



ECA, Sustainability Policy

Montgomery County Public Schools · Montgomery County, Maryland



**Coalition for Climate
Education Policy**

Advancing climate literacy for a just and sustainable future



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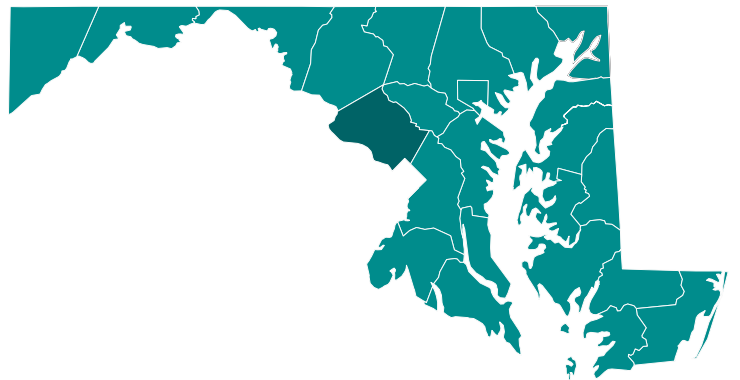
Executive Summary

This case study celebrates climate education policy in the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland by taking an in depth look at the ECA, Sustainability Policy. It provides an overview and background on the policy, and dives into the impact this policy has had on the ground. Finally, it covers some specific challenges faced, lessons learned, and next steps for the Montgomery County Public Schools on their sustainability and climate education journey.

Overview

Montgomery County, Maryland, implemented a sustainability policy in the spring of 2022 that centers on environmental sustainability in every aspect of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), including infusing climate change education into the K-12 curriculum and supporting teacher professional development. In addition, the policy aims to increase the sustainability of school infrastructure and operations and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 80% by 2027 and 100% by 2035 compared to 2005 levels. Finally, it establishes a framework for making decisions about sustainable practices in MCPS and commits to increasing the number of **Maryland-Certified Green Schools**, a nationally recognized sustainable schools program.

Policy Type: Teaching and Learning, Community Partnerships & Facilities and Operations



Implementing climate change education throughout the curriculum aligns with **Maryland's Environmental Literacy Standards** and graduation requirements. While the policy is unfunded, it helps to advance the funded **County Climate Action Plan** (see below), a strategic roadmap for advancing the county's climate goals developed in 2020. This policy is one of the most robust sustainability policies on the east coast, managed entirely at the local level.

Background

Maryland has a rich history of supporting environmental literacy. In 2011, Maryland became the first state to pass an environmental literacy high school graduation requirement aligned with the state's Environmental Literacy Standards already in place. The state also runs the Maryland Green Schools certification program, which provides students with opportunities to become environmental stewards and engage in sustainability. These initiatives provide a strong foundation for environmental literacy and climate education in public schools across the state.

In 2019, Montgomery County, Maryland, wanted to take further action and build on state-wide initiatives by creating and implementing a **Climate Action Plan**. The plan listed 20 actions that its public schools should take to support climate action, including strategies for reducing GHG emissions and becoming more resilient to climate-related risks. This was a big step for the county, but students in MCPS—the county's largest emitter of GHG emissions—felt there was more work to be done. Students began organizing to demand comprehensive climate education, energy efficiency, and greener schools. MOCO (Montgomery County) Students for Change activated their networks, held protests, and wrote an advocacy brief that they presented to the school board. The school district leadership hosted an Earth Day Symposium and a Climate Action Town Hall to demonstrate their support. The call for climate action was framed as an equity and environmental justice issue; this was critical for gaining further support from local communities. Student activism and advocacy, combined with effective messaging strategies, were the driving forces for the passing of this policy.



Approach

This policy focuses on improving climate education through three main approaches: updating the formal curriculum, increasing teacher professional development, and providing student experiences. In addition, the policy centers on climate action via improvements in the sustainability of school facilities and operations. Although no associated funding exists, the policy commits MCPS to identifying creative financing mechanisms through local, state, and federal public and private partnerships.

Infrastructure and Operations

Initiatives for improving the sustainability of school infrastructure and operations include growing the number of electric and fuel-efficient public school buses, greening construction practices, and increasing sourcing of renewable energy. In addition, schools are expected to implement waste reduction programs (i.e., composting) that function as educational and experiential learning initiatives for students and staff. The county plans to regularly provide public updates about climate initiatives to increase community support and highlight the policy's impacts.

Education

Educational initiatives required by the policy include infusing sustainability and climate concepts throughout school curricula and teacher professional development, providing experiential opportunities for students and staff to engage in climate adaptation and mitigation solutions, and exploring careers related to climate and sustainability. Through this policy, MCPS is making sustainability and climate concepts the norm in education, infrastructure, and operations.

Evaluation

There is no formal evaluation strategy for this policy. However, the Montgomery County Climate Action Plan established a system for prioritizing and evaluating projects. The plan identifies primary and secondary co-benefits for each climate action; primary benefit evaluations include GHG emissions and climate risk reductions. Environmental stewardship, economic prosperity, public health, racial equity, and social justice are co-benefits that will be assessed, although they are more challenging to quantify.

Outcomes

Implementing Montgomery County's ECA Sustainability policy has significantly impacted the school district, local communities, and the broader region. Significant strides have been made that increase sustainability in MCPS infrastructure and operations. MCPS installed the first set of public electric vehicle charging stations at the Carver Educational Service Center in Rockville as part of a pilot program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the region and the school system. The pilot program provides opportunities for the community to access charging infrastructure and encourages the use of electric vehicles. This program was made possible by partnering with one of MCPS's electric utility providers. Installing public electric vehicle charging stations provides several benefits to the community, including reducing transportation-related emissions and promoting the use of electric vehicles and low-emissions technology. This program is an example of the collaborative partnership that MCPS seeks to establish to identify creative financing mechanisms to support the policy's goals.

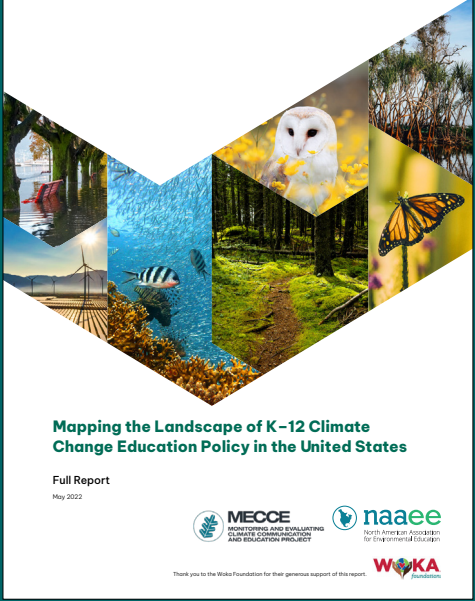
Currently, the policy serves 210 school districts and approximately 160,000 students in Montgomery County. The policy prepares students and staff to become environmental stewards and climate advocates by infusing climate change education into the curriculum and teacher professional development. As the number of Maryland-certified Green Schools increase due to the policy, there will be even more opportunities for students and staff to learn about climate solutions and reduce their environmental impact.



Lessons Learned & Next Steps

Implementing this policy has not come without several challenges and lessons learned. A few of these are highlighted below, and many are still a work in progress.

- Student advocacy is an incredible catalyst and force for change.
- The framing of climate change as an environmental justice and equity issue was crucial for obtaining support. Racial and economic justice will be key considerations in any actions supported by this policy.
- Intentional communications about climate and sustainability can inform and garner community support.



Mapping the Landscape of K-12 Climate Change Education Policy in the United States

Full Report
May 2022

MECCE
MONITORING AND EVALUATING
CLIMATE COMMUNICATION
AND EDUCATION PROJECT

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Thank you to the Woka Foundation for their generous support of this report.

Does the ECA, Sustainability Policy support any of the recommendations from the *Mapping K-12 Climate Education Policy Report*?

Yes!

- Increasing the quality and quantity of climate change content in education.
- Include a stronger focus on climate justice, climate action, and Indigenous knowledges in all education policies.
- Providing policy support, such as funding, professional development, and staffing to help advance climate change education policy.

Resources

- [ECA, Sustainability Policy](#)
- [Case Study: Effective Communications for Climate Education Policy](#)
- [Montgomery County Climate Action Plan](#)
- [Maryland Environmental Literacy Standards](#)
- [Maryland Green Schools Program](#)
- [Mapping the Landscape of K-12 Climate Change Education Policy in the United States Report](#)

Contact

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