

High-Quality Environmental Education Programming: A Self-Assessment Rubric for District Success

Overview of the Self-Assessment Rubric: This self-assessment rubric is the outcome of a [research study](#) conducted during the 2023-24 academic year. The study aimed to explore how well environmental literacy programming, particularly Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs), aligns with school district priorities, focusing on student learning goals in the Mid-Atlantic states. The primary purpose of the rubric is to help non-formal educational organizations and educators demonstrate the alignment of their environmental education programs with K-12 school district priorities. The criteria used in the rubric are based on data collected and analyzed during the study.

Development Process: The development of the rubric involved several steps. First, an extensive literature review was conducted, focusing on MWEE and other place-based instructional strategies, which provided a theoretical framework for the rubric. Initial data collection included pre-interview surveys and focus group interviews with school district personnel, including administrators and K-12 teachers. Additionally, a supplemental non-formal focus group, comprising leaders from state departments of education, was convened. This group provided insights into their state's educational priorities and how they relate to environmental education and the MWEE. The study included participants from five Mid-Atlantic states with diverse content backgrounds, contributing to a multidisciplinary approach.

Key Findings: The [study](#) revealed that administrators and teachers highly value their partnerships with local non-formal education organizations and are eager to build on these relationships. Non-formal education providers should be aware of local educational contexts and priorities, adjusting their programming accordingly to meet the needs of local districts. Recommendations for these providers include ensuring that their programming directly supports district curriculum and state standards, offering opportunities for collaborative planning of outdoor experiences, and enhancing professional development for both formal and non-formal educators and administrators. The findings were consistent with those from NOAA's [District Environmental Literacy Planning Toolkit](#).

Intended Use of the Rubric: The resulting rubric is designed as a self-assessment tool for environmental education providers. It is not intended as a scoring system but rather as a means for program improvement. Providers can use the rubric to ensure that environmental literacy programs align with district curriculum and state standards. Moreover, it seeks to encourage collaboration between environmental education providers and school districts, as providers are urged to work with districts to enhance their programs following the self-assessment. The rubric also strives to create opportunities for professional development and support for non-formal educators, teachers, and administrators.

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