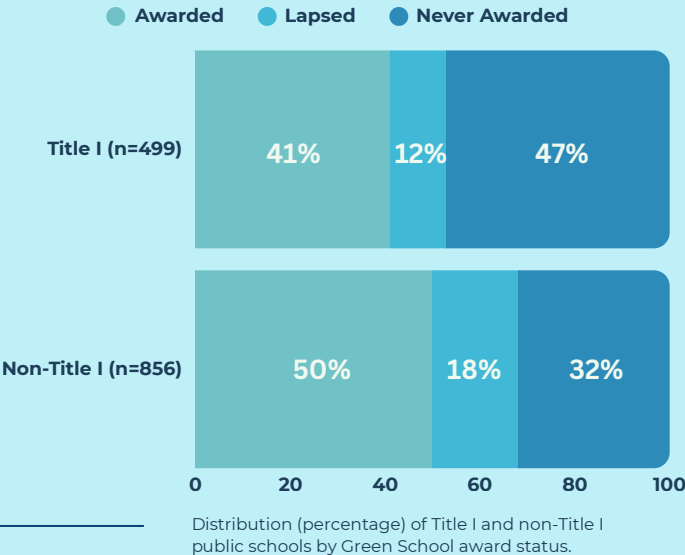


Self-reported participation (% of schools who answered yes) for a series of green practices across Maryland Green Schools (n=166) in 2025-26.

CHALLENGES TO PROGRESS



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. Small schools and urban schools are also less likely to be Green Schools.



More financial support may be required for economically disadvantaged schools, but MAEOE’s grant-giving strategy is not yet wholly aligned with the goal of increasing representation from under-resourced schools and regions. The overall funding amount was not meaningfully different between Title I and non-Title I schools, and nearly 3x more non-Title I schools received mini-grants this year than Title I schools.*



It remains challenging to grow the statewide award rate while simultaneously conducting outreach to underrepresented schools and regions. MAEOE has necessarily prioritized retaining schools in danger of expiring out of the program, but with limited capacity, these intensive efforts prevent additional focus on growth and diversification. To produce significant progress toward both of these goals, MAEOE must increase its operational capacity, both in terms of permanent staff dedicated to the program, as well as increased allocated funding for outreach and training.

*Data as of May 2026

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS



Refine program goals and increase operational capacity to achieve meaningful changes in Green Schools program reach

MAEOE is at an important inflection point in the evolution and growth of the Maryland Green Schools program. Two distinct pathways can deliver program results in different ways: 1) a significant increase in the Green Schools state-wide award rate, or 2) a greater diversity of schools and regions represented by the program. Both are achievable, but may require investment in certain strategies over others. And if both goals are pursued, it will likely require increased program capacity - both in terms of funding allocations and permanent staffing.

For MAEOE to address these goals, the current priority should be to secure the funding and internal support necessary to increase the number of full-time and part-time staff supporting the Green Schools program. The development of a statewide, informal support network has strategically helped MAEOE to maintain this important program, but to move from maintenance to growth, operational capacity must be strengthened to ensure long-term success.



Improve the reliability of school sustainability metrics to better tell the story of Green Schools environmental impact

Collecting sustainability metrics data from awarded Green Schools has the potential to quantify the statewide environmental impact of the program, further motivate individuals and schools to engage in green practices, and secure additional funding for the MDGS program (a critical outcome for MAEOE). Achieving these outcomes is wholly dependent on the reliability and accuracy of school-submitted metrics data, and so the data collection process must be improved. To improve data validity and use, MAEOE should 1) identify and implement necessary improvements to survey design, and 2) offer a training program for school survey-takers that provides instruction on how to collect and report these data. A trained evaluator or social scientist can support the process of revising the metrics survey such that key items are preserved while also ensuring that survey confusion is eliminated for respondents.



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