

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



MAEOE

Annual Evaluation of the
Maryland Green Schools Program

2023-2024



MARYLAND GREEN SCHOOLS PROGRAM

About Maryland Green Schools

Since 1999, the Maryland Green Schools (MDGS) program has been the signature program of the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE), with current participation from schools in 22 of Maryland's 24 counties. 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 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 broader goals of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.

Context for this Evaluation Report

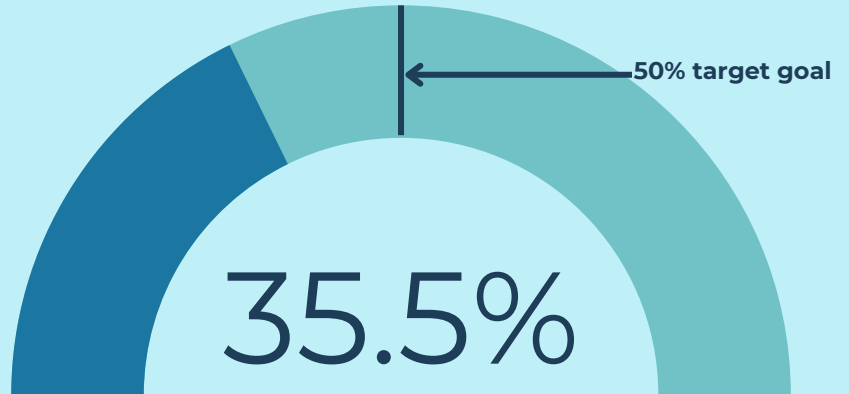
In 2019 and 2022, the Maryland state legislature allocated funding to MAEOE to expand the contributions of schools toward statewide sustainability goals. The MDGS program set a goal to support 50% of all schools in Maryland to receive Maryland Green School awards by 2028. To achieve this ambitious goal, MAEOE's objectives include 1) increasing support for Green School development, 2) providing professional development to teachers, and 3) increasing students' environmental literacy.

This evaluation explores the outcomes of the first two objectives in detail. First, it examines progress towards expansion of MDGS awards statewide, including any changes over time and the identification of differences in award status across demographic, geographic, and other factors. Second, it explores evidence of the impact of professional development offerings and mini-grants on supporting schools to submit successful MDGS applications. In addition, this evaluation describes the environmental impact of the MDGS program statewide. Finally, recommendations are provided to improve progress toward MAEOE's goal of 50% of Maryland schools awarded as Green Schools by 2028.

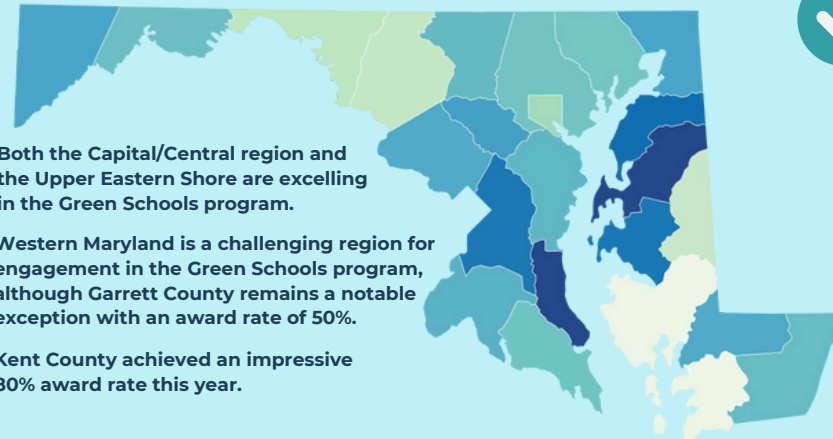
PROGRESS TOWARD GOAL



In the 2023-24 academic year, 35.5% of all schools in the state – including both public and private – are awarded as Maryland Green Schools, showcasing a 1.5% increase from the previous year.



Public Schools Awarded (%)



Both the Capital/Central region and the Upper Eastern Shore are excelling in the Green Schools program.

Western Maryland is a challenging region for engagement in the Green Schools program, although Garrett County remains a notable exception with an award rate of 50%.

Kent County achieved an impressive 80% award rate this year.

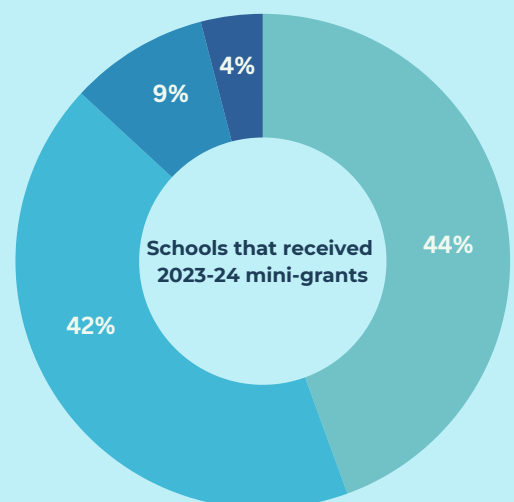


Green School awards are not uniformly distributed, with hotspots of both high and low program engagement across Maryland. Several counties significantly improved their award rates in 2023-24, while others saw small regressions.

- Successfully applied in 2024
- Reapplication due in 2025 or later
- New to MDGS/rejoining
- Lapsed MDGS school



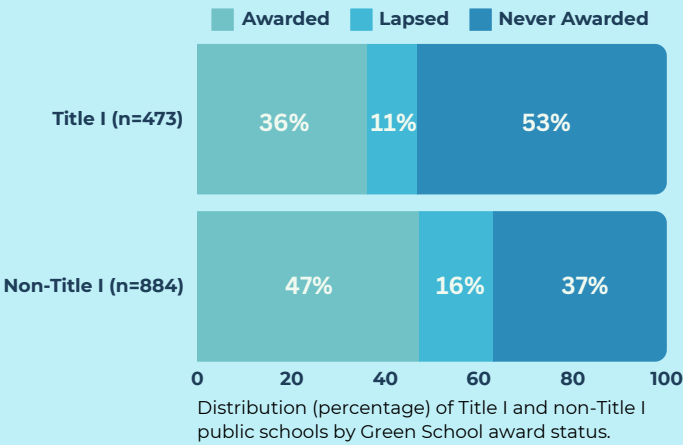
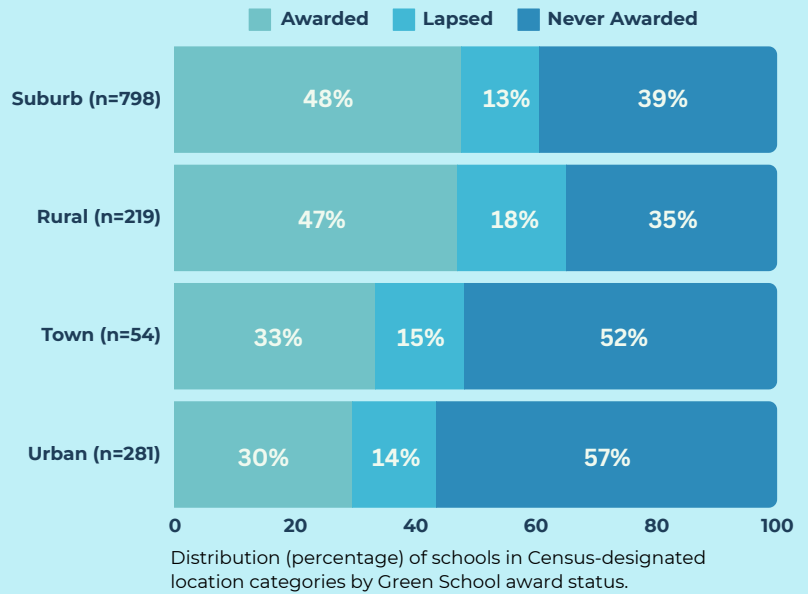
Of schools that received MDGS-sponsored professional development (PD) and/or mini-grants this year, the outcomes were highly favorable. Of the 78 schools that attended at least one PD offering during the 2023-24 academic year, 50 (64%) completed a successful Green Schools application between 2021-2024. Over 86% of schools that received mini-grants in the 2023-24 academic year either went on to complete successful Green School applications or their reapplication is due in 2025 or later.



CHALLENGES TO PROGRESS



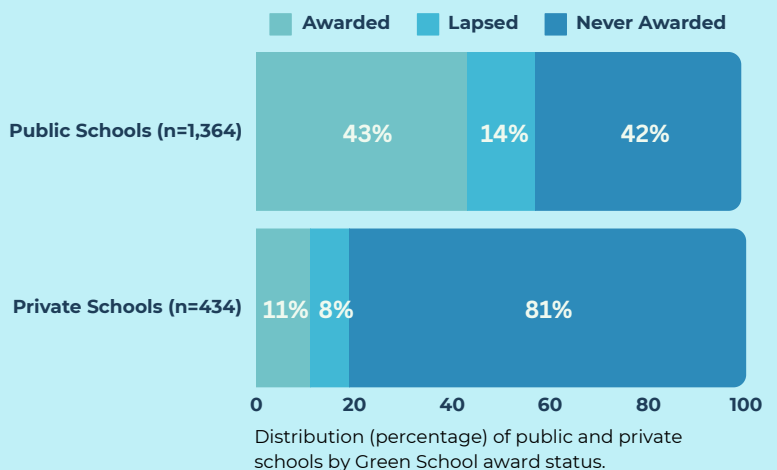
The MDGS program continues to have greatest success recruiting and awarding schools that are in suburban and rural locations, with opportunity to reach more urban schools.



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.



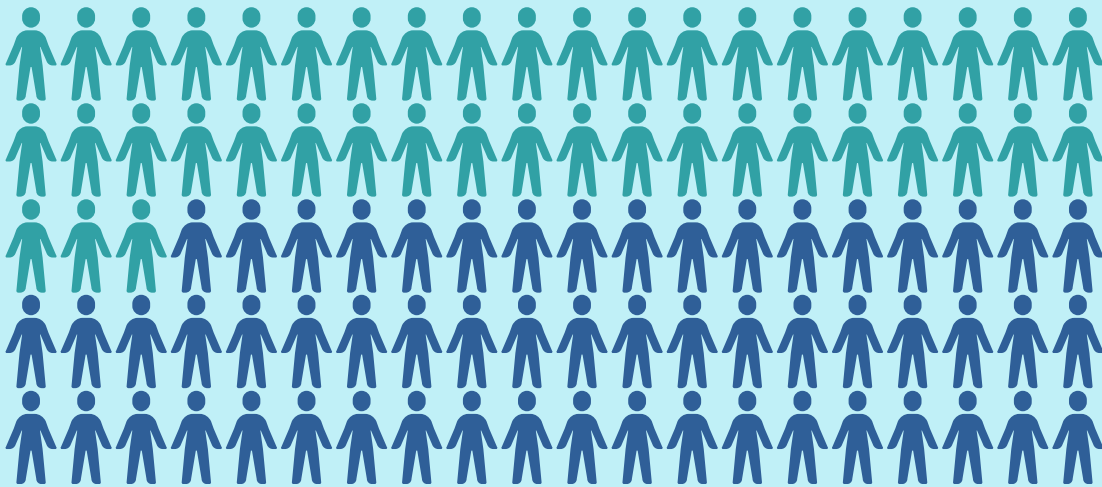
The MDGS program continues to have higher Green School award rates in public schools than private schools. Private schools remain the most critical opportunity to increase the number of awarded Green Schools statewide.



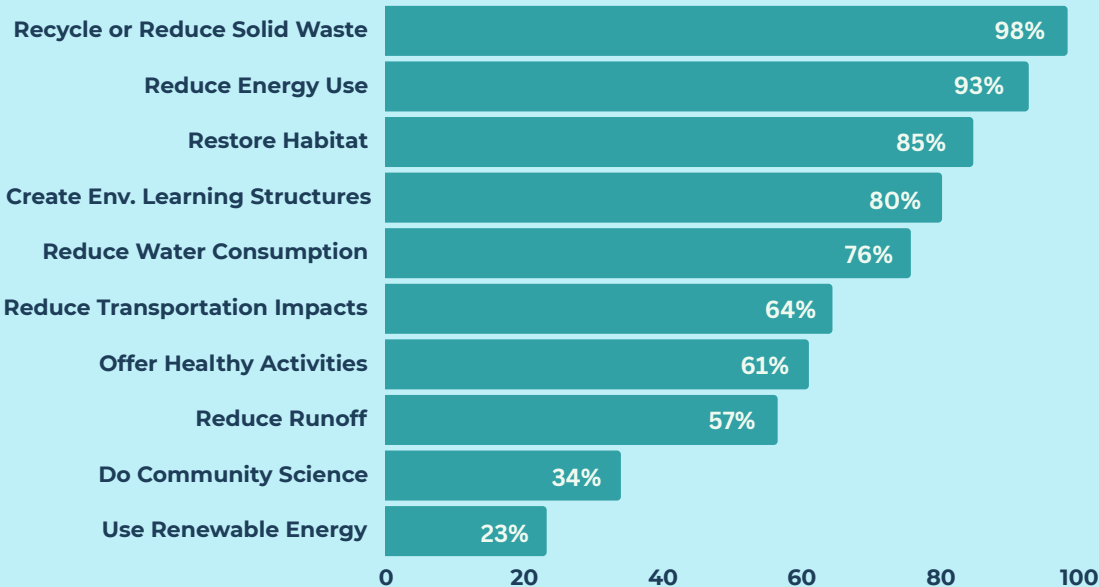
MDGS PROGRAM IMPACT



Though MDGS is reaching 35.5% of schools across the state, they are reaching 43% of the total number of enrolled students in Maryland - a figure much closer to their target rate of 50%.



Self-reported data from 177 Green Schools showcase high participation in a series of sustainable and green practices, though there is lower participation for activities that require high levels of training and/or resources.



Self-reported participation (% of schools who answered yes) in a series of green practices Across Maryland Green Schools (n=177) in 2023-24.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS



Provide evidence-based, targeted support to in-need schools

Currently MDGS is not on track to meet the 50% Green School award rate goal unless significant advances are made in the next two years. This goal is achievable so long as funding is dedicated to developing a data-driven and tailored approach to strategic recruitment and support/outreach, based on the results of this evaluation. Several factors are identified that influence schools' ability to apply and retain Green School awards, such as socioeconomic status and locale type. Exploring cross-sectional impacts of these factors, as well as conducting school and community needs assessments, can produce a list of target schools in need of extra support to become Green Schools and identify how best to support them. Further, additional resources to conduct a qualitative analysis of the rich feedback and data provided by schools about their professional development experiences, challenges with reporting, and experience with the application process would further refine such an approach and increase odds of successful recruitment.



Improve quality of environmental impact data

Collecting environmental metrics data from Green Schools has the potential to quantify the environmental impact of the program, further motivate both individuals and schools to engage in green practices, and secure additional funding for the MDGS program. These outcomes, however, are dependent on the reliability and accuracy of the data. It is critical that MDGS identify and tackle the necessary improvements to survey design, as well as to offer a training program for teachers and staff that provides instruction on how to collect and report these data.

Further, availability of certain data (such as renewable energy usage) required to complete the environmental metrics survey is currently a challenge for schools. A priority for MDGS is to work with utility companies or school districts to readily provide these data to schools in a clear and concise format.

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