



Proposed Maryland Environmental Literacy Graduation Requirement: Key Questions and Answers

Q. What is the proposed Environmental Literacy Graduation requirement?

The language proposed by the Maryland State Department of Education will require local school systems to provide in public schools a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary environmental education program infused within current curricular offerings and aligned with the [Maryland Environmental Literacy Curriculum](#) to all enrolled students. Each local school system can design its own program which will be reviewed by MSDE every 5 years. It does *not* require an additional course or specific number of environmental education experiences. Each local school system can implement their environmental literacy plan based on the resources unique to their system. Proposed language: http://www.dsd.state.md.us/MDRegister/3715/Assembled.htm#_Toc266696462 (Note: do not click -- must paste link into browser)

Q. What is environmental literacy?

[The Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature](#) defines environmental literacy as: students that 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 processes and systems, including human systems. They are able to analyze global, social, cultural, political, physical, economic and environmental relationships, and weigh various sides of environmental issues to make responsible decisions as individuals and as members of their community and citizens of the world.

Q. Why do we need an environmental literacy graduation requirement?

While many exemplary environmental education programs already exist in some Maryland schools not *all* students have access to these programs due to a significant narrowing of the curriculum as a result of the 2002 No Child Left Behind Law. In addition, environmental education is important for three key reasons:

- **It has a positive impact on student achievement in core subjects.** [Research has shown](#) that when integrated into the core curricula or used as an integrating theme across the curriculum, environmental education has a measurably positive impact not only on student achievement in science but also in reading, math, and social studies. Properly integrated environmental education requires students to use math, reading, science and writing skills as they pursue engaging activities. Moreover, outdoor activities increase student engagement and interest in science and in all core subjects.
- **It can help improve the health of children.** Field experiences and related programs as part of the regular school curriculum contribute to healthy lifestyles through outdoor recreation and sound nutrition. Getting kids outdoors to exercise, play and experience their natural world is an important tool to prevent obesity, alleviate attention deficit disorder and address other related health problems.
- **It provides critical tools for a 21st Century workforce.** We will be passing on complicated environmental problems to future generations. We must give the next generation a solid understanding of these problems and the basic tools to overcome them and make informed choices in their own lives. Business leaders also increasingly believe that an environmentally literate workforce is critical to their

long term success. Environmental education is the foundation for creating the green workforce of the new economy.

Q. How will student environmental literacy be assessed? How will the success of the school system's program be assessed?

The MDNCLI Coalition is currently working with MSDE and the Governor's Children in Nature Partnership to discuss how local school systems can best measure the success of the environmental literacy graduation requirement, but no additional testing is planned. The goal of this graduation requirement is to provide all students with comprehensive, multi-disciplinary environmental education infused within current curricular offerings and aligned with the Maryland Environmental Literacy Curriculum.

Q. Will there be a need for new staff or professional development?

The implementation of this graduation requirement will be within existing curriculum offerings (unless otherwise designed by a local school system) and implemented and taught interdisciplinary by existing highly-qualified teachers. Professional development would be necessary to ensure efficacy, but would be the same as in the introduction of new curriculum. Professional development offerings would be at the discretion of the local school system based on their individual environmental literacy plan.

Documentation of an environmental literacy graduation requirement would be accomplished using the existing framework within each local school system for tracking graduation requirements.

Q. Will this require additional funding?

As stated in the language proposed by MSDE, this proposed action will have no economic impact on local school systems. An environmental literacy graduation requirement will not require school systems or counties to spend any additional funds for implementation. However, there are existing and potential public and non-profit sector funding opportunities for implementation of integrated environmental education programs and for the enhancement of related programs (i.e. STEM, Service Learning). Some examples include:

- [NOAA Chesapeake BWET program grants](#) support meaningful watershed experiences systemically in local school systems.
- [The Chesapeake Bay Trust Environmental Education Funding Opportunity](#) announced July, 2010 supports development and implementation of environmental literacy programs
- [The proposed No Child Left Inside legislation](#) provides for potential funding to train teachers to deliver high quality environmental education and utilize the local environment as an extension of the classroom; and for states to implement State Environmental Literacy Plans.

Q. What is the Maryland No Child Left Inside Coalition's position on the proposed environmental literacy graduation requirement?

The MDNCLI Coalition applauds MSDE's support of an environmental literacy graduation requirement. Maryland would be the first state in the nation to adopt an environmental literacy graduation requirement, and is being looked to by other states as a national leader. The Coalition supports passage of the proposed language in COMAR 13A.04.17, which describes environmental education instructional programming. We also strongly support the addition of an environmental literacy graduation requirement to COMAR 13A.03.02: Graduation Requirements for Public High Schools in Maryland. In this way, the environmental literacy graduation requirement will be set forth in two appropriate places in the regulations.

Q. A 30-day public comment period is open from July 16-August 16. Where can I send comments?

Comments may be sent to Dixie Stack, Director of Curriculum, Maryland State Department of Education, 200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201, or email to dstack@msde.state.md.us, or fax to 410-333-2369. Comments will be accepted through August 16, 2010.