



# 2021 Mid-Atlantic Environmental Literacy Summit

*Ensuring equity as we prepare the next generation of climate-ready environmental stewards*

**June 15, 2021, 9:00-4:15**

9:00-9:40

## **Welcome & Introduction**

- Welcome: Cindy Dunn, Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- Keynote: Dr. John King, Jr., President, The Education Trust
- Logistics: Shannon Sprague, Co-Chair Education Workgroup, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office

9:40-10:10

## **Community Sessions**

Is there a connection with your highest organizational priorities and today's agenda?

10:10-10:20

## **Break**

## **SESSION 1 (1.75 hours) – ENSURING EQUITY IN ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY**

*Purpose: Educational equity requires establishing and implementing systems to ensure that every child has an equal opportunity to participate and chance to succeed, including access to environmental literacy programming. This is at the heart of the Chesapeake Bay Program's approach to environmental literacy, which aspires to have meaningful environmental education embedded into learning standards and local curricula, and to support this with highly trained teachers, outdoor experiences for all, and enrichment programs and career pathways that spark and fan interest in environmental stewardship and careers.*

**Moderator: Secretary Noe Ortega, PA Department of Education**

10:20-10:40

**Plenary speaker:** Patti Curtis, US Department of Education

10:40-11:30

## **Breakouts**

BREAKOUT 1

### **Building Capacity Equitably Across School Districts**

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[Notes](#)

(Session Organizer: Tara Drennan, Chesapeake Bay Trust; Karen Mullin, Chesapeake Bay Foundation)  
A sustainable environmental literacy movement demands strong relationships between school districts and their community partners. Nowhere is the power of collaboration more evident than in school districts who serve communities facing socio economic challenges. The supports needed for taking environmental literacy work to scale are being put in place, from states establishing guidelines to partners creating planning guides to emerging capacity building initiatives. These supports have the potential to empower and accelerate progress more equitably at the local level. What are the perceived and real barriers of school districts and community partners working collaboratively together? What are the opportunities to address barriers and build school district capacity? How can we ensure attention and resources are distributed equitably?

BREAKOUT 2

### **Addressing Equity through Youth Afterschool and Summer Programs**

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(Session Organizer: T'Noya Thompson, North American Association for Environmental Education)  
21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers and similar afterschool and summer school programs provide academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. Are there opportunities to expand access to environmental literacy programming using the program? How else can we ensure underserved populations have access to enrichment programs that see them learning and recreating in the outdoors? How can we cultivate partnerships that are collaborative and sustainable to benefit youth?

### BREAKOUT 3 **Transformative Policies and Funding for Environmental Education**

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(Session Organizers: Jason Morris, Pisces Foundation;  
Sarah Bodor, North American Association for Environmental Education;  
Anupama Joshi, Blue Sky Funders Forum)

States across the nation are creating systemic change in their schools by embracing environmental education as a fundamental student right. This session will explore some of the best state level policy and funding examples from around the country by hearing directly from those people who helped to establish and grow the programs. How can these examples inform your state efforts?

### BREAKOUT 4 **Harnessing the Power of Networks to Accelerate Change**

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(Session Organizers: Christy Gabbard, Local Concepts; Shannon Sprague, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office)  
States play the starring role in encouraging and supporting the education community to establish embedded environmental literacy content and programming. Formal and nonformal educator networks exist in each state, but they are often not well-connected. Bridging these two types of networks and supporting them with technical assistance and consistent funding, so together they can build strong relationships with decision makers, school districts and community partners, is key to building a strong and sustainable environmental literacy movement in the region. Where are there opportunities to better connect and bolster formal and nonformal educator networks to collectively advance environmental literacy? How can a partnership of existing networks empower districts and teachers to advance environmental literacy priorities?

### BREAKOUT 5 **Applying Lessons Learned from COVID into the Future**

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(Session Organizers: Nancy Striniste, Green Schoolyards America;

Monica Wiedel-Lubinski, Eastern Regional Association of Forest and Nature Schools)

COVID has changed the educational landscape -- perhaps forever. People around the world have been reminded of the value of spending time outdoors to our health and well-being. Since early in the pandemic the National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative (NCOLI) has been supporting schools and districts across the country in reopening safely and equitably by using outdoor spaces. Also during the pandemic, many young children in our region attended forest schools or nature preschools, which provided safe, joyful, and educationally rich outdoor experiences for the youngest residents of our watershed. How can we help school districts steward the land they own to enhance ecological function while improving the academic performance, and physical and mental health of students? How can we increase equitable access to high quality outdoor schools that support families and provide developmentally appropriate early childhood education?

### BREAKOUT 6 **Preparing Teachers for Environmental Project-Based Learning**

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(Session Organizer: Tom Ackerman, Chesapeake Bay Foundation)

Project-based learning like the Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (MWEE) is a powerful tool for engaging learners, building 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and imparting a stewardship ethic. However, many teachers feel unprepared to use project-based learning because it asks them to relinquish some classroom control to student-directed inquiry. How can we work with school districts to create comprehensive training programs? How can we build relationships with universities to offer meaningful pre-service teacher education? What are the key elements of PD programs that create sustained impact in underserved districts? What are the real/perceived barriers to this work with underserved districts?

11:30-11:40 **Break**

### 11:40-12:30 **State Breakouts**

The state breakout will ask participants to reflect on the following questions: What did you hear during the morning session that you think the state should prioritize over the next 1-2 years? Are there existing or emerging sources of funding that could help support this work? How do we ensure equity in this work? [D.C.](#) \* [Delaware](#) \* [Maryland](#) \* [New York](#) \* [Pennsylvania](#) \* [Virginia](#) \* [West Virginia](#) \* [National](#)

12:30-1:30 **Lunch**

## Session 2 (1.75 hours) -- EMPOWERING A CLIMATE-READY GENERATION

*Purpose: The current generation of students understands that climate change will have a profound impact on their daily lives. Because climate change is an all-encompassing issue, mitigating it is a job for everyone, not just scientists. This session explores why we must build career awareness and skills through inquiry-based education and hands-on training programs to prepare students to meet the lifestyle and workforce demands necessitated by a changing climate.*

**Moderator: Secretary Patrick McDonnell, PA Department of Environmental Protection**

1:30-1:50 **Plenary speaker: Laura Schifter, Aspen Institute**

1:50-2:40 **Breakouts**

### BREAKOUT 1 **Involving K-12 students in Local Climate Action & Policy**

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(Session Organizers: Carrie McDougall & Sarah Schoedinger, NOAA Office of Education)

Over the past five years communities throughout the country have continued to work toward the goals outlined in the Paris Agreement ([America Is All In](#)). State and local governments are taking actions and implementing policies to address climate change causes and impacts (e.g., Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, Climate Action Plans, Energy Efficiency Initiatives). K-12 students can play leadership roles in implementing local climate action. School-based programs afford students the opportunity to learn the fundamentals of environmental literacy as it relates to local climate action. With teachers as their mentors, students can pursue place-based solutions to address specific climate vulnerabilities facing their communities. What opportunities and barriers exist to implementing equitable school-based climate change curricula and climate actions?

### BREAKOUT 2 **Incorporating Climate Justice into Curriculum and Programming**

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(Session Organizer: Lindsey Kirkland, Climate Generation)

Marginalized communities often face disproportionate impacts from climate change due to structural injustices in society, such as historical exclusion from decision-making and inequities in housing (i.e. lack of air conditioning, properties susceptible to flooding, few resources to adapt). Communities on the frontlines of climate impacts are often those creating the most innovative adaptive and mitigative solutions to climate change as well. How can we teach about the climate crisis in a way that highlights the wisdom and experience of frontline communities, and confronts racism, economic inequality, and other disparities to create more authentic and inclusive curriculum and programming?

### BREAKOUT 3 **Building Career Awareness to Support the Green Economy**

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(Session Organizer: Bart Merrick, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office)

Today's middle and high school students will be instrumental in identifying opportunities to solve problems and address the challenges of a changing climate. These new and emerging career paths will exist in a wide range of disciplines and draw on a broad range of educational backgrounds meaning that students with diverse interests can be part of the climate solution. Harnessing the interests and abilities of today's students towards future careers and life opportunities is an exciting part of being an educator, but we know inequities exist in this system. What can we do to build career awareness and better connect students with the diversity of jobs and careers that support the emerging green economy for both career and college tracked students?

### BREAKOUT 4 **Integrating Environmental Literacy into Community College and Career and Technical Education Programming**

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(Session Organizer: Judd Pittman, Pennsylvania Department of Education)

Green, climate-focused jobs represent a growing sector of our region's economic future. Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in high schools and technical programs in community colleges along with traditional university programs provide in-demand, skill-based opportunities for students to enter the local and regional workforce. These programs support students pursuing the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed by industries ranging from agriculture to information technology. What opportunities exist to build connections across the educational continuum in support of developing environmentally focused skills and competencies, and constructing career pathways for learners to access jobs in the Green Economy?

**BREAKOUT 5 Increasing Diversity in Youth Leadership and Corps Programs**

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(Session Organizers: Brittany Hall, National Park Service; Joe Toolan, Chesapeake Bay Trust)  
Increasing diversity in the environmental field is essential to developing culturally responsive solutions to climate change and other complex environmental challenges that we face as a society. Yet today's green workforce lacks the diversity of voices needed to achieve a truly inclusive movement. Providing opportunities for youth from all backgrounds to further their interest in the many different types of environmental work and advocacy is important to motivate and inspire them for their future and prepare them for the workforce demands of climate change. How can agencies and organizations more equitably engage youth in these important opportunities? Once engaged, how can we make sure that these opportunities are inclusive and culturally proficient in meeting the needs of all youth?

**BREAKOUT 6 Teaching Science and Engineering Practices using STEM and Environmental Literacy**

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(Session Organizer: Kirsten Jackson, Maryland State Department of Education)  
Adapting to a changing climate will call on society to have a firm understanding of how to use evidence-based data and information to make informed decisions and take appropriate action. This includes but goes beyond understanding climate change content to also foster an understanding of how science is conducted and why that matters. This session will explore how STEM and environmental literacy programming allows students to engage in contextualized science and engineering practices that build the critical thinking skills students need to better understand and respond to changing environmental conditions. What do we need to make sure is in place to ensure this is happening in schools and helping students use problem solving and scientific ways of thinking in their approach to understanding and addressing the existential threat of climate change?

2:40-2:50 **Break**

2:50-3:40 **State Breakouts**

The state breakout will ask participants to reflect on the following questions: What did you hear during the afternoon session that you think the state should prioritize over the next 1-2 years? Are there existing or emerging sources of funding that could help support this work? How do we ensure equity in this work? [D.C.](#) \* [Delaware](#) \* [Maryland](#) \* [New York](#) \* [Pennsylvania](#) \* [Virginia](#) \* [West Virginia](#) \* [National](#)

3:40-4:15

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**Closing Session**

**Moderator: Tom Ackerman, Co-Chair Education Workgroup, Chesapeake Bay Foundation**

Leaders from the state departments of education will reflect on the ideas and takeaways generated from their state breakouts and what actions they plan to take to follow up on this information.

**Closing Remarks: Secretary Russell Redding, PA Department of Agriculture**



Hosted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on behalf of the Chesapeake Bay Program:

