



## Maryland Outdoor Learning Partnership (OLP) Access to Nature Working Group Meeting Minutes

Date and Time: Monday, March 10, 2025, 2:00-3:00 PM

### Attendees

Rick Garber (Working Group Co-Chair), Chris Wheedleton (Working Group Co-Chair), Jo Anne Murray, Stephanie Tuckfield, Michelle Hickerson, Isabel Layton, Katrina Jones

### Welcome & Meeting Began at 2:03

### Group Sharing – What were your impressions & observations from the Pre-Reading materials?

- [OLP Co-Chair Welcome Packet](#)
- [Executive Order](#)
- [PGC Recommendations](#)
- Progress on the June 2019 PGC Report Recommendations
  - o Recommendation #1: Environmental Literacy Specialist position at MSDE was hired.
  - o Recommendation #3: Higher Education Environmental Literacy (HEEL) fellowship launched.



- Discussion of Pre-Read Materials:
  - o The recommendations are finite but not particularly ambitious or measurable. How can implementation be assessed? Future recommendations should be clearly actionable and achievable.
  - o The PGC recommendations were primarily focused on state coordination and teacher support, with limited emphasis on county-level action – where many decisions are made.
  - o English Language Learners (ELL) and students in Special Education face unique barriers to outdoor learning. NorthBay has collaborated with PhD researchers to better serve ELL students.
  - o Assumptions about student access to nature can be misleading – for example, proximity to tributaries does not always equate to a strong connection to nature.
  - o NorthBay supports students experiencing nature for the first time, emphasizing a “stretch zone” rather than a “freak out zone.” Similar to Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development.
- Potential connections between Green Schools/ Outdoor Classrooms & Access to Nature:
  - o The Public School Construction program includes requirements for outdoor classrooms in new schools
  - o The Interagency Commission on School Construction's (IAC) [Pass-Through Grant program](#) can be used to support playgrounds
  - o There is a misconception that older school buildings are not eligible for [Maryland Green School](#) Certification



- Key Questions Moving Forward:
  - o What barriers limit participation in outdoor education, and how can we develop recommendations to address them?
  - o What messaging could better align access to nature to other key issues in education like mental health and physical education?
  - o How can we leverage school connectivity to students and families to promote accessing nature?
  - o How can we better align the mandate for outdoor classrooms with necessary teacher training to ensure effective use of these spaces?
  - o What insights can Environmental Literacy Plans and Science Coordinators provide about students' current outdoor learning experiences?

### **Back-Mapping Milestones by Month**

- April: Discovery meeting. Learn from researchers about what the barriers to outdoor learning are. Potential invitees include: Marc Stern (Virginia Tech), Bob Powell, Dan Prince (Oregon).
- May: What does the data in Maryland tell us? What barrier, based on what we learned in April, could this group address?
- June: What does success look like and how are we going to measure that?
- July: Begin drafting recommendations.
- Aug: Finalize draft recommendations to share with broader OLP.

**Meeting Closed at 3:06**