

Maryland Green Schools Progress Evaluation Executive Summary 2021



Evaluation Context

The Maryland Green Schools (MDGS) program is led by the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE), providing infrastructure, support, and a rigorous review process to any school in Maryland to be awarded status as a sustainable school, with the title of being a Maryland Green School.

In 2020, the “Maryland Green Schools Act of 2019” provided funding to expand efforts to support schools toward sustainability. With this, MAEOE has a **goal of supporting 50% of all schools in Maryland to become awarded Maryland Green Schools by 2026.**

In the first year of state funding, the evaluation led a quantitative assessment of progress toward its 50% goal. Specifically, evaluation comparatively examined the characteristics of schools that have and have not achieved MDGS status. This comparison sought to reveal the program’s current progress, areas of strength, and opportunities for growth to reach the 50% target by 2026.

Evaluation drew upon: (1) MAEOE’s historic records of schools that have currently or previously been awarded MDGS status; (2) State-level data about all public and private schools available through NCES; (3) Environmental impact metrics reported in 2021 MDGS applications.

33% of all schools are Maryland Green Schools; and the program has reached 42% of public schools.



664 schools were in good standing as Maryland Green Schools, as of reporting in June 2021.

This is an award rate of 33% of all schools (public and private). Success is far higher among public schools.

Nearly 430,000 Maryland K-12 students are enrolled and served by these Maryland Green Schools.

Areas of Strength in the MDGS Program

The MDGS program is doing extremely well among public schools in Maryland; 42% of all public schools currently hold Green School status.

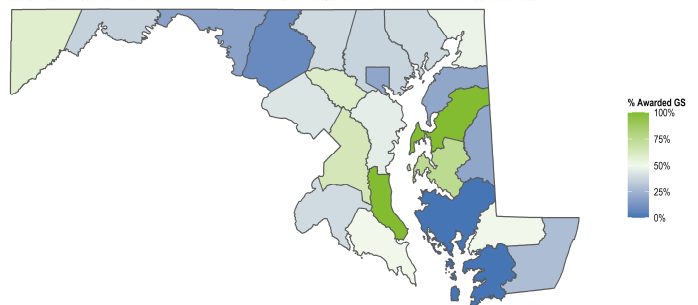
Among public schools, eight Maryland counties have already achieved the target of at least 50% of schools awarded MDGS status – Calvert, Queen Anne’s, Talbot, Prince George’s, Howard, Garrett, St. Mary’s, and Wicomico. In two counties (Calvert and Queen Anne’s), 100% of public schools are Maryland Green Schools.

The MDGS program is equally serving schools across the grade-bands (i.e., elementary, middle, and high schools). There is no apparent skew or bias in the program toward a particular grade level. Students at all levels are served by this award program.

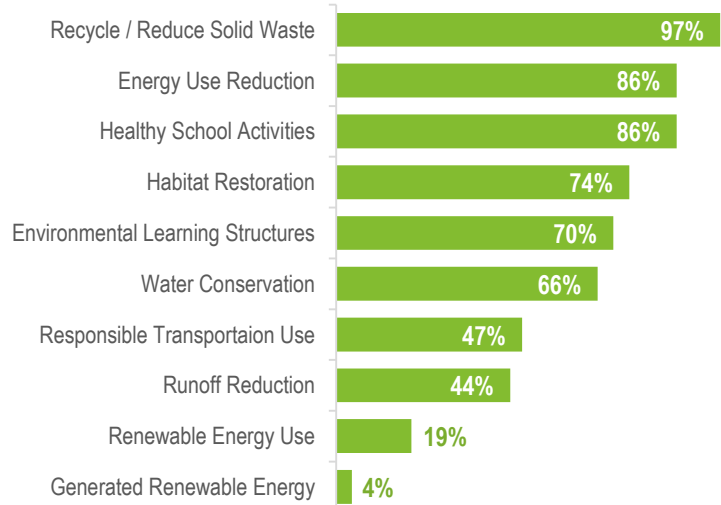
The most common green practices that applicant schools enact are those for which students can play an active role in implementing – waste reduction, energy use reduction, and healthy activities. It seems that grass-roots, student-level sustainability actions are most actionable for applicant schools. In contrast, the actions that are least frequently reported in schools’ application materials are actions that would likely need district- or administrative-level action – renewable energy generation, renewable energy use, and runoff reduction.

Proportion of public schools, by county, that are MD Green Schools

This heat map depicts which counties have the highest percentage of their public schools awarded (bright green), and which counties have the lowest percentage of public school awarded (bright blue).



Self-Reported Rates of Green Practices across Schools Applying to be Maryland Green Schools in 2020-21 (n=70)

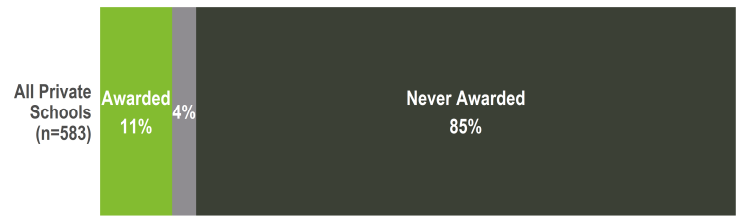


Opportunities for Future Strategic Growth

The Maryland Green Schools program has far weaker reach into the population of private schools, with only about 11% of all private schools having been awarded the MDGS designation. Without the centralized administration of the public school districts, private schools are much more diffuse in efforts to engage.

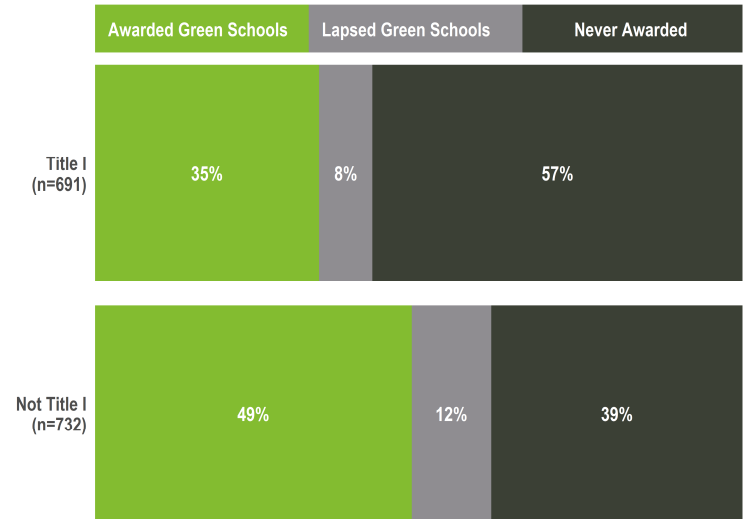
MDGS has relatively weaker reach into schools that are in urban and/or under-resourced communities. Only 30% of all urban public schools and 35% of Title I schools are certified (compared with nearly 50% of suburban, rural, and non-Title I schools). Those urban and Title I schools that are already in the program may be useful information sources for how to effectively frame the value of MDGS support and awarding for outreach to schools in similar contexts not currently awarded status.

County-by-county analysis highlighted counties where award rates are low and could potentially use greater support or outreach to gather buy-in about the value of the process of applying and being awarded MDGS status.



MD Green Schools have less reach into Title I schools.

Comparing the proportion of schools that are currently awarded, by whether they are designated as Title I.



Conclusions & Recommendations

Setting Parameters around the Population for the Goal

MDGS would be well-served to recalibrate and focus the parameters that define the population of schools that are reasonably eligible to be part of the 50% target. Informal discussions with some districts raised questions about whether schools categorized as “ungraded” in state records should be included (as this designation typically indicates a school that serves a specialized and distinctive student population).

Similarly, because of the variation in private schools, it may be worth setting a threshold of enrollment that makes a school a viable candidate for the MDGS program; this could eliminate the extremely small schools (<25 students, for example) from the benchmarking analysis in the future. The number of schools in the total population has an influence on progress toward the goal, so these decisions should be made intentionally and applied systematically across all counties and contexts.

Overall, there is a much smaller population of private schools in the state, and the program has had far less penetration into that more diffuse and dispersed type of school. Overall, the degree to which private schools are an emphasis of the program’s 50% target may also be something to consider in the intention of the legislation.

Supporting Schools in Environmental Metric Reporting

Self-reported environmental impact metrics provide some insight into the potential environmental impact of the MDGS program. Recent research done in collaboration between MAEOE and Towson University quantified the impact of these metrics (Haines & McDonough, 2020).

When we look closely at the individual school responses within those aggregates, however, there is evidence that some schools struggle to accurately estimate data for these environmental metrics. The wide ranges of responses suggest likely under-estimations, over-estimations, and/or confusion time scale for reporting metrics (e.g., a 4-year total or an annualized amount). Providing applicant schools with greater clarity, specificity, structure, and tips about how to record and find these data would improve their reliability.

The overall pattern is that the more frequently-reported green actions are those that can be implemented at the student or teacher level, rather than those actions that would require far greater involvement, buy-in, and financial support at a district or administrative level. This is not surprising, but it may be an area for further discussion with district leaders.