

Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building – Room 131
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Atterbeary,

I am writing in favor of HB 997 – Green Schools – Mondel Professional Development Facilities – Designation.

My name is Anna Saderholm and I'm excited to testify before your committee today and share my experience at a Maryland Green School. I attended St. Annes School of Annapolis from preschool to eighth grade, and I enjoyed the privilege of an education informed and encouraged by nature.

In the fourth grade, my classmates and I spent a school year raising oyster spat for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. We learned about what makes organisms thrive, we measured turbidity and water pH, and we invented cute names for our resident oysters. In humanities we learned about the first Marylanders and how oyster shoals used to rise above the surface of the Bay, in civics we learned how our colonists began to degrade the oyster populations and how they're still in recovery now, and in science class we learned how oysters are the beautiful and cool creatures that make our Bay work.

In second grade we studied the culture of Native Americans in Maryland and grew the three sisters, corn, beans, and squash in our playground garden. In fourth grade we read English classics and performed Shakespeare in the outdoor classroom spaces for the whole school to enjoy. In the seventh grade my classmates and I learned about buoyancy, engineering, and physics by constructing cardboard boats and racing them in the Bay off Hillsmere Shores. In eighth grade we went on a 'swampwalk' chest-deep in mud at an outdoor learning facility to learn how to get over our fears and work collectively towards a common goal.

My education centered on and was made better by a focus on the environment. My classmates and I spent as much time out in nature in outdoor classrooms, at the community garden, on camping trips to Chincoteague, string-fishing for crabs with chicken necks off the dock, in Quiet Waters and Patapsco parks, as we did sitting at our desks learning. My experiences in nature helped me to tie what I was learning in science to math, or humanities to civics, or art to music. Everything I learned could be tied back to hands-on experience outdoors; pea plant genetics in our garden were like ratios and cross multiplication, stress during a standardized test became calm breathing like trees' evapotranspiration, and a conflict with a friend was resolved due to communication strategies we learned paddling a canoe together.

When I graduated and went to college I chose to major in Environmental Science and Policy at the University of Maryland. My environmental education directly informed my career choices. Everytime someone asks me, “why environmental science” I tell them about my fourth grade oyster spat. My holistic, experience-based, and frankly really cool, nature education made me the person I am today.

My school was a Maryland Green School, and a model one at that. Green schoolyards are nature-filled outdoor spaces that offer students, teachers, parents, and community members places to explore, learn, and grow.¹ These spaces are designed to meet their community’s needs and can include outdoor classrooms, native gardens, stormwater infrastructure, playgrounds, vegetable gardens, trails, trees, and more.² Through green schoolyards, one can make sure that all students have access to the benefits of nature. HB 997 would establish a program to help green communities and schools learn and grow together through these model schools.

I urge this committee to vote favorably on HB 997, and ensure that every Marylander can have the opportunity to experience an education like I had.

¹ Children and Nature Network, *Green Schoolyards for Healthy Communities* (n.d.), <https://www.childrenandnature.org/schools/greening-schoolyards/>

² Trust for Public Land, *Community Schoolyards Projects: A Game-Changing Solution to America’s Park Equity Problem* (August 25, 2021), <https://www.tpl.org/community-schoolyards-report-2021>