



WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION

STRENGTHENING WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING



NRPA POLICY POSITION

- Provide investment in well-rounded education inclusive of environmental education through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and ensure that park and recreation agencies are eligible to partner with schools for grants to develop and implement environmental literacy programs and train teachers in environmental education.

BACKGROUND

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), better known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), in its current form, sets federal guidelines for public schools across the country. Congress has begun work on reauthorizing ESEA to set the course for a revised federal education policy.

The Act's emphasis on test scores as the primary measure of school performance has effectively narrowed curriculum as schools are forced to devote the majority of resources to reading and math, causing many to eliminate environmental education from their curriculum. This unfortunate circumstance lessens students' opportunity to study the natural environment and denies them hands-on, experiential learning about the physical world in which they live.

As Congress works towards the reauthorization of the ESEA, it is likely we will see legislative efforts which seek to ensure children receive a well-rounded education, inclusive of environmental education. NRPA encourages Congress to enact legislation that would provide funding for the development and implementation of state environmental literacy plans, teacher professional development grants, and an environmental education grant program. It is important that park and recreation agencies are provided an opportunity to participate and obtain resources to aid states in the development and implementation of state environmental literacy plans and the training of teachers.

WHY CONGRESS SHOULD ACT

By not educating our children on the importance of our environment or getting them interested in being outdoors, we jeopardize the future of environmental stewardship and advances in environmental science, including areas vital to the 21st Century economy such as clean and renewable energy.

A well-rounded curriculum which is inclusive of environmental education is needed to strengthen critical thinking, inspire innovation and keep us competitive in the global economy. Additionally, environmental education helps us to understand the need for environmental management, the connection between the economy and the environment, and creates environmental stewards.

Environmental Education Boosts Student Performance and Achievement

- Environmental education is a key to addressing the decreasing competitiveness of American students in math and science. As reported by the Pew Charitable Trust, the use of the outdoors as a classroom significantly enhances a student's mastery of math and science¹.
- Additional studies show that environmental education experiences improve not only science and math test scores, but performance in all core subjects.

Research has shown that outdoor activity, such as experiential learning, reduces attention deficit disorder, which negatively impacts America's competitiveness and performance in the classroom.

Parks are Vital to Environmental Education

- Many local and state park agencies currently work with school systems to provide environmental education programs. They have trained and knowledgeable staff, such as interpretive naturalists and wildlife biologists who provide benefits to students and teachers through "field" learning experiences at nature centers, science centers, demonstration farms, and in park and wildlife refuges. These experiences stimulate the student's learning process and curiosity in a manner that cannot be achieved through classroom learning.
- Unfortunately, park and recreation agencies, like schools, have limited resources. Considering the tremendous benefit provided by having park and recreation agencies take part in the local environmental education curriculum, it makes sense that park and recreation agencies should be specified as entities which are directly eligible to partner with education agencies to jointly apply for grant funding.

¹ A report by Pew Charitable Trust, entitled "Closing the Achievement Gap," found that in 42 schools that used the outdoors as the classroom for one year, more than 90 percent of educators reported that students showed better mastery of math and science skills.