

ANNUAL EVALUATION



Maryland Green Schools Program

2025-2026



ANNUAL EVALUATION

MAEOE Maryland Green Schools Program

TABLE OF CONTENTS

03	About Maryland Green Schools
05	Evaluation Methods
08	Results: By the Numbers
13	Results: Trends in Public Schools
20	Results: Support for Green Schools
26	Results: Environmental Impact
35	Conclusions & Recommendations

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)*.

By integrating environmental education and sustainability practices 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 environmental goals proposed in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.

The process to become a Green School is rigorous. The MDGS program supports schools by providing infrastructure, an array of logistical and financial support, and systematic application review to Maryland schools interested in applying. If schools are awarded, they carry the recognition of being certified as a Maryland Green School. To maintain award status, schools must reapply every four years.

Program Goals

In 2019, as a result of the Maryland state legislature's "Maryland Green Schools Act of 2019," funding was provided to MAEOE to expand the contributions of schools toward statewide sustainability goals, with new legislation in 2022 that provided an additional expansion for two more years of funding. For the MDGS program in particular, a goal was set to grow the participation of schools across Maryland in the Green Schools program. To achieve this goal, MAEOE set the following objectives:

- Increase support for the development of Green Schools;
- Provide professional development to more teachers; and
- Increase environmental literacy of students.

The annual evaluation assesses progress of the Green Schools program. 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, training, and other support on program engagement. Finally, it explores the collective environmental impact of the Green Schools program across the state.

*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.

MARYLAND GREEN SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Context for the 2025-26 Evaluation

During 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 due to reapply from expiring out of the program.

Despite these challenges, MAEOE shifted resources to maintain MDGS program participation (see Page 9) while planning more strategically for program growth. For example, MAEOE established a formalized process for recruiting new schools.

Success of this program increasingly depends on a broader ecosystem of Green Centers, Green Leaders, LEA personnel, environmental education providers, and other regional networks that amplify program messaging, support Green Schools through the quadrennial application process, and aid with activities that allow Green Schools to maintain their award status. To build on this strong foundation, future efforts will increasingly align Green Centers, the Maryland Environmental Literacy Advisory Network (MELAN), and the broader statewide environmental education ecosystem through:

- Regional inventories of environmental education opportunities.
- Expanded data collection of PreK-12 education programs.
- Improved documentation of student experiences.
- Increased visibility for Green Centers and environmental education providers.
- Stronger alignment with local environmental literacy planning efforts.

Currently under development is a Green Schools Data Dashboard - a decision-support and systems-planning tool that will aid both MAEOE and Local Education Agencies to 1) identify patterns in school participation, recertification, and engagement over time, 2) map environmental education access and gaps across schools and regions, 3) track alignment between school-based sustainability actions and environmental literacy goals, 4) support targeted outreach to Title I, rural, and under-engaged schools, and 5) strengthen coordination between curriculum, facilities, and environmental programming.

EVALUATION METHODS

Maryland Green Schools Program

2025-2026



EVALUATION METHODS: DATA COLLECTION

Evaluation Questions

The annual evaluation of the Maryland Green Schools program explores progress made towards increasing the statewide percentage of schools that are Green Schools, with a focus on 1) factors that may influence progress towards this goal, and 2) recommendations for strategies to achieve this goal.

Guiding evaluation questions include:

1. What is the current progress towards the goal? What percentage of Maryland schools obtained new awards, sustained awards, or expired out of the program? How are schools progressing through the life cycle of the MDGS program?
2. Among public schools, how does school participation and award status in the MDGS program vary across demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic factors? Is MDGS improving their reach in key target areas identified by these factors?
3. How do professional development and grant support contribute to a school's likelihood to achieve and maintain a Green School award? Is MAEOE's giving strategy supporting their goals for the program?
4. What is the cumulative environmental impact of the MDGS program? How are Green Schools contributing to statewide sustainability goals?

Data Sources

Several data sources were collated and analyzed to complete this evaluation of the MDGS program:

1. MAEOE's databases of all Green Schools and Green Centers currently or previously awarded, award level, and award history.
2. School-level metadata on all public schools from the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) 2024-25 dataset (most recent available).
3. School-level metadata on all private schools from NCES' Private School Survey (2023-24; most recent available).
4. List of Maryland Approved Nonpublic Schools sourced from the Maryland State Department of Education (accessed in May 2026).
5. Environmental metrics survey results, reported in school applications for the 2025-26 Green School award cycle.
6. Records of training offerings and resources, mini-grants, and professional development stipends awarded by the MDGS program in 2025-26.
7. School-level data on Title I status from the Maryland State Department of Education's 2025-26 dataset.

EVALUATION METHODS: DATA ANALYSIS

Data Analysis

To conduct this evaluation, a systematic and rigorous data audit and cleaning exercise was undertaken to ensure that information derived from multiple data sources used for this analysis (such as the National Center for Education Statistics state-level school metadata) were both collated and merged with accuracy. Any discrepancies among the different data sources were brought to the attention of MAEOE staff and resolved/updated accordingly. This exercise produced a merged dataset from which we explored factors that influence MDGS program growth across Maryland schools.

To ensure consistency with prior annual evaluations and to most meaningfully compare the Green School population to all Maryland schools, the following criteria were applied to remove schools that:

- 1) Are solely pre-K (or daycare) facilities;
- 2) Have fewer than 15 students; or
- 3) Are alternative schools/programs.

The results presented in this report are based on the application of MDGS award policies to the collated dataset. Photos of Green Schools used in this report were provided by MAEOE staff.

Interpreting this Report

The MDGS program is based on a 4-year application cycle, and as such, annual progress is incremental. Much of the year-to-year change is related to the number of initial Green School awards from new recruits that year, as well as the number of schools who expired out of the Green School program. All other schools are elsewhere in the 4-year cycle and are not impacting growth or regression in statewide award rates this year.

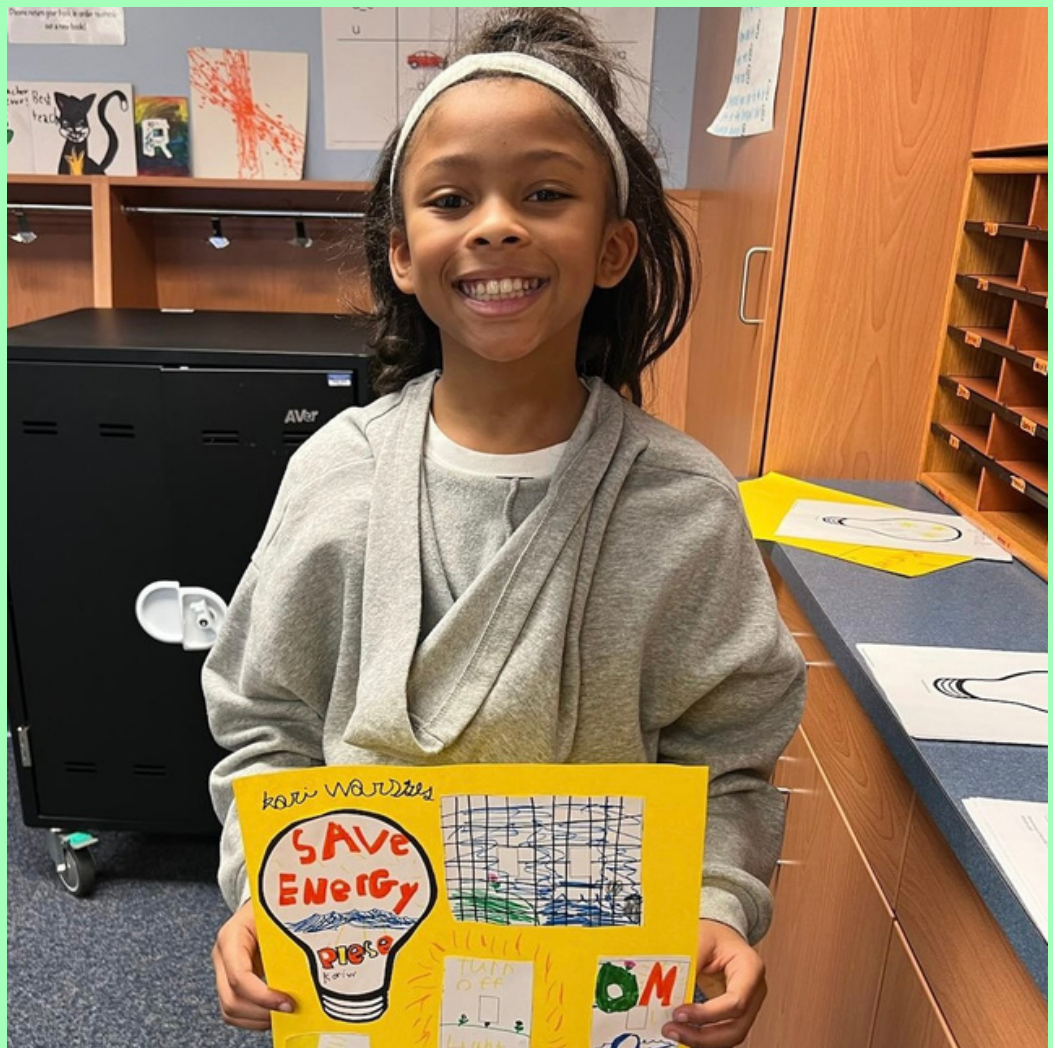
Additionally, analyses for this report originate from data that are publicly available from NCES and the MD State Department of Education, as well as Green School data provided by MAEOE. There are limitations to what these data can illustrate. Though we can explore factors that contribute to Green School award rates, we cannot analyze changes in student environmental literacy as a result of the program, or other similar items of interest to MAEOE.

The intent of this evaluation is to provide tangible and feasible strategies to improve school participation in and long-term commitment to the Maryland Green Schools program, particularly in areas with low program reach.

RESULTS: BY THE NUMBERS

Maryland Green Schools Program

2025-2026



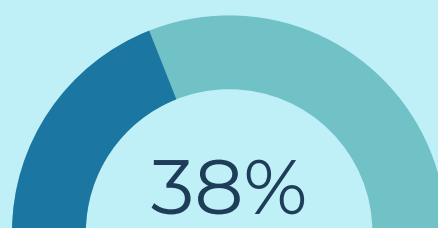
REACH OF THE GREEN SCHOOLS PROGRAM

In the 2025-2026 academic year, 38% of all schools in Maryland are Green Schools – including both public and private schools. This is the same statewide award rate as the previous year.

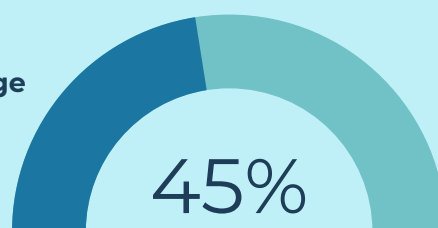


There are a total of 702 Green Schools across Maryland in 2025-26.

Of all schools in Maryland, 38%* are currently Green Schools.



Of public schools only, the percentage that are Green Schools is much higher.



The primary goals of the Maryland Green Schools program are to 1) increase the number of schools participating in the program, and 2) for those schools to sustain their participation for the long-term. Since 2020 when program evaluations began, the statewide Green School award rate has vacillated between 30-38%, this year falling at the top of that range. Included in this number are 85 schools that would have expired this year, but were granted waivers or extensions to complete their reapplication to the program. Of particular importance to MAEOE (in large part due to funding) are the state's public schools (see Page 12), and the Green School award rate in public schools (45%) is considerably higher than for all schools.

This evaluation explores an array of factors that may contribute to Green Schools program participation in Maryland, as well as opportunities to increase the award rate in future years.

**Note: Though the total number of awarded Green Schools this year is 702, the award rate of 38% is based on the number of awarded Green Schools after applying the filters outlined in the Data Analysis section (Page 7) of this report (n=685).*

2022-23

34%

2023-24

35.5%

2024-25

38%

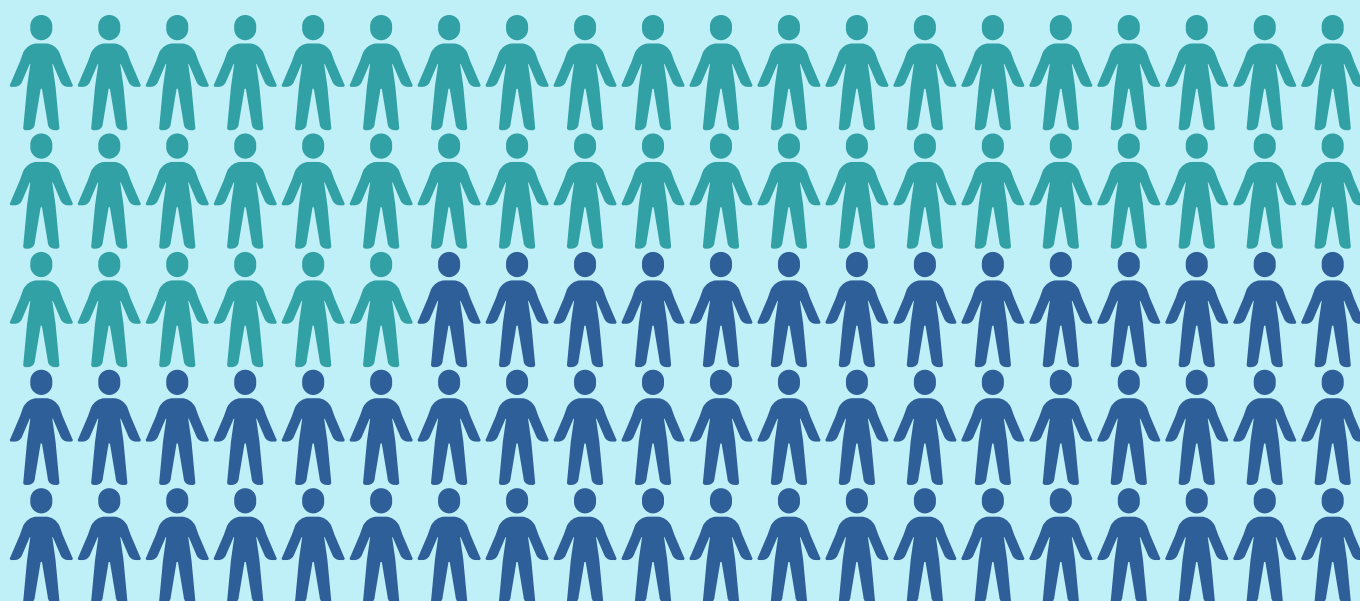
2025-26

38%

Statewide Green School award rate for the past four years in which an annual impact evaluation was conducted for the MDGS program.

STUDENTS SERVED BY GREEN SCHOOLS

A total of 457,131 students attend certified Maryland Green Schools (46% of all Maryland students), up from 449,712 students in 2024-25.



Just under half (46%) of Maryland students, illustrated in green, attend certified Green Schools.

Though MDGS is reaching 38% of schools across the state, they are reaching 46% of the total number of enrolled students. The disparity between the school and student percentages is unsurprising, as larger-sized schools tend to have greater Green Schools participation (see Page 17).

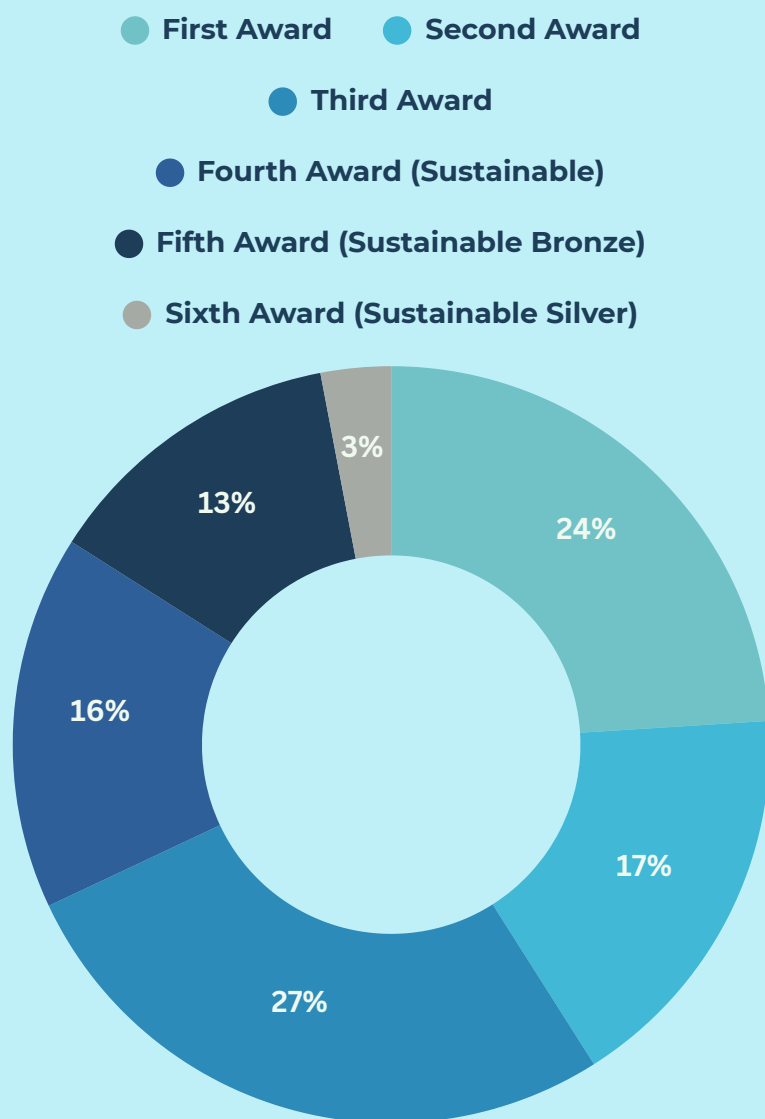
The number of students in awarded schools is a conservative estimate, as the data from a small number of schools (almost exclusively private schools) did not report the size of their student body.

Maryland Green Schools are reaching an impressive **50% of public school students** statewide, an achievement in part supported by MAEOE's strategic investment in public school outreach.

In the more detailed analysis of public schools found later in this report, this evaluation will explore which students are reached by the MDGS program and where there may be opportunities to conduct additional strategic outreach.

GREEN SCHOOL AWARD CYCLE

Maryland Green Schools are spread across the award lifecycle, with the largest segment having achieved their third award. This year, the MDGS program also celebrated the first schools to achieve Sustainable Silver status.



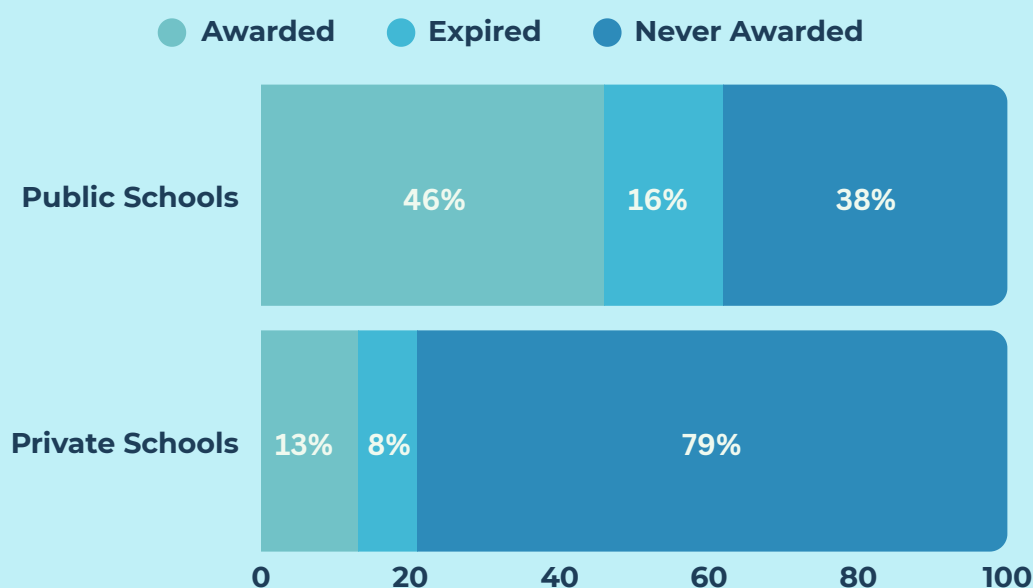
Green School Award Lifecycle

Green Schools are somewhat evenly distributed across the award life cycle. That the highest percentage of schools (27%) have achieved their third award demonstrates the long-term involvement of many schools in the Green School program. As reapplication is required every four years, schools on their third award represent an 8-12 year commitment. The distribution of schools across the program's life cycle is consistent with the previous year.

Once a Maryland Green School has achieved its fourth award, it becomes a Sustainable school and may use a simplified process for future program applications. **This year, for the first time, 19 schools achieved the Sustainable Silver rank,** meaning that they have successfully applied to the program six times and maintained their Green School status for over 20 years!

PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE SCHOOLS

The Maryland Green Schools program prioritizes support for public schools due to available funding, and this effort is reflected in the program participation rate for public schools when compared to private schools.



Distribution (percentage) of Maryland public and private schools by Green School award status.

The Maryland Green Schools program continues to have higher participation from public schools (630 of 1,355 public schools) than from private schools (55 of 434 private schools). This is not a new finding; MDGS reach in public schools has been consistently and intentionally higher than in private schools since 2020-21 when annual program evaluation began.

MAEOE's focus remains centered on public school participation in MDGS, while also continuing to provide support to private and independent schools upon request. This is because 1) the MDGS program is primarily funded through public dollars, 2) the majority of Maryland students attend public schools, and 3) state environmental literacy requirements - a strategic focus for MAEOE - apply to public education systems only.

The following section in this evaluation examines trends in public schools only for all analyses concerning school participation and award rates.

RESULTS: PUBLIC SCHOOLS

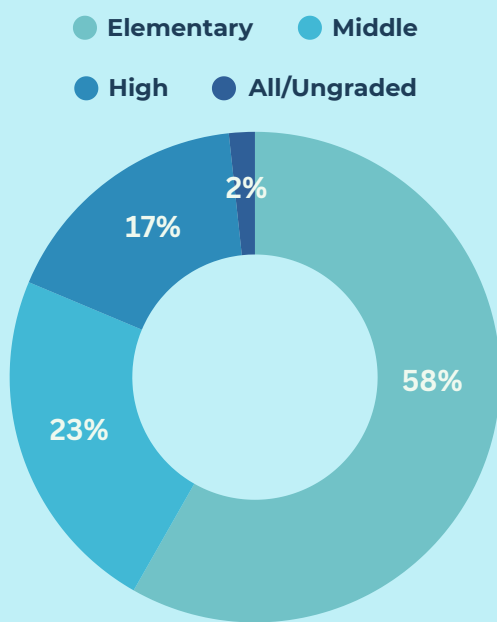
Maryland Green Schools Program

2025-2026

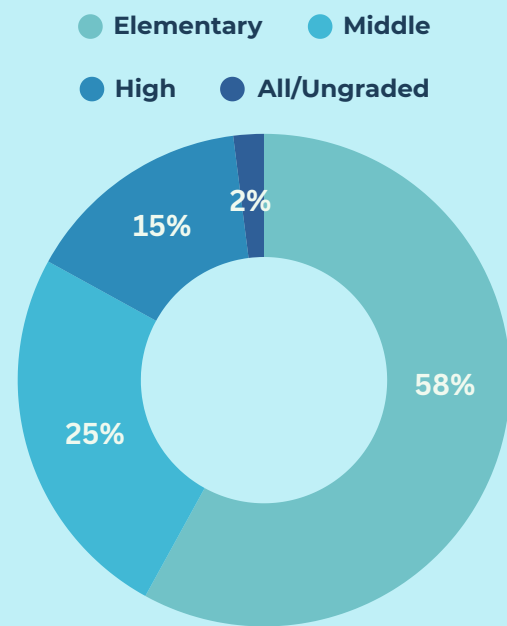


AWARD RATES BY GRADE LEVEL

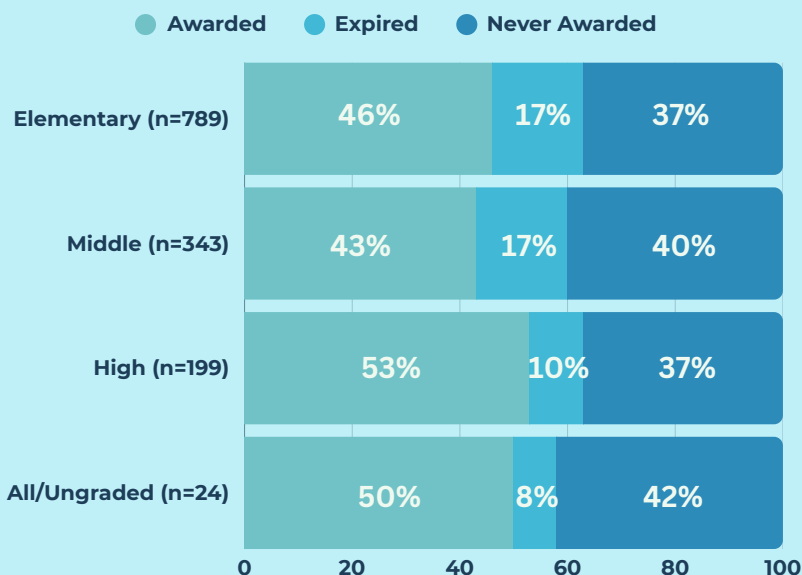
Of the 630 public Green Schools, the distribution of elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as schools that are ungraded or serve all grade levels, closely resembles the statewide grade level distribution.



Public Schools (Green Schools)



Public Schools (All)



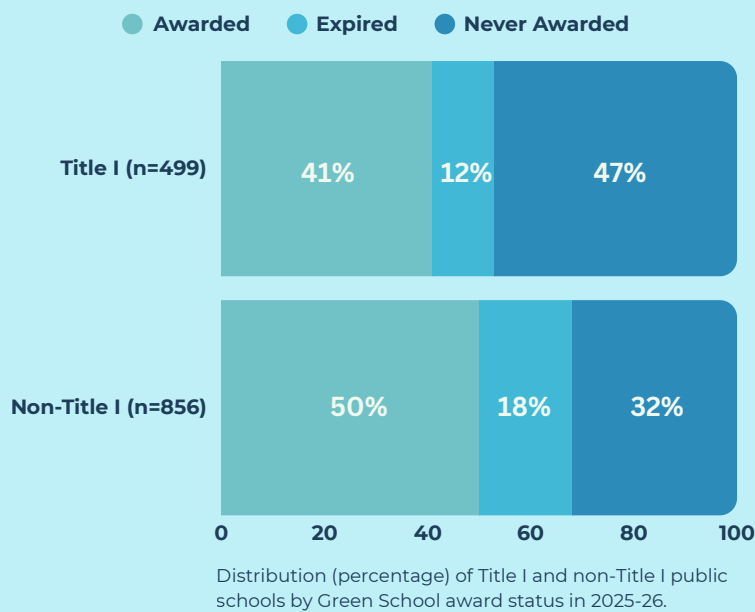
Distribution (percentage) of public school grade levels by Green School award status in 2025-26.

This year, and also over time, the distribution of Green Schools across grade levels in public schools has remained nearly identical to school grade level distribution statewide.

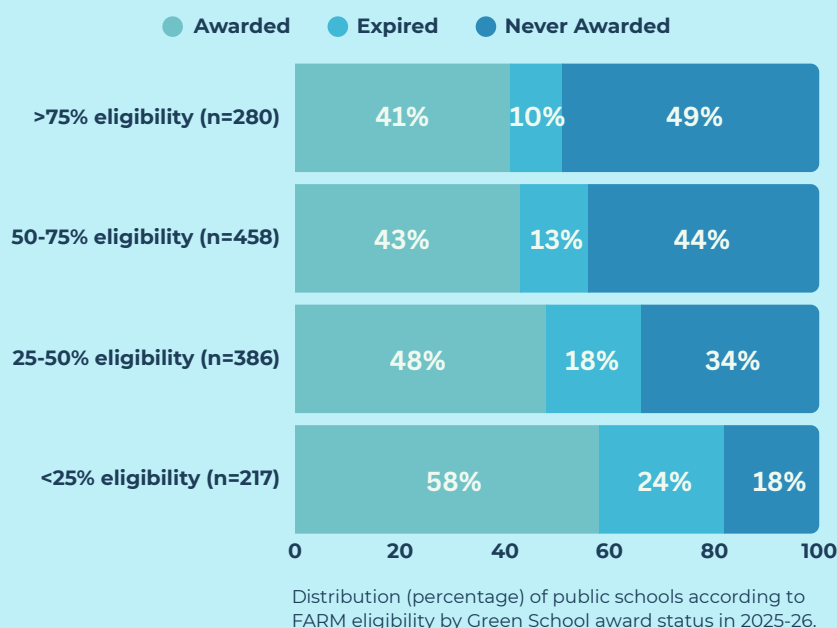
High school award rates (53%) are the highest and continue to improve year after year. The award rate for ungraded schools (and for schools serving all grades) also improved this year, though there are very few of these schools in the population.

AWARD RATES BY SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

Title I schools and schools with higher student eligibility for the Free and Reduced Meal (FARM) program are less likely to be awarded as a Maryland Green School.



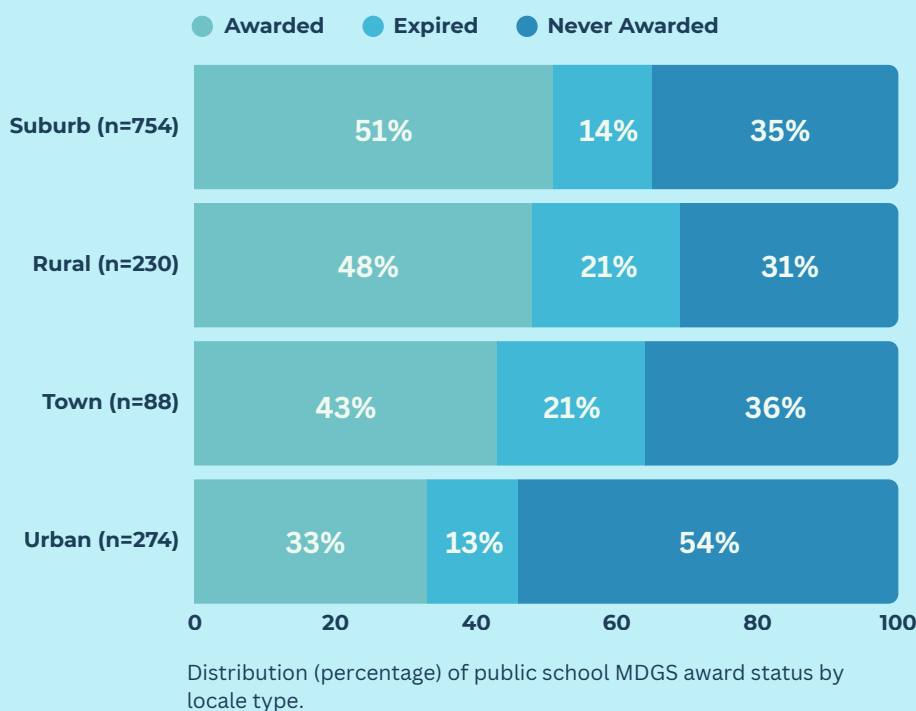
Green School award status is likely impacted by the resources available to each school. Schools that are designated as Title I status and schools with a higher proportion of student eligibility for the FARM program were less likely to be awarded as a Green School. This indicates that the MDGS application process and requirements for participation may require more resources than are readily available at economically-disadvantaged schools.



Schools with fewer resources and more disadvantaged students may benefit from a wide variety of resource programs to improve their capacity to take on the challenge of applying to become a Green School. Meaningful incentives and resources to apply and sustain participation in the Green Schools program should be explored if MAEOE is interested in increasing participation from low-resourced public schools. Of existing support programs, MAEOE could set aside a designated proportion of their grant-giving to these schools.

AWARD RATES BY SCHOOL LOCALE

The MDGS program continues to have greatest success recruiting and awarding schools that are in suburban and rural locations, with opportunity to reach more urban schools.



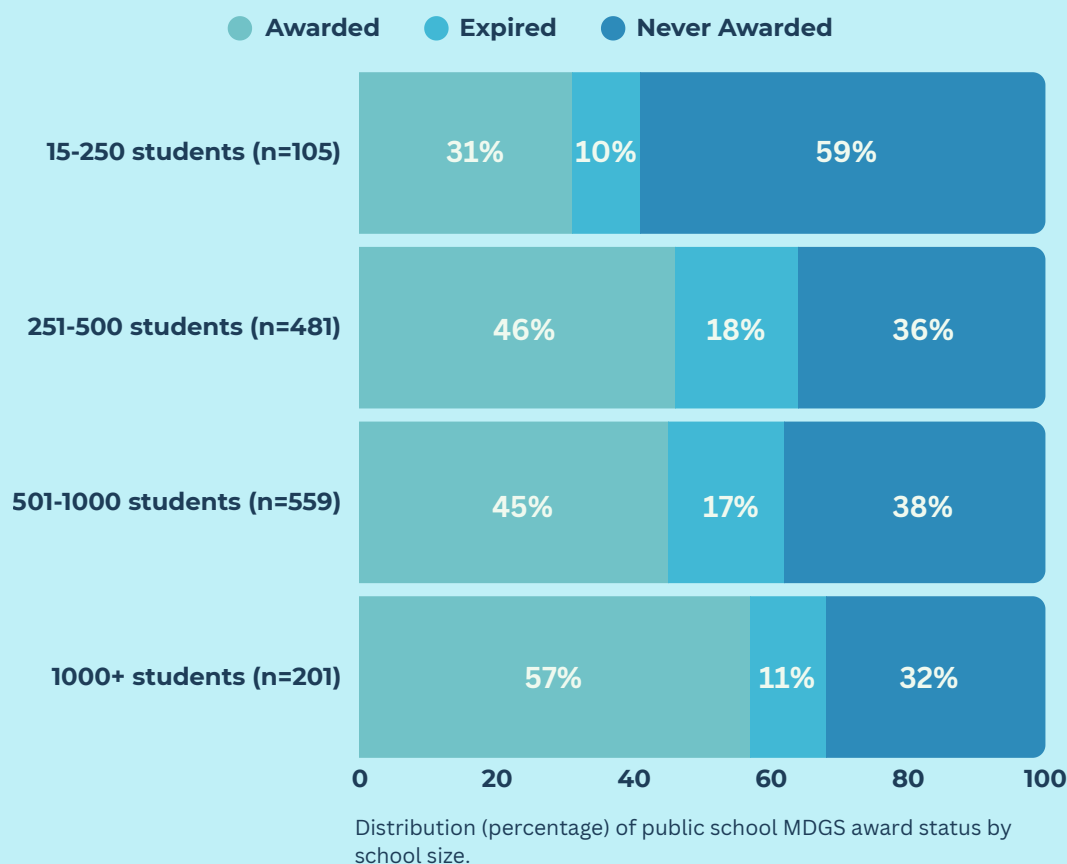
Green School award rates are highest in suburban schools and lowest in urban (city) schools. Locale is highly correlated with the socioeconomic indicators measured in this evaluation. Over half of schools located in urban areas are designated Title I schools, a rate much higher than in suburban, town-based, and rural schools. However, program expiration rates in rural and town-based schools are higher than in suburban and urban schools. It is possible that more remote schools require more (and consistent) engagement from MDGS staff and other support networks to stay

active in the program, including but not limited to: increased communication and program updates, opportunities to connect with other Green Schools, and county-wide Green School events to improve program visibility and salience.

MAEOE has taken steps this year to aid areas far from major population centers by partnering with MELAN to establish regional support hubs. New Maryland Green Centers have been established as a result of this effort (see Page 21).

AWARD RATES BY SCHOOL SIZE

Among public schools, as in past years, the Green Schools program continues to see higher award rates in schools with larger student bodies.



School size in public schools (as measured by number of enrolled students), is also associated with Green School award rate, with larger schools maintaining active award status at higher rates than smaller schools. These figures are essentially unchanged from past years.

As with other metrics that were explored for this evaluation, school size is likely an indicator of Green School program participation because larger schools tend to have access to more resources than smaller schools. This finding is documented in Maryland, where larger schools are in fact less likely to be Title I schools than smaller schools. Additional resources may afford larger schools more opportunity to complete the rigorous application process and also to maintain all the requirements expected of active Green Schools.

AWARD RATES BY COUNTY

	County (# of Public Schools)	Awarded	Expired	Never Awarded
High Participation	Calvert (n=23)	100%	0%	0%
	Kent (n=5)	100%	0%	0%
	Queen Anne's (n=14)	100%	0%	0%
	Prince Georges (n=197)	80%	2%	18%
	Talbot (n=8)	63%	13%	25%
	Montgomery (n=207)	59%	5%	36%
	Worcester (n=13)	46%	23%	31%
	Cecil (n=28)	43%	21%	36%
	Anne Arundel (n=120)	43%	22%	36%
	Charles (n=38)	42%	11%	47%
Low Participation	Howard (n=76)	42%	38%	20%
	Wicomico (n=24)	42%	8%	50%
	Allegany (n=22)	41%	0%	59%
	Harford (n=54)	39%	35%	26%
	Baltimore County (n=165)	39%	18%	44%
	Carroll (n=38)	34%	45%	21%
	St. Mary's (n=27)	30%	56%	15%
	Dorchester (n=11)	27%	9%	64%
	Baltimore City (n=149)	23%	13%	64%
	Frederick (n=66)	23%	12%	65%
	Caroline (n=9)	22%	11%	67%
	Washington (n=43)	14%	16%	70%
	Garrett (n=11)	9%	82%	9%
	Somerset (n=7)	0%	14%	86%

Distribution (percentage) of public school MDGS award status by county in the 2025-26 academic year.

Participation in the Green School program varies highly by county. Calvert, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties maintain 100% award rates, while Somerset continues to have no awarded schools.

Calvert, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties continued to maintain 100% award rates in their public schools. Over half of the public schools in an additional 3 counties are also awarded. Somerset is the only county in Maryland with no Green Schools.

Prince George's and Montgomery counties have the highest number of participating schools, largely an artifact of population size relative to other counties - though Prince George's also maintains one of the highest award rates. There is still opportunity to increase reach in Montgomery, as well as other populous counties like Baltimore, Baltimore City, and Anne Arundel.

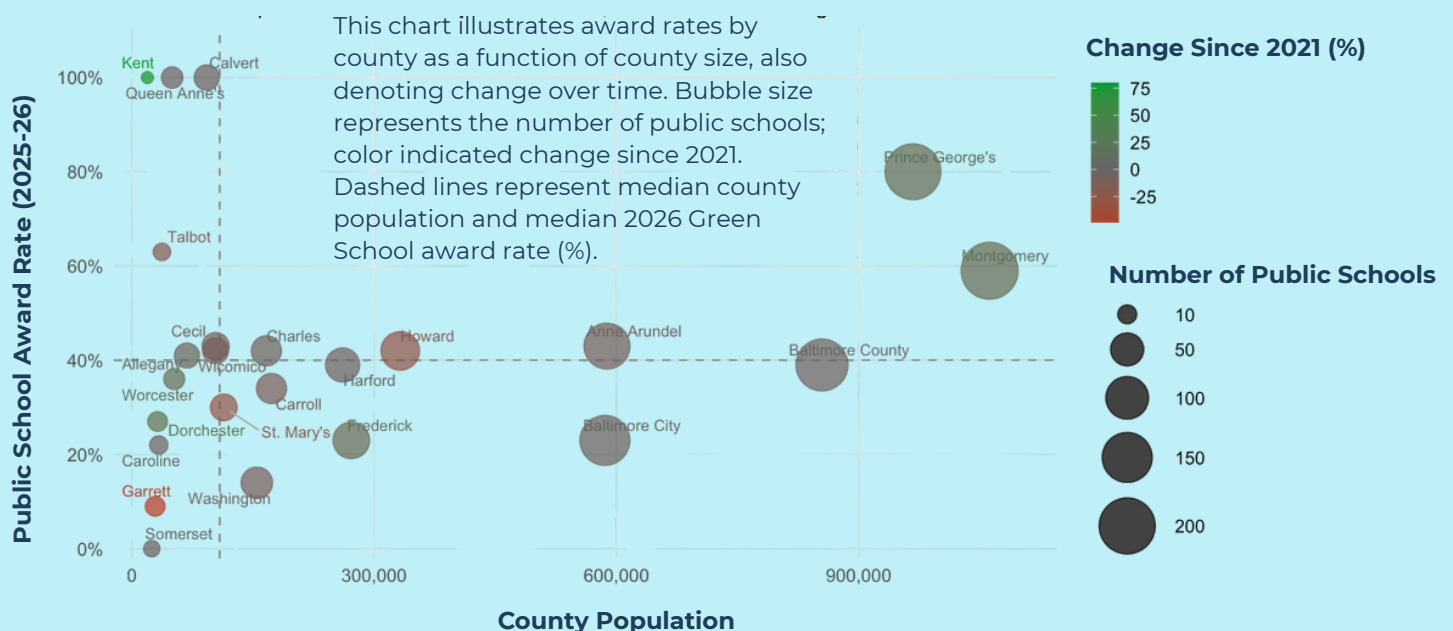
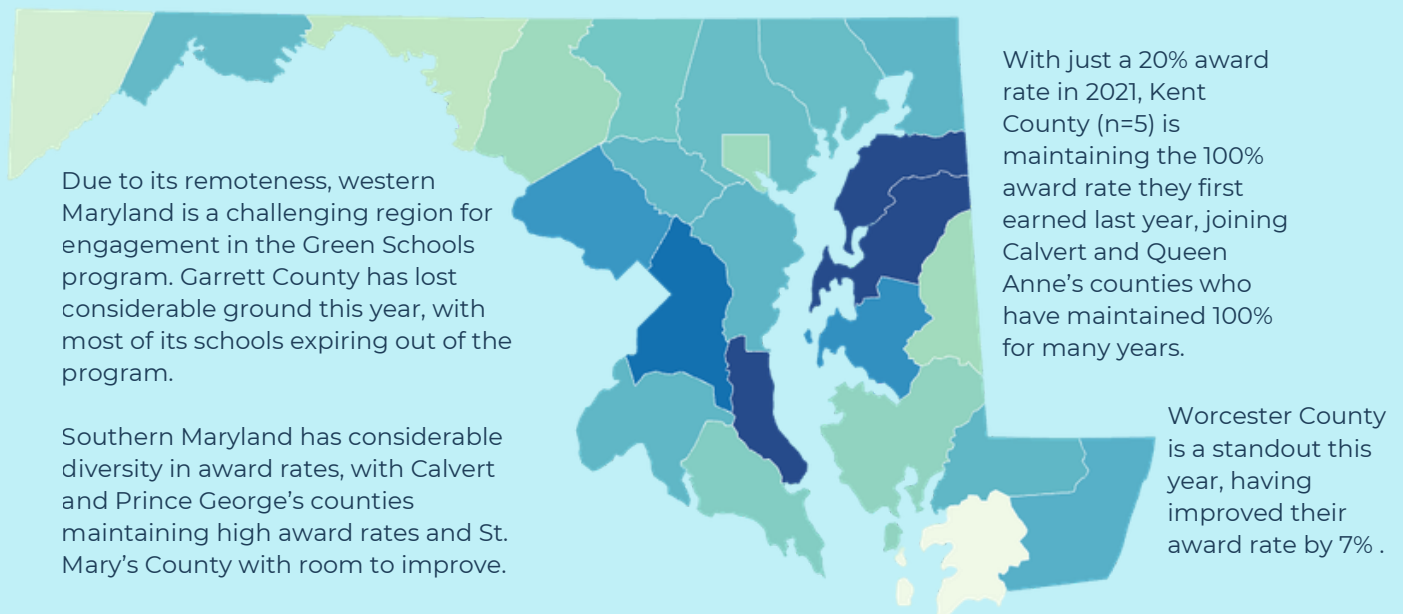
AWARD RATES BY COUNTY, CONT.

Green School award rates are not geographically uniform, with hotspots of both high and low program engagement across Maryland. Some counties improved their award rates in 2025-26, while others saw regressions.

Public Schools Awarded (%)



Baltimore City is an opportunity area for outreach from the Green Schools program. This year, they received more financial support through MDGS grants programs to support increased participation (see Mini-Grants section of this report).



RESULTS: GREEN SCHOOL SUPPORT

Maryland Green Schools Program

2025-2026



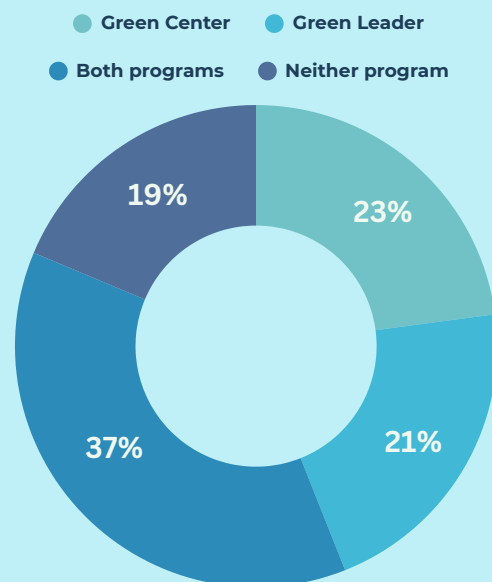
MARYLAND GREEN CENTERS AND MAEOE GREEN LEADERS

Maryland's Green Schools receive invaluable support from partnerships with Green Centers and MAEOE Green Leaders. Of 166 schools that applied this year, 135 (81%) were supported by a Green Center, a Green Leader, or both. The extensive network of community partners, which also includes MDGS staff, meaningfully aids schools with their success in the Green Schools program.

Maryland Green Centers are local organizations that support aspiring and current schools to achieve or maintain Maryland Green School awards. Like Green School awards, Green Center awards are valid for four years before reapplication is required. Recognition as a Green Center is an important symbol of an organization's commitment to sustainability, environmental education, and engagement with local schools in the community. **There are 45 Maryland Green Centers across the state.** This year, five new Green Centers were awarded in strategic areas for Green Schools program outreach. Additionally, Caroline County (22% award rate), had its only Green Center successfully re-certify this year.

MAEOE Green Leaders are individuals that aid schools with their applications, provide professional development and mentoring to teachers, help review applications from other districts, and volunteer with the MAEOE Youth Summit and Awards Ceremonies.

Green Centers and/or Green Leaders supported 81% of this year's successful



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

Green School applicants, illustrating the critical importance of localized support for schools. Likewise, the absence of local Green Centers may lower the likelihood of participation for aspiring Green Schools. Currently, five counties are without Green Centers; two of which have low engagement in the program: Dorchester (27% award rate), and Somerset (0%). The sole Green Center in Wicomico County (42% award rate) closed in 2022, so this is an important place to establish new Green Center or Leader support.

MARYLAND GREEN CENTERS

Forty-five Maryland Green Centers support Maryland Green Schools. These Centers represent diverse institution types and are located across the state.

Green Center	County
Evergreen Heritage Center	Allegany
Arlington Echo Outdoor Education Center	Anne Arundel
Annapolis Maritime Museum & Park	Anne Arundel
MES Port of Baltimore	Anne Arundel
Cromwell Valley Park	Baltimore
Marshy Point Park & Nature Center	Baltimore
Oregon Ridge Nature Center	Baltimore
Camp Puh'Tok	Baltimore
Masonville Cove Environmental Education Center	Baltimore City
BLISS Meadows – Backyard Basecamp, Inc.	Baltimore City
Carrie Murray Nature Center	Baltimore City
Maryland Zoo in Baltimore	Baltimore City
The National Aquarium	Baltimore City
Adkins Arboretum	Caroline
Carroll County Outdoor School	Carroll
NorthBay Adventure Center	Cecil
Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center	Charles
Mobilize Frederick	Frederick
ThorpeWood	Frederick
UMD Frederick County	Frederick
Hickory Environmental Education Center	Garrett
Eden Mill Nature Center	Harford
Harford Glen Environmental Education Center	Harford

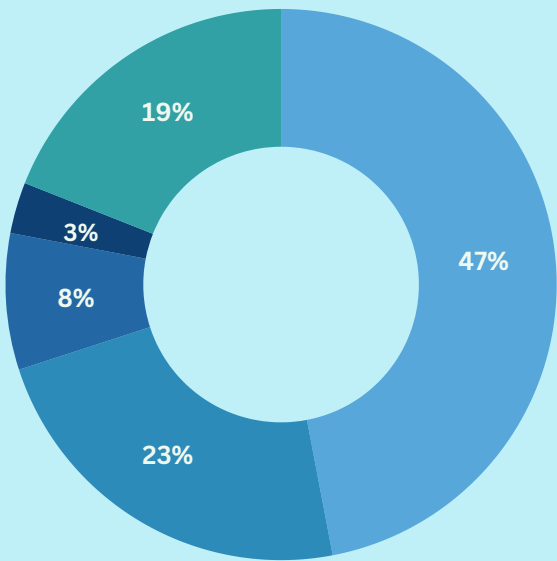
Green Center	County
James and Anne Robinson Nature Center	Howard
Howard County Conservancy	Howard
Sultana Education Foundation	Kent
Black Hill Discovery Center	Montgomery
Lathrop E. Smith Environmental Education Center	Montgomery
Meadowside Nature Center	Montgomery
MCPS Division of Sustainability and Compliance	Montgomery
Nature Forward	Montgomery
Brookside Gardens	Montgomery
Alice Ferguson Foundation	Prince George's
Old Maryland Farm	Prince George's
Patuxent River Park	Prince George's
Watkins Nature Center	Prince George's
William S. Schmidt Outdoor Education Center	Prince George's
Clearwater Nature Center	Prince George's
Patuxent Research Refuge	Prince George's
Elms Environmental Education Center	St. Mary's
ShoreRivers	Talbot
Phillips Wharf	Talbot
Claud E Kitchens Outdoor School at Fairview	Washington
Assateague State Park	Worcester
Maryland Coastal Bays Program	Worcester

MINI-GRANT SUPPORT

In the 2025-26 academic year, 110 mini-grants were awarded to schools, LEAs, and Maryland Green Centers in support of improving the total number of awarded Maryland Green Schools. A total of 86 schools received mini-grants, with a range of 1-3 mini grants per school.*

Mini-Grant Funding (2025-26)	Number of grant recipients	Total amount awarded
Teacher Stipends (Green Leaders)	54	\$13,500
Transportation Grants - Youth Summit	23	\$15,597
Transportation Grants - Field Trips	15	\$12,106
Student Action Project Grants	11	\$15,182
Professional Development Grants	7	\$13,928

- Reapplication due in 2027 or later
- Successfully applied in 2026
- Never awarded school
- Expired school
- Green Center



70%

Percent of schools receiving mini-grants in the 2025-26 academic year that went on to complete successful Green School applications this year (23%) or have their reapplication due in 2027 or later (47%).

Though grant support is just one of many factors that influences a school's award status, it can produce favorable outcomes in certain instances.

Of schools that successfully applied for their initial award to become a Green School (or to renew their award) this year, 18% of them received mini-grants. Mini-grant support for these schools ranged from \$250 - \$2,627, with an average amount of \$554.* **Ten of the 36 schools that were first-time applicants to the program this year received MDGS mini-grants.**

*Data as of May 2026

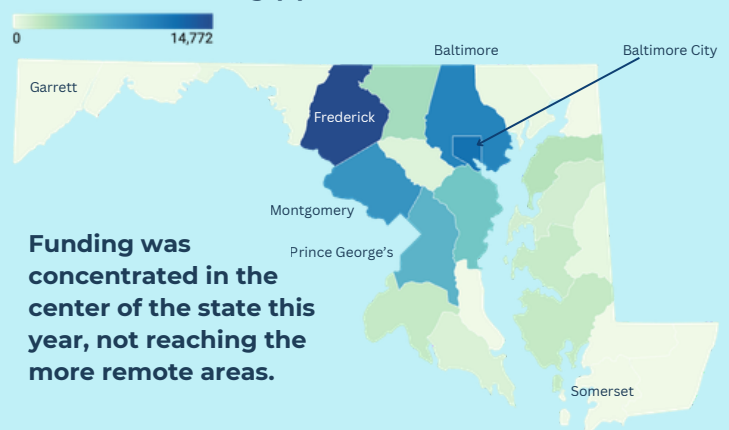
MINI-GRANTS BY COUNTY

In 2025-26, MAEOE provided mini-grants to schools and organizations in 17 of 24 Maryland counties. Grant-giving occurred across counties with high and low Green School award rates, as well as counties with either high or low Title 1 designation.*

County	Total Grant Funding+	Green School Award rate
Frederick	\$14,772	23%
Baltimore City	\$11,757	23%
Baltimore	\$10,225	39%
Montgomery	\$8,960	59%
Prince George's	\$6,500	80%
Anne Arundel	\$5,064	43%
Carroll	\$3,202	34%
Kent	\$2,499	100%
Dorchester	\$1,830	27%
Charles	\$1,825	42%
Talbot	\$1,700	63%
Queen Anne's	\$1,315	100%
St. Mary's	\$1,000	30%
Howard	\$750	42%
Caroline	\$380	22%
Harford	\$250	39%
Washington	\$250	14%
Allegany	\$0	41%
Calvert	\$0	100%
Cecil	\$0	43%
Garrett	\$0	9%
Somerset	\$0	0%
Wicomico	\$0	42%
Worcester	\$0	46%

+includes both mini-grants for schools/districts/Green Centers and stipends for teachers and Green Leaders.

Mini-Grant Funding (\$)



The total amount of MDGS mini-grant support awarded to schools and organizations, by county, in 2025-26.

The counties with the lowest Green School award rates (Somerset, Garrett, and Washington) did not receive any (or very little) mini-grant support this year. Frederick County received the most mini-grant support. Its low award rate (23%) indicates a need for outreach, but financial support in particular may have been best reserved for counties with fewer resources (Frederick County has the lowest percentage of Title 1 schools in the state).

A significant grant funding increase was made in Baltimore City, an LEA with a low Green School award rate and the highest percentage of Title 1 schools. Next year, MAEOE plans to further prioritize teachers and schools that have not received funding previously.

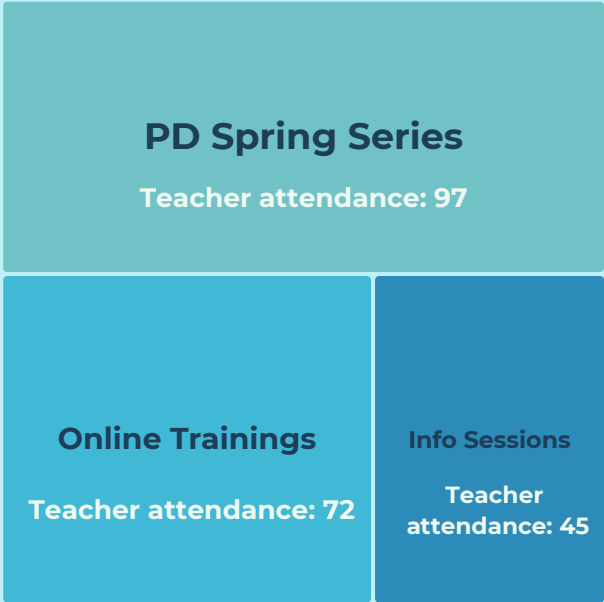
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

To aid schools in meeting the professional development requirements in the Green Schools program application, MAEOE offered a Green School Professional Development Series this spring, in addition to online training videos that remain available to all schools.

One of the strategic decisions made this year, to allocate some funds toward the development of a Green Schools Professional Development (PD) series with a variety of topics and presenters, proved to be instrumental in helping schools meet the PD requirements for their applications. A total of 97 teachers attended MAEOE's spring Green School PD Series, which featured presentations from experts on salient topics including environmental justice and integrating language arts, inquiry, and math in outdoor learning.

In addition, MAEOE continued to offer access to online training videos on their “Using the Outdoors for Learning” platform. These trainings were completed by 72 teachers.

Finally, MAEOE continued to offer Green School Info Sessions to guide schools through the application process, and these info sessions were attended by 45 teachers this past fall.



Attendance of MAEOE-led professional development offerings by teachers in 2025-26.

Based on the popularity and utility of these programs, **MAEOE will focus on creating a high-quality video series featuring information on 1) the Green Schools application process, and 2) popular PD topics**, such as environmental justice and the interdisciplinary use of the outdoors, while continuing to offer a variety of in-person PD opportunities for teachers.

RESULTS: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

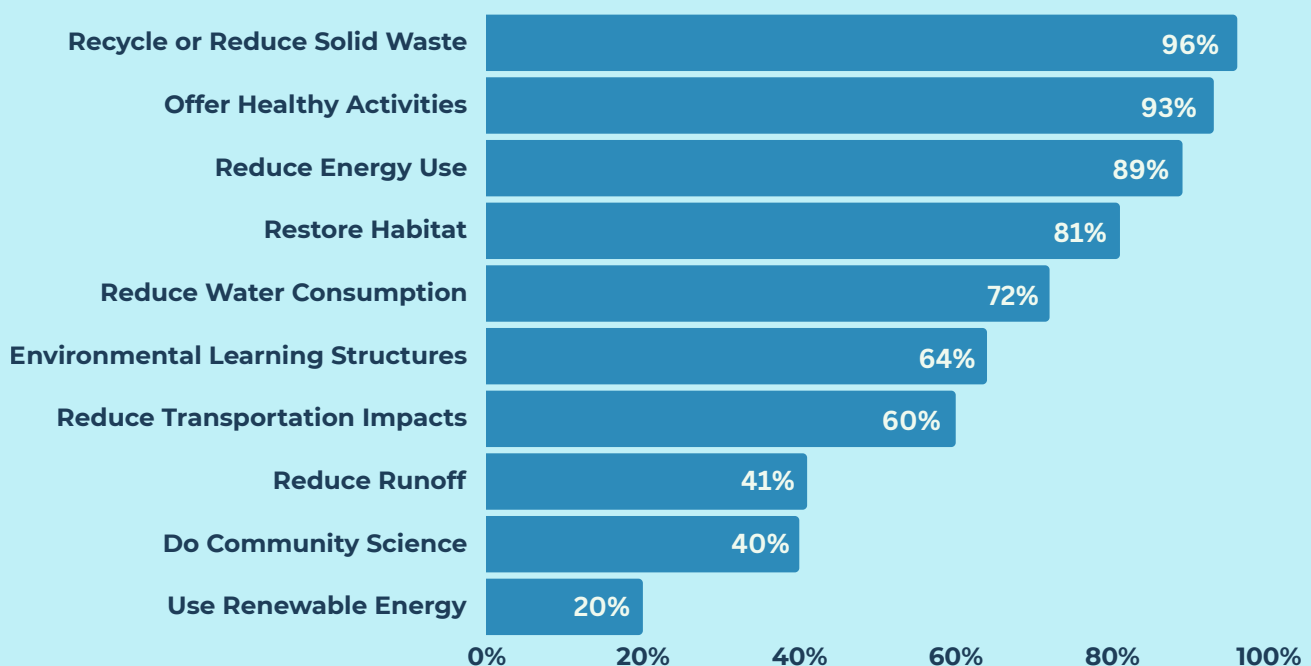
Maryland Green Schools Program

2025-2026



GREEN PRACTICES IN GREEN SCHOOLS

School-reported data from 166 Green Schools were available to assess the positive environmental impact of green practices in awarded Maryland Green Schools during the 2025-26 school year.



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

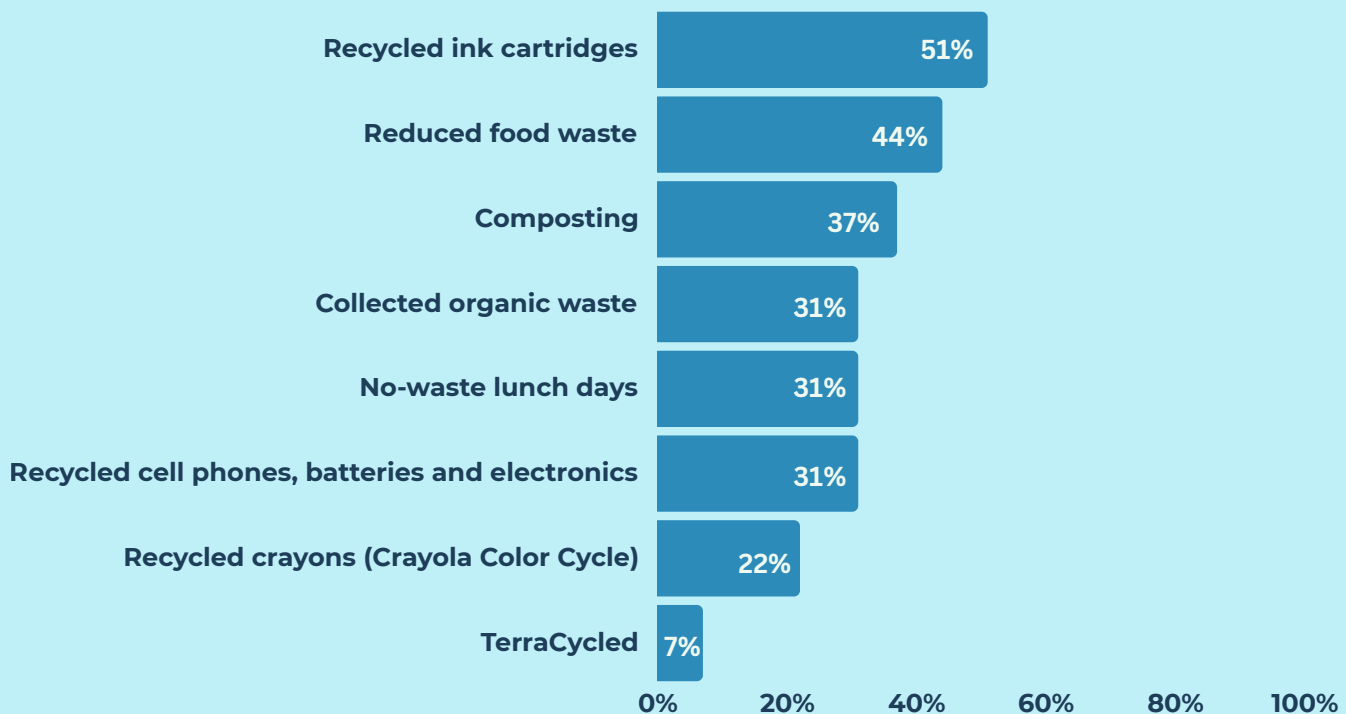
Green School engagement in different sustainability practices varies. School-reported participation has been consistently high for recycling, energy reduction, and healthy activities such as using plants to promote indoor air quality. Conversely, most schools are not using renewable energy(ies) or engaging their students in community science activities. Practices requiring little effort and training to complete, as well as those that are easier to measure, are conducted and reported by schools more often than effort-intensive practices or those with substantial measurement barriers.

One example of a green practice with significant data collection barriers for schools is regarding the use of renewable energy, which includes solar, wind, and/or geothermal energy. Installation and maintenance of renewable energy infrastructure involves LEA or county approval. Additionally, associated costs can be prohibitive for low-resourced schools. In contrast, relatively simple and cost-efficient actions that can occur in schools include the use of energy-efficient light bulbs and use of daylight. Each sustainability category is explored in greater detail in the following pages.

RECYCLING & REDUCING WASTE



Recycling ink cartridges was the most common waste reduction practice reported by Green Schools (51% of schools), but over one-third also reported reducing food waste and composting.



Self-reported participation (% of schools who answered yes) in a series of practices to recycle and reduce waste across Maryland Green Schools (n=166) in 2025-26.

School-reported data showed minimal to moderate Green School participation in recycling and waste reduction practices. Recycling ink cartridges garnered the most school participation, while recycling crayons and TerraCycle activities were less commonly reported. Some schools may not have access to these metrics.

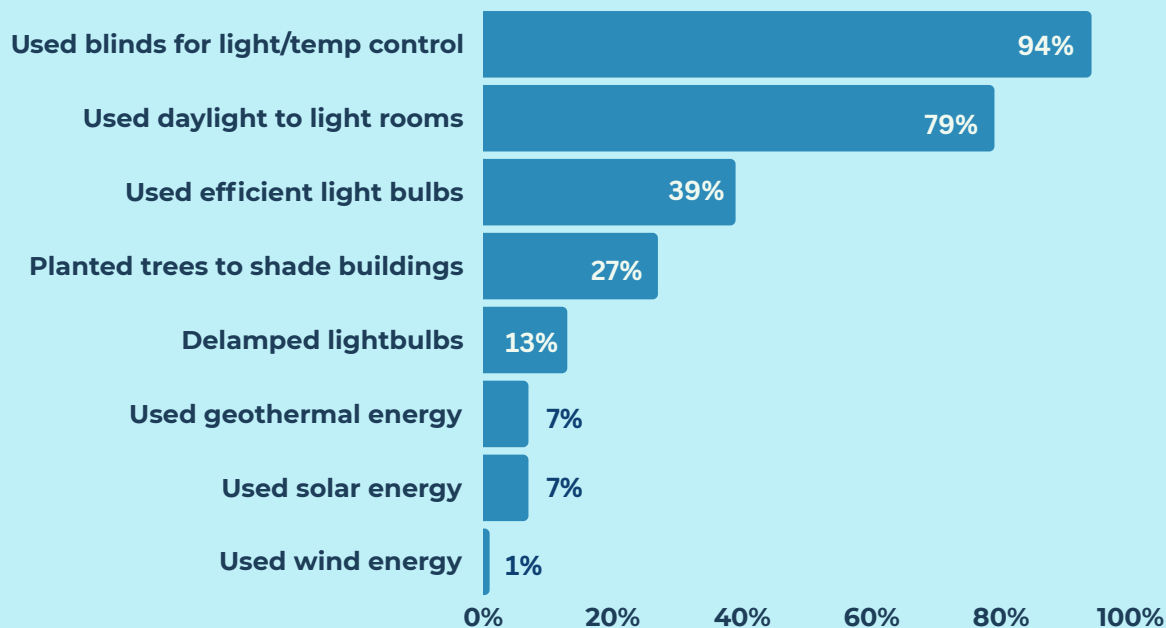
Ranges for most school-reported waste reduction metrics were atypically large and included unrealistic outliers. Other

schools indicated their participation in various waste reduction practices, but did not report the associated impact metrics that would have allowed for a quantitative impact assessment of recycling and waste diversion across the MDGS program. As such, we have opted not to include impact metrics in this evaluation. Without an increase in resources, schools may lack capacity or training to reliably track these metrics.

ENERGY CONSERVATION



To conserve energy on school grounds, schools most often reported using blinds for temperature and light control and using daylight for lighting rooms. Very few schools reported using renewable energy.



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

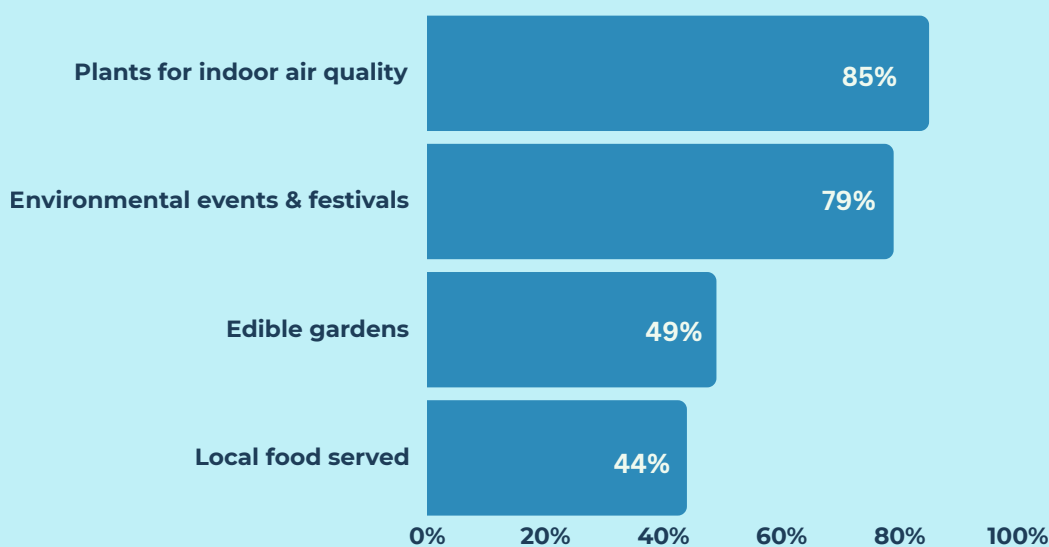
Several energy conservation behaviors had high engagement in Green Schools this year, with the greatest participation reported for using window blinds to control indoor temperature (94% of schools) and using only daylight to light classrooms (79%). Practices with much lower participation included the use of renewable energy technologies, such as geothermal, solar, or wind energy. While practices like lowering blinds are low-effort and only require decision-making at the individual level, school-wide use of renewable energy likely requires district-level commitments and infrastructural investment. Further, schools are not able

to reliably report energy conservation metrics. For example, the average K-12 school in the U.S. consumes ~10 kWh of energy per year*, yet 94% of Green Schools reported values that were significantly higher than that average, and in many cases, simply impossible. And while 33 schools indicated participation in renewable energy use, only 20 listed quantitative metrics for documenting total energy saved from renewables. Asking survey-takers to report school-wide energy saved in kWh appears to introduce confusion and result in inaccurate data.

HEALTHY SCHOOL ACTIVITIES



Most Green Schools reported having indoor plants for air quality (85%) and hosting outdoor events and environmental festivals (79%). Nearly half maintain edible gardens and serve local food.



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

School participation in healthy activities ranged from moderate to high. While 85% of schools use plants to improve indoor air quality and 79% organized environmental events and festivals for their students, participation was lower for sourcing local food to serve (44% of Green Schools) and maintaining edible gardens (49%). Edible gardens may be less common because of the time and effort it requires staff and students to maintain gardens year-round.

Similarly, the procurement of locally-sourced food involves many external factors, such as food availability and cost.

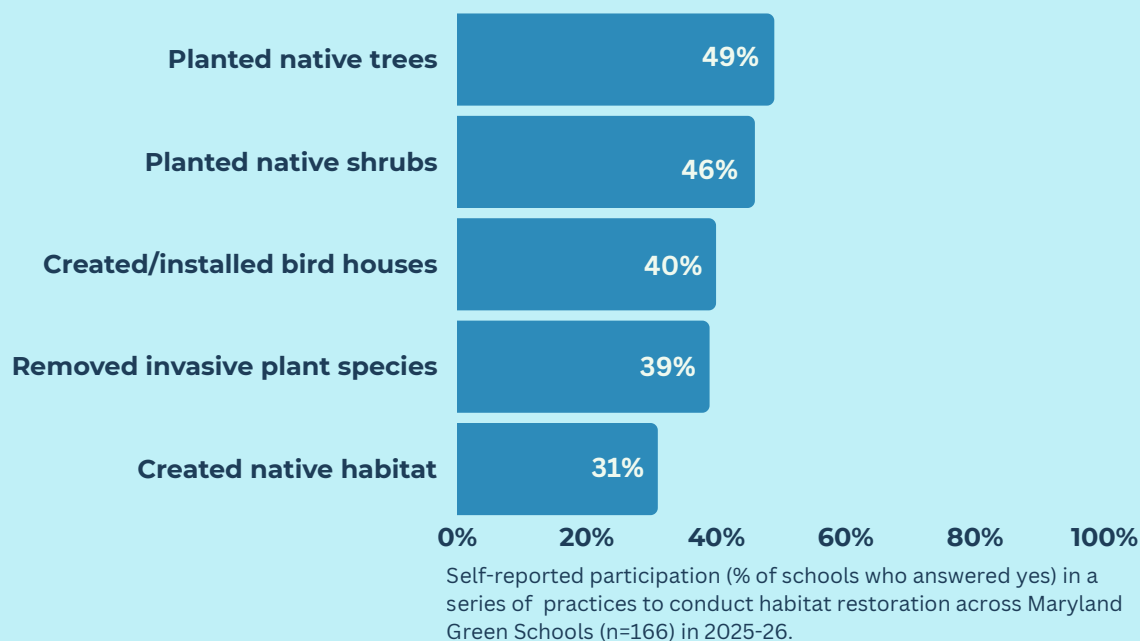
This is evident by the wide range of times (1 - 181 times) that local food was reportedly served at each participating school. To increase participation in serving locally-sourced food, the MDGS program could consider subsidies for schools, providing access to state-sponsored food health initiatives, or streamlining processes for finding and ordering local food.

Survey reporting for this sustainability category had fewer major challenges; however, estimated edible garden size ranged from 1 sq ft - 60,000 sq ft.

HABITAT RESTORATION



Green Schools reported participating in a range of habitat restoration practices, including planting native trees and installing bird houses.



Nearly half of Green Schools participated in habitat restoration practices this year. Collectively, schools installed 426 bird houses, planted 1,611 native trees, and removed over 145,000 square feet of invasive plant species.

Overall, these practices may have fewer reporting challenges than observed in other categories (e.g., renewable energy use). Count-based metrics - such as trees planted or birdhouses installed - are likely easier for school staff to measure.

Still, some adjustments to the survey are suggested. For example, “*Created native habitat*” could be collapsed into existing categories. This item overlaps “*Planted*

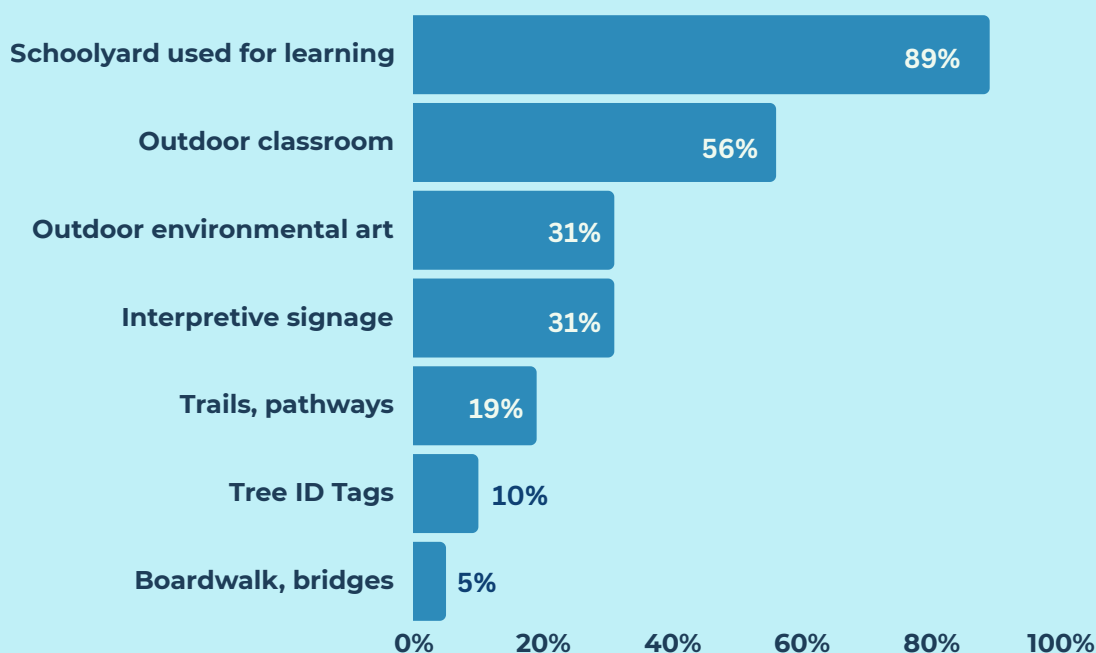
native trees” and “*Planted native shrubs*,” and is also more difficult to measure. Additionally, schools have previously indicated that they install bat houses and other non-bird animal shelters; as such, the “*Created/installed birdhouses*” category could expand to reflect these efforts.

To more holistically measure the full impact of habitat restoration activities undertaken by Green Schools, the survey should be revised to also include metrics that capture the maintenance of *previously* restored/installed habitat. A school’s commitment to managing existing habitat is not currently reflected in these data.

ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING



One of the most common green practices for Green Schools to report was utilizing their schoolyards for outdoor learning. Other environmental learning practices involving installation of new features - such as trails and boardwalks - were less common.



Self-reported participation (% of schools who answered yes) in a series of practices to promote environmental learning structures across Maryland Green Schools (n=166) in 2025-26.

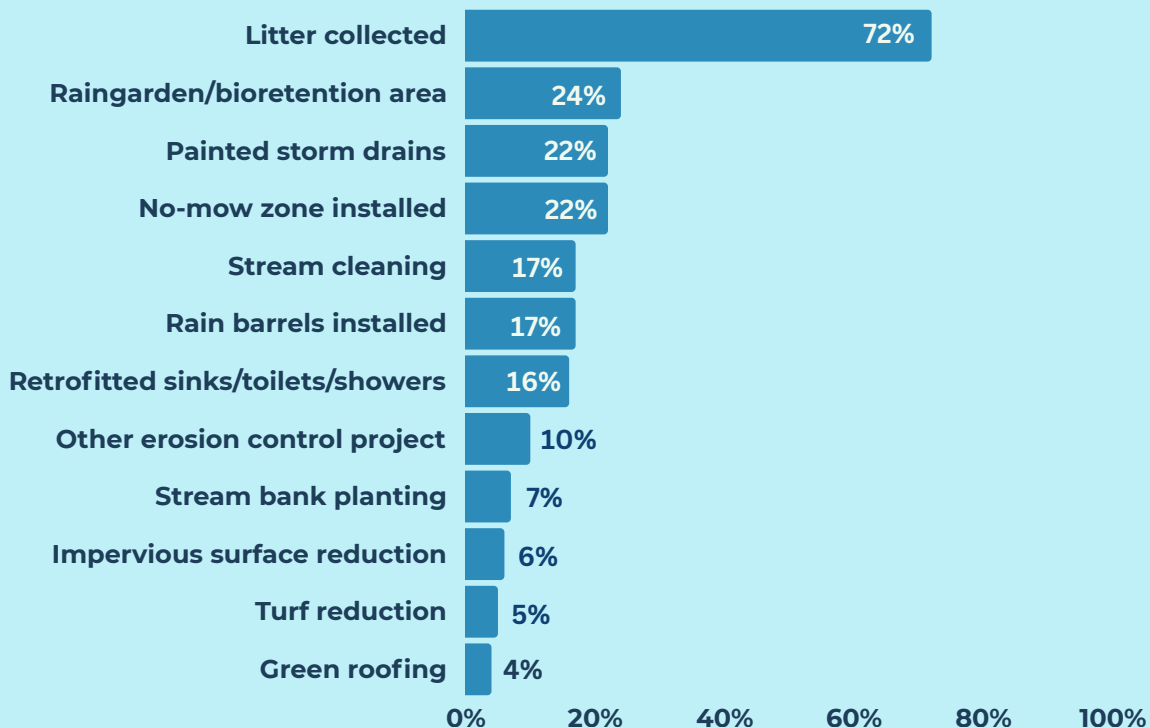
Most schools participated in outdoor learning, including the use of schoolyards for learning (89% of schools) and the use of outdoor classrooms (56% of schools). The number of outdoor classrooms may be unreliable. It is not clear if schools were answering this question as a “yes or no” question, based on the high number of responses indicating one outdoor classroom (55 of 93 participating schools), or if respondents were listing the number of such classrooms their school had available, or the number of times the classroom was used (range: 1 - 100).

Practices with lower engagement included the installation of nature-based infrastructure (e.g., pathways, trails, signage, tree tags, boardwalks, and bridges). From previous surveys, we know that many Green Schools already maintain existing outdoor infrastructure, and as such, are not building new installations. Efforts to maintain existing nature-based infrastructure are currently unaccounted for in the annual metrics survey.

WATER CONSERVATION



Green Schools most often participated in water conservation practices by collecting trash to reduce pollution in local waterways. All other water conservation practices were much less common.



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

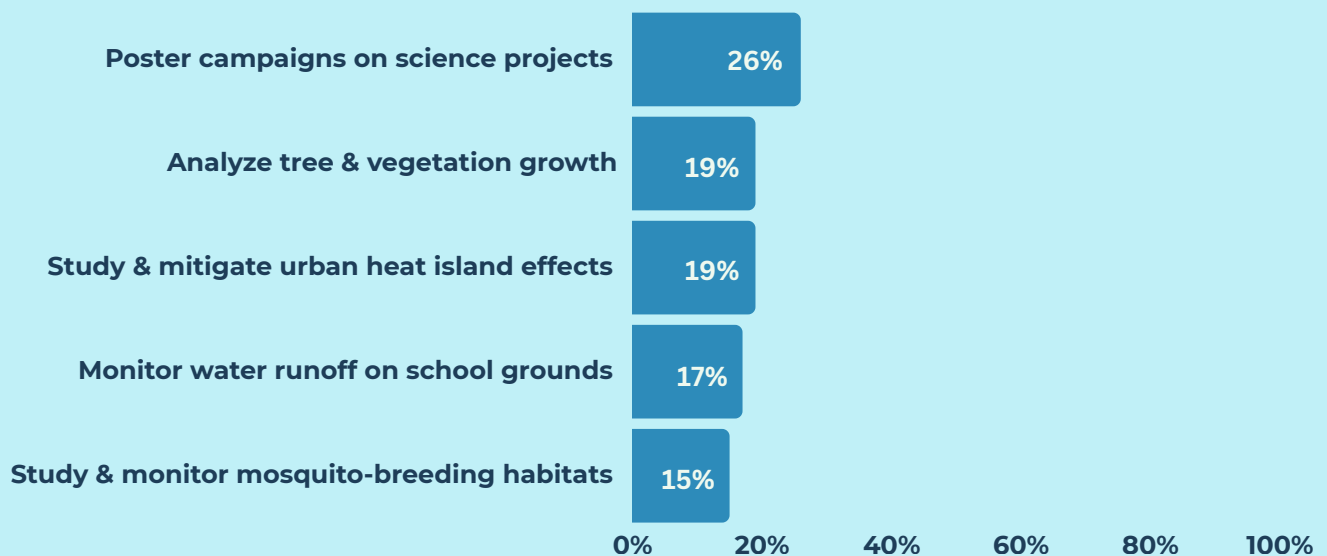
Apart from litter clean-ups held in nearby aquatic habitats (72% of schools), water conservation practices had low engagement in 2025-26 (and in previous years). Many of these practices are costly to implement, such as retrofitting water infrastructure (e.g., sinks, toilets, showers) and installing green roofing. Schools have previously indicated that renting their property, as opposed to owning it, prohibits such installations. Alternatively, individual water conservation behaviors can significantly conserve water on school grounds, but such efforts are not measured by the annual metrics survey.

Reported water conservation metrics likely also contain unreliable data. For example, water conservation estimates ranged from 10 - 500,000 gallons saved per year, though the average was ~18,000 gallons. Another example: for “*Rain barrels installed*,” the requested unit of measurement being gallons (as opposed to number of barrels) caused confusion for respondents. In the future, MAEOE could consider including only metrics that are easily measurable, such as the use of motion-sensor sinks in bathrooms (a practice already occurring in several schools).

COMMUNITY SCIENCE



Green Schools are much less likely to participate in community science initiatives than other green practices. This is a newer reporting category in the annual metrics survey, and is highly contingent on establishing partnerships with local environmental organizations.



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

Community science in Green Schools, as with water conservation practices, had comparatively low engagement than the other green practices measured in this evaluation. Two potential factors may explain low levels of school participation in community science projects. First, this practice is newer to Green School reporting, and therefore newer to teachers and schools. Additional training may be required to set schools up for success and empower them to undertake community science projects with their students. Second, community science initiatives often require collaboration with host organizations that design projects and assist with data collection training. The MDGS program may need to further facilitate connections between schools and host organizations to ensure long-term participation, as well as secure additional funding for these partnerships.

Community science is an important activity not only to achieve sustainability goals for MDGS, but to cultivate student scientific/environmental literacy and facilitate networking opportunities. Expanding the list of approved research topics for community science could also encourage broader participation.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Maryland Green Schools Program

2025-2026



PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS



38% of Maryland schools are Green Schools.

MAEOE's signature initiative, the Maryland Green Schools program, has incrementally improved its statewide school award rate over the last five years, this year maintaining the 38% award rate observed in 2024-25. This result was achieved despite reduced operational capacity, and occurred in part by exercising the strategy to defer the application process for a subset of schools until next year.

A school's success in the Green Schools program seems to be impacted by several factors. Suburban schools hold a disproportionately high Green School award rate, as do schools with larger student bodies. Title I schools, and schools with a higher percentage of FARM-eligible students, have lower overall representation in the MDGS program. These insights, observed consistently year over year, suggest that resource availability may impact school engagement in the Green School program.



A diverse support network of both individuals and institutions help Maryland Green Schools to succeed.

The ability for schools to renew their Green School applications every four years, and to maintain the rigorous standards of participation, is aided meaningfully by a diverse network of support, including Maryland Green Centers and MAEOE Green Leaders, LEAs, and environmental education providers. Of all successful school applicants this year, 81% were assisted by either a Green Center, a Green Leader, or both. By investing in MELAN, MAEOE has also established regional hubs in areas of need, aiming to support Western Maryland and the Lower Eastern Shore.



The longevity of the MDGS program was illustrated by its first Sustainable Silver Green Schools this year.

The Maryland Green Schools Program is a shining symbol of the state's commitment to environmental literacy, student well-being, and the importance of sustainability. The long-term commitment to this program is best illustrated by the first cohort of schools to reach Sustainable Silver status this year. These 19 schools have now maintained participation in the Green Schools program for an impressive 20+ years.

CHALLENGES TO PROGRESS



With limited resources, it is challenging to balance both growth and diverse representation within the program.

Though the Green Schools program is successful in many ways, school participation has reached an asymptote of around 35-38%. The current MAEOE staffing and operational capacity along with diverse program goals may be influencing this stagnation.

An ongoing challenge for MDGS is wanting to both grow the statewide award rate and increase the diversity of participating schools with a limited budget. Lower engagement from urban schools, Title I and high FARM-eligibility schools, and small schools likely stems from resource-related challenges and may require a higher level and even more forms of support. Further, the Green Schools program continues to have more engagement in the interior of the state and lower engagement in outer counties. Providing this level of support may not be possible while also increasing the number of schools in the program. Ultimately, providing targeted outreach and support to larger, higher-resourced suburban schools may more quickly increase the state-wide award rate, while a higher level of investment will be needed for under-resourced schools to join and sustain participation in the program. By determining the relative importance of each goal to their broader organizational strategy, the MDGS program could then pursue the changes that will best position them to achieve it.



The environmental impact of the program is still unknown.

The environmental impact of the MDGS program provides justification for continued state legislative support. However, the methods by which green practices are currently evaluated have produced unreliable data, which has prevented a quantified impact assessment for the program. Recommended revisions to the annual metrics survey (the tool used to assess environmental impact) include 1) re-structuring survey questions to improve response validity, and 2) adding new metrics that capture green practices with fewer barriers for both participation and accurate measurement. Additionally, developing a green practices training portal for the school staff who are accountable for completing the survey could further improve the accuracy of school-reported environmental data.

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.

Strategies for reaching desired goals:

Goal #1 - significantly grow the statewide award rate:

- Develop an outreach strategy targeted at the schools with the greatest likelihood of maintaining Green School awards. This likely includes larger, suburban schools, but will be further informed by an in-depth cross-sectional analysis (e.g., additional socioeconomic factors, school attributes, geographic factors, etc.). This strategy involves investing fewer resources per school, but targeting a larger number of schools.

Goal #2 - diversify representation within the program:

- Develop an outreach strategy targeted at the schools least likely to be reached by the program. This could involve school and community needs assessments to identify the schools/regions most in need of support, and then developing case-specific plans for how to best support their journey. This strategy involves investing more resources per school, but targeting a smaller number of schools.

For MAEOE to address these goals, the 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS, CONT.



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 - see previous page). These outcomes are dependent on the reliability and accuracy of school-submitted data, and thus 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 teachers and staff (or other survey-takers) that provides instruction on how to collect and report these data.

Availability of certain data (such as renewable energy usage) required to complete the sustainability metrics survey is currently a challenge for schools. To increase the accuracy of these metrics, MAEOE may consider working with school districts to readily provide these data to schools in a clear format, rather than leaving this responsibility with school staff.

Currently, the required maintenance and/or long-term commitment to certain sustainability practices is omitted from the data. In the current metrics survey, emphasis is placed on installation of new nature-based infrastructure and the creation of newly restored habitat, but does not acknowledge the effort and resources required of schools to manage long-term usage or maintenance.

Sustainability practices occurring at an individual level, such as remembering to turn water faucets off, or bringing refillable water bottles to school, are not included in the metrics survey. In previous survey comments, many schools indicated that they engage in these types of practices.

Most importantly, a trained evaluator or social scientist should be contracted to revise the metrics survey to improve data reliability. Both quantitative data and qualitative feedback from the survey are important tools for 1) improving and communicating the impact of the Maryland Green Schools program, and 2) ensuring schools do not encounter unnecessary barriers to participation.



**THIS EVALUATION REPORT WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GRANT
FROM THE MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.**