

# MD Green Schools Progress Evaluation

## Evaluation Context

Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE) leads the Maryland Green Schools (MDGS) program, providing infrastructure, support, and a rigorous review process to award qualifying schools across the state as a Maryland Green School. 2019 legislation provided funding to expand efforts to support schools toward sustainability. With this, MAEOE has a goal to increase the number of Green Schools to 50% of schools statewide.

Evaluation tracks year-to-year progress toward that goal through comparative analyses of schools awarded as MD Green Schools (MAEOE's historic and ongoing data) with statewide data of all schools (available through NCES databases) and data of participation in MAEOE professional development and mini-grants.

---

**With the end of COVID-era grace periods, there was a decrease in the overall number of Green Schools in 2023. However, the impacts of schools who let their awards lapse were largely offset by adding a strong set of 33 new awardees.**

In its third year of state funding, there was a slight decrease in progress toward the goal of having 50% of Maryland schools awarded and maintaining MDGS status. The result was discouraging, but expected, as the impacts of COVID challenges and staff turnover were newly revealed in the data, with the end of COVID-era extensions for previously awarded schools. In 2023, 66 schools lost their MD Green School status.

There was also evidence that MAEOE's ongoing efforts to provide professional development and financial assistance to schools and teachers was successfully supporting the journey to achieving an initial or renewed award. The three main takeaways from the 2023 evaluation are summarized to the right.

1

### 34% of MD Schools are Green Schools

This metric fell in 2023, but it remained higher than what was seen in the first year of evaluation (2021). Moreover, despite the impacts of COVID on the program, within public schools, the program only saw a decrease of one percentage point, compared to 2022. Currently, **43% of all public schools are currently Green Schools**, very close to the 50% target.

2

### Steady Growth in Three Counties

Over the past three years, including 2023, when across-the-board decreases were anticipated, MDGS has maintained steady, positive growth in the reach of Green Schools in three counties – Prince George's, Montgomery, and Kent Counties. Achieving this progress in this year of declines was very encouraging. However, MAEOE priority program targets need to continue to be in Eastern Shore and Western counties.

3

### PD & Grants Support MDGS Applicants

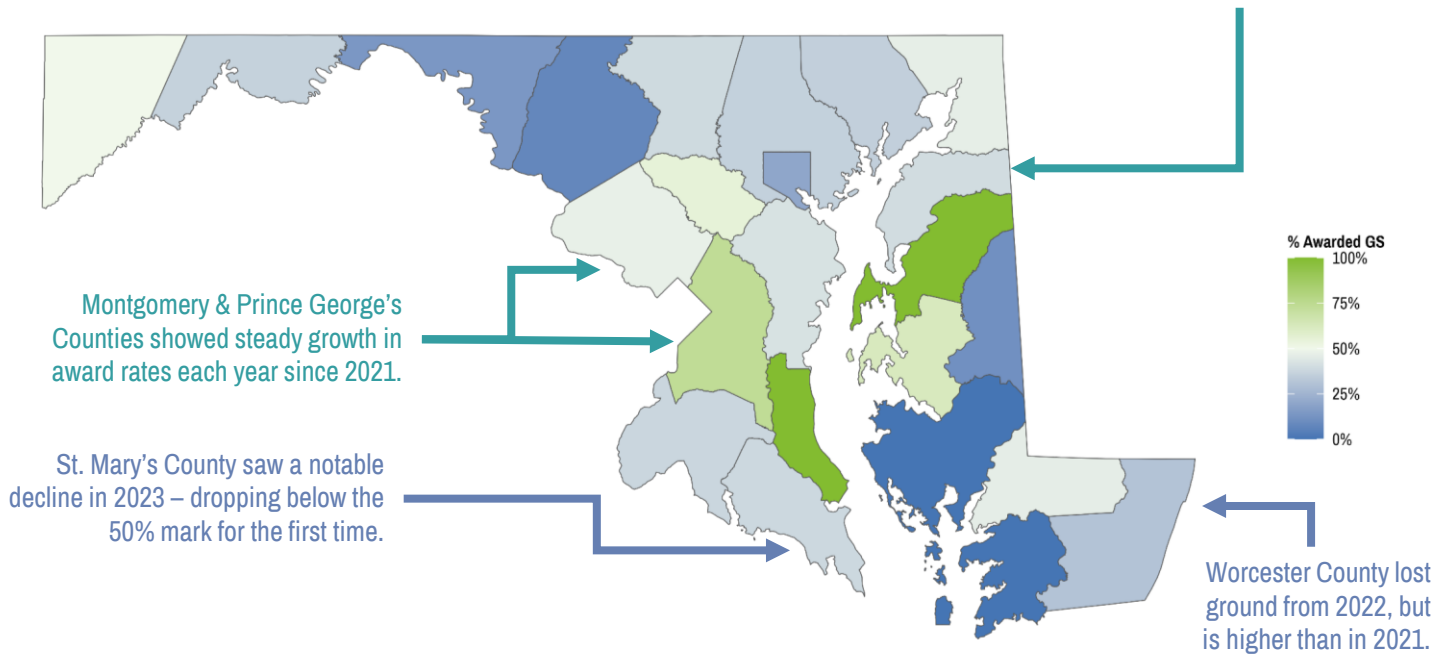
Expanded analysis of MAEOE's currently available data of schools that have attended professional development (PD) and received mini-grants showed a strong relationship between schools that received support and those that have successfully applied and been awarded as Green Schools. 60% of schools that sent someone to PD sessions have made successful applications, and 42% of 2023 grant recipients achieved MDGS awards as well.

## 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).

The region with the lowest engagement in the MDGS program appears to be in the Eastern Shore area, as well as some counties in western Maryland.

Kent County added a new Green School in 2023, raising its coverage to 40% of schools.



## Key Considerations for Next Year

### Supporting New Applicants & First-Time Awardees

The MDGS program showed a strong post-COVID rebound in attracting and shepherding new schools to be awarded, reaching new award levels on par with pre-COVID years. The data also suggest that awardees are most likely to drop out between the initial award and the first re-application. These early stages may be the most at risk of “giving up” on a Green School journey.

### Supporting Eastern & Rural Schools

Somerset and Dorchester counties have continually shown limited engagement or interest in the MDGS program, with no Green Schools and no participation in PD or mini-grant programs. There were also data suggesting that the program lost some traction in schools in rural areas (not just the Eastern Shore), two findings which may indicate a need to rethink the needs of small and rural schools in order to make inroads.

### Sustainable School Status Decisions

The MDGS program delayed a planned change to require Sustainable level schools to resume reapplications to maintain award status. If the requirement for a re-application process goes into effect, it seems likely to result in further losses of total Green Schools numbers. These schools may need very different support than new schools to encourage reengagement in a process they considered complete.