Maryland Outdoor Learning Partnership (OLP)

Access to Nature Working Group Meeting Minutes

Date and Time: Monday, February 9, 2026, 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Attendees:
Rick Garber- working group Co-chair; Chris Wheeleton- Working group Co-chair; Stephanie Tuckfield, Isabel Layton, Mary Odell, Jo Anne Murray, Karen McDonald, Katie Dell

Welcome New Member
- Welcome Mary Odell- Director of Program and Safety from Chesapeake Bay Outward Bounds

Review where we are at the start of the year
- Summary of action:
  - OLP requires a comprehensive state-wide understanding of the gaps in opportunities, and utilization of resources that impact equitable implementation of outdoor learning for Maryland students. To address this, the Access to Nature Working Group will establish an ad hoc Committee on Data. The committee will collaborate and conduct interviews with stakeholders to identify where data exists and data is needed; compile and analyze existing data from local education agencies, schools, teachers, environmental education providers, and established databases. The work will document where programs occur, who is served, associated costs, partners involved, and barriers to opportunities. The committee will also examine approaches from other states where data application has resulted in greater equity in outdoor learning. Findings will be synthesized into a statewide summary report with recommendations for future acquisition and management of data. Success for implementing this action is defined by a more accurate understanding of current opportunities and barriers in order to better align resources, inform legislative action, and drive continuous improvement in equitable opportunities for outdoor learning for students statewide.

- This year's focus is to utilize existing data and collected data to give us a concrete idea of who is getting access to nature through school

- Data collection will be through interviews with individuals in various school districts
  - Collaborate with other members of OLP and members outside of OLP
  - Review existing data (Rick to put in DropBox)
  - Conducting interviews in a very specific and intentional way
  - Where is programming being provided (E. Lit, Outdoor school, CTE, etc)
  - Understand the cost barriers: What cost are associated, who's paying it?
  - Include Provider types/opportunity types etc
  - Understanding capacity vs need
- As we get the data together understanding how we prevent this from becoming stagnant
- Creating overlap between Working Groups
- As interviews happen identify discrepancy in language and norm/create definitions
  - Need: Define the terms we are using to normalize language- what does outdoor learning mean? What is environmental education programming? Etc.
- Ideal: building a tool that can be utilized in perpetuity, so it sustains as people move around

Question:

- Are we working towards a recommendation this year? We would need to build out a timeline for that to work towards a Sept due date. OR do we focus on data collection this year to build out a recommendation for next year

Additional actions:

- Connect with Dan Prence. to look at how he addresses gaps for the Oregon Outdoor School for all to see if he could come speak with the group in March?
  - Understand how he gathers data, questions he used, etc.
- Rick will draft question in Dropbox and share out for thoughts
- Connect with the CGC group regarding the AI action and the data collection tool
- Rick to send an email about a gathering at MAEOE

From the chat:

- How Programs Are Identified (Layered search model)
  - Layer 1 – Statewide Hubs Start with statewide education and environmental organizations that act as connectors to many local programs.
  - Layer 2 – County by County Sweep Apply the same search pattern to all 24 Maryland jurisdictions (23 counties plus Baltimore City), including parks departments, school systems, watershed groups, and nature centers.
  - Layer 3 – Nonprofit and Network Lists Use environmental education networks and nonprofit directories to capture smaller or less visible organizations.

- Layer 4 – Program Framework Networks Identify programs connected through shared curricula, stewardship models, or teacher training frameworks.

Set a cadence for meeting and timeline
- Meetings will continue on the first Monday of the month at 2-3pm

Meeting Closed at 2:45