

Case Studies of State Environmental Education Policy Victories in California, Maryland, and Oregon

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Little if any literature exists about how changes in government environmental education policy have come about, particularly changes at the state level. As a result, it is almost impossible for those interested in changing environmental education policy in their state to learn from what has happened in other states. This short paper illuminating some of the history in three landmark states that made exemplary progress is a first step towards filling that information gap.

What exactly is “policy”? “Policy” is one of those vague words that mean different things to different people. For the sake of this paper, it means the rules and regulations put in place by those in authority.

Enabling policy change offers the potential for great leverage. The rules of the system are often embedded in policy; and as Donella Meadows pointed out in *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System*¹, changing the rules of a system is a major leverage point in changing how a system operates. Careful investment of time and money in policy change has been shown to produce lasting and ongoing returns far in excess of the original investment.

The objective in writing each of the three following case studies was to provide the basics of the policy framework that was built by the advocates involved, as well as some information about how the policy victory came about. Hopefully these case studies will provide some options to consider for the next steps that might be taken in your state, and inspire some ideas about how to get started.

These three examples were chosen because they are the three that seem to hold the most potential for changing the lives of students in their respective states: Maryland, California, and Oregon. Maryland’s graduation requirement is the gold standard in environmental education policy. California has invested \$12 million to create the most thoroughly scoped and sequenced model EE curriculum in the nation. Oregon’s Outdoor School for All program has created the single largest dedicated funding source for non-formal environmental education in the nation, which promises to provide every single sixth grade student in the state with a week of outdoor environmental education.

What follows is a summary of how these three states arrived at this point. Individual participants in these victories will inevitably have different recollections and perspectives, and can further enrich any effort to replicate the outcomes. However, these stories can readily form the basis for future success stories in other states.

¹ donellameadows.org/archives/leverage-points-places-to-intervene-in-a-system/

1. MARYLAND'S ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY GRADUATION REQUIREMENT

In many ways, Maryland leads the nation in implementing universal environmental education, with its unique mandate that all students must be environmentally literate² in order to graduate from high school. Every five years (as of 2015), each local superintendent of schools must certify a county environmental literacy plan (ELP) with the State Superintendent of Schools. 255,000 or so students are currently enrolled in Maryland public high schools, graduating roughly 65,000 students in 2015 alone under requirements that include these standards.³ How did Maryland get here?

History: Even though Maryland had environmental education standards in place for several decades, not all students had access to environmental education programs and environmental education has been significantly reduced (even eliminated) in many K-12 classrooms as programs are increasingly challenged by a curricular focus on testing requirements.

Maryland's long history of environmental education can be traced back to the nation's first federal environmental education law, the Environmental Education Act, which was passed in 1970 (and repealed in 1981)⁴. In response, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) developed an Environmental Education Framework that provided curricular goals for environmental education. This effort was spearheaded by the Division of Instruction in collaboration with the state's outdoor education centers⁵, many of which had been established in the 1960s.

In the mid-1980s, the federally-established Chesapeake Bay Program provided funds to MSDE to support a full-time position to lead this work and grants to schools to engage students in projects that would improve the environment. Since individual donors also wanted to be able to support this work, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Secretary led an effort to form the Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT).⁶ The DNR also had grant funds for environmental education. Thus, DNR, MSDE, and CBT coordinated their funding to support environmental education which emphasized student projects. This work led to an environmental education by-law in the Code of Maryland Regulations which required environmental education to be included the school's curriculum, and required school systems to report annually to MSDE on how they were meeting the by-law. While a helpful step forward, this was largely about "checking the box".

In 1990, U.S. Congress passed the new National Environmental Education Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-619). That same year, Maryland legislators again followed this lead by passing a

² Note that there is no single state-wide assessment to determine environmental literacy in each grade, or specifically for impending graduates.

³ Maryland is experiencing a surge in high school enrollment after years of decline; a peak of close to 300,000 is expected in 2023. www.mdp.state.md.us/msdc/School_Enrollment/Table1.pdf

⁴ The act was administered under the auspices of the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare until 1979 when President Carter created the stand-alone Department of Education, and was repealed in the first year of the Reagan Administration.

⁵ Currently, half of Maryland's 24 counties have outdoor education centers which supplement classroom learning with hands-on field experiences which help schools in their county educate their students

⁶ The MD Legislature established CBT in 1985. It is funded by dedicated license plate funds and half of voluntary tax check-off donations to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund, with some additional funds accruing from private donations and private foundation grants.

bylaw that defined the program requirements for multidisciplinary environmental education instructional programs for grades pre-kindergarten through 12. The bylaw was later rewritten in 2008-09 to reflect MSDE environmental education standards.

Forty years of a broad and politically active environmental education community set the stage for passing the 2011 graduation requirement.

Maryland Partnership for Children.: In 2008, Governor Martin O'Malley, supported by the environmental education community, issued an Executive Order on environmental education. It created the Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature (Partnership) to promote outdoor experiential activities and environmental education, and to build a coalition for ongoing collaboration and support of other aspects of the Executive Order. This public/private stakeholder partnership consists of representatives from MSDE and DNR along with agencies and NGOs throughout the state, and was charged with implementing environmental literacy throughout the state.

At the same time, the Maryland No Child Left Inside Coalition, led by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, was also created from the NGO community to provide public support and grassroots advocacy to reinforce the efforts of the Partnership and provide political cover when needed.

Graduation Requirement: The O'Malley Executive Order also called for the creation of a state environmental literacy plan. While no formal plan was written, the Partnership prompted the state Board of Education to vote unanimously in September 2010 to approve an environmental literacy graduation requirement (COMAR 13A.04.17) – making Maryland the first state in the nation with such a requirement. Each school district in the state was now required to provide a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary environmental education program infused into current curricular offerings and aligned with the state environmental literacy standards. It was followed in June 2011 by COMAR 13A.03.02) which provided clarification to the school systems and giving them oversight and flexibility to implement the environmental literacy requirement.

This ground-breaking new law had one major weakness: no funding was attached (an “unfunded mandate”) to underwrite the costs of implementation by MSDE. The Partnership charged ahead with what little resources they had to begin the roll-out and implementation.

In 2012, the Partnership held a summit hosted by MSDE for representatives from each of Maryland's 24 school districts to provide information and showcase model programs that had been developed and implemented as a partnership between environmental education providers and schools. This process helped to build stronger relationships between the representatives of the school districts with the environmental education providers, and was key to moving forward.

While the environmental education requirements had been in place for some time, they were not being implemented in a rigorous manner which used best practices. Using a grant from the U.S. Department of Education Title II Math and Science Partnership, MSDE provided four years of funding to establish the Maryland Environmental Literacy Program (MELP) to provide professional development in environmental education for teachers from 18 districts. The participating teachers developed a framework for integrating environmental education into their curricula.

Next Steps: Full implementation of the graduation requirement will require significant additional teacher training. Much of this will need to be funded by traditional methods: Professional development channels within the school or district, or field experiences at a school level. Environmental educators have been working to create appropriate professional learning

opportunities for teachers and field experiences for students. It remains for the state to align teacher pre-service requirements with the environmental literacy requirement.

Schools are making good progress, and collaboration with the environmental education community has been effective. This progress is further driven by policies such as the Chesapeake Bay Program 2014 Agreement, which all six Chesapeake Bay Governors have signed, and which mandates a “target of at least one meaningful watershed educational experience in elementary, middle and high school depending on available resources”. Interagency and NGO collaboration coupled with innovative professional development are creating an environment for success for this unfunded mandate.

Maryland’s recent adoption of the Next Generation Science Standards should also help significantly to advance the environmental literacy requirement. While environmental education is more than just environmental science (including as it does social studies and social sciences as well), NGSS contains a significant amount of environmental content. As the majority of Maryland schools move to incorporate NGSS into their curriculum, they will also be incorporating an important component of environmental education.

Written in consultation with Laura Johnson Collard, Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education, and Jamie Baxter, Chesapeake Bay Finders Network

2. CALIFORNIA’S ENVIRONMENT AND EDUCATION INITIATIVE

In 2003, California passed a ground-breaking environmental education bill which subsequently resulted in the creation of the United States’ most thoroughly scoped and sequenced environmental education curriculum produced and/or endorsed by a state government. California has since invested over \$12 million in developing this curriculum to make it the cornerstone of a variety of efforts to embed environmental education in many California public schools. With nearly 6.3 million students and more than 295,000 teachers, integrating new material into the state’s education system is a formidable task.⁷

History: Prior California policy efforts reaching back to the 19070s to advance environmental education helped to build the base of support for environmental education, but had fallen short of significantly increasing environmental literacy among California students.

Most agree that real progress began in 2001. Then-state Senator Tom Torlakson (D-Contra Costa County⁸) filed an environmental education bill (SB 373) which was signed into law later that year. Called the School Diversion and Environmental Education Law, it was an effort to support instructional strategies that would improve recycling in California’s school districts. It created the first Office of Environmental Education at the Waste Board and charged it with developing a “unified education strategy on the environment,” taking steps to achieve significant waste reduction and diversion in schools; and distributing \$1.5 million in grants to schools from the Waste Board’s solid waste facility fees to teach the concepts of source reduction, recycling, and composting.

⁷ California’s school system is by far the biggest in the United States. It comprises more than 10,400 schools from pre-K- high school. The enrollment number includes 570K+ charter school students. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/ceffingertipfacts.asp>

⁸ Tom Torlakson was elected as State Superintendent of Instruction in 2010, and again in 2014. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/bo/tt/>

At the next legislative session in 2002, then Assemblywoman Fran Pavley⁹ took the recently enacted law (SB 373) and built on it to craft the provisions of AB 1548. At Pavley's request, Heal the Bay joined in to help pass AB 1548. Due largely to the advocacy work of Heal the Bay and others, the bill passed in 2003, and was signed into law by then-Governor Gray Davis.

Implementation: Passage of AB 1548 set in motion the Education and the Environment Initiative (EEI). The new law required the CalEPA and Integrated Waste Management Board (now CalRecycle) to develop an environment-based model curriculum to be offered to all California public schools. In cooperation with the Natural Resources Agency, State Department of Education, and State Board of Education, the CalEPA and CalRecycle were directed to begin by developing a set of overarching environmental principles and concepts (EP&Cs) that would complement (but not duplicate or conflict with) existing academic content standards.

To develop the EP&Cs, CalEPA engaged the State Education and Environment Roundtable and the Acorn Group to coordinate a collaborative and transparent process to ensure the participation of a wide range of interested parties. Initially, the planning team reviewed examples of environmental principles from a wide variety of sources. They then brought together more than 100 technical experts to identify "Overarching Environmental Principles" to use as an initial framework for developing the EP&Cs. A broad online review of the draft EP&Cs followed, with field reviews and a series of statewide focus groups. In late 2004, the EP&Cs were presented to and approved by the Secretary for Environmental Protection.

A writing team of over 30 experts led by the State Education and Environment Roundtable and the Acorn Group then dug in to use the EC&Cs to produce scoped and sequenced K-12 units. These units integrate the EP&Cs into academic content into science and history-social science curricula. This EEI curriculum received final, unanimous approval by the State Board of Education in 2010.

A state-approved K-12 classroom-ready environmental education curriculum positioned California at the national forefront of environmental education. While California schools are not required by law to use this curriculum, it is available to all at no cost, designed to meet numerous state standards and to fit easily into the instructional programs of California's schools.

AB 1548 was particularly thoughtful in spelling out all the key elements of this endeavor as well as engaging a wide diversity of state agencies in the development of the EP&Cs and the subsequent EEI curriculum. The bill also was strategic in building on the CalRecycle's commitment to environmental education and tapping its significant revenue stream to implement the legislation. This allowed supporters to accurately claim that the bill would cost the taxpayers no new money, since the revenue source came from fees rather than taxes.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the bill is the requirement that all textbooks in science and history-social science include the state's formally adopted "Environmental Principles and Concepts" (EP&Cs) when they are updated (on average every seven years). Most consider that California and Texas drive the textbook adoption market throughout the United States. Thus, this requirement should have huge impact when the next textbook revision process for science and history-social science is initiated in 2018.

⁹ In 2008, Climate champion Fran Pavley was elected to represent the 23rd district of the State Senate (now the 27th following 2010 redistricting). Her former staffer Henry Stern was elected to replace her in 2016.
<http://www.sfchronicle.com/business/article/California-climate-champion-Fran-Pavley-has-host-10637771.php>

Next Steps: The final stage of EEI is dissemination. This is a two-pronged process: 1) integrating the EP&Cs into various materials, and 2) disseminating the 85 different EEI model curriculum modules. Ten Strands, a California non-profit founded in 2010, notes: “With our partners the State Education and Environment Roundtable and CalRecycle, we collaborate with the California Department of Education to ensure that California’s Environmental Principles and Concepts (EP&Cs) are included in the state’s new Science, History–Social Science, and Health Frameworks, which guide how these subjects are taught in California’s schools. We are also working with textbook publishers to integrate the EP&Cs into new instructional materials.”

CalRecycle says they have distributed more than 5,000,000 student lessons to over 3,250 schools (out of some 12,000 schools in California) in 658 districts to date. California adopted the Next Generation Science Standards in 2013, which is upping the demand from teachers for EEI modules. But NGSS may eventually make the EEI science modules outdated if/when NGSS gets fully implemented, since the EEI curriculum was written before the NGSS were published and therefore do not fully utilize all of the NGSS pedagogy. In addition, state and other funds to train teachers in the use of the EEI modules as well as to update and print copies of the curricula are increasingly scarce. Thus, the most lasting impact of the EEI legislation may be the legacy of the EP&Cs themselves rather than the curriculum, now that the EP&Cs are integrated into the implementation of the California science and history-social science standards and should be embedded in textbooks across the country in the future.

Tom Torlakson, now the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, remains a strong champion for environmental education. In 2014, he convened a 47-member Environmental Literacy Task Force to evaluate the state of environmental education and make recommendations for improving and scaling environmental education throughout the state. The result is “A Blueprint for Environmental Literacy”. While the EP&Cs are becoming embedded in California’s standards and textbooks and EEI is providing schools with a model k-12 curriculum, the Blueprint extended that work to the broader California education “ecosystem”. It calls for integrating environmental literacy concepts into state assessments and into Career and Technical Education programs, addressing environmental education funding issues, infusing environmental literacy into local school district plans, revitalizing the California Regional Environmental Education Community (CREEC) Network of local agencies and organizations that works to support local school districts and connect them with informal environmental education providers, and last but not least, integrating environmental literacy into state graduation requirements.

The Department of Education formed a team to put the Blueprint’s recommendations into action, and they began by including the EP&Cs into the Next Generation Science framework and history/social science framework. In early 2017, the pilot implementation project for the priorities identified in the Blueprint began with funding from the Leonardo Di Caprio Foundation.

With significant leadership from state champions such as Pavley and Torlakson, this decade and a half of cooperation and coordination between the environmental literacy community, CalRecycle, and the California Department of Education has put in motion a powerful force for change.

Written in consultation with Jerry Lieberman, State Education and Environment Roundtable, and Leslie Tamminen, Seventh Generation Advisors

3. OREGON'S OUTDOOR SCHOOLS FOR ALL

On November 8th, 2016, Oregon voters passed a citizen-initiated ballot measure that, for the first time in the United States, authorizes permanent state-level funding for outdoor education. In the process, they created perhaps the largest single source of funding for outdoor/environmental education in the nation. Oregon Measure 99, also known as "Outdoor School for All," dedicates \$22 million from the Oregon lottery to send all 50,000 5th or 6th graders in the state to the Oregon institution known as Outdoor School, a full week of science-based outdoor education programming that takes place at residential camps across the state.

History: Outdoor School began in the late 1950's as a weeklong, place-based educational experience near Medford, Oregon. It subsequently spread throughout the state, becoming a rite of passage for sixth graders. However, during the recent decades, school budget cuts have led to a steep decline in the number of Oregon youth able to attend the program as well as in the length of time they can stay. While students from wealthier private schools have continued to attend in greater numbers and for longer periods, schools/districts with high numbers of disadvantaged students were not able to sustain the program. By 2015, just over half of eligible students were participating.

In 2008 after three years of development, Oregon Metro, the Portland regional government, began a \$1 million/year funding effort for outdoor school in the metro region. The sponsor of this initiative, Metro Councilor Rex Burkholder, convened a group of business leaders, educators, pollsters and environmental leaders in 2010 to address the statewide decline in outdoor school. This group included the Oregon-based Gray Family Foundation (Gray FF) which had long been the largest private supporter of Outdoor School, but their grant funding was not sufficient to close the growing funding gap. Gray FF and others initially funded statewide outreach leading to the formal creation of the Oregon Outdoor Education Coalition in 2014.

SB 439 Passage: The Coalition then drafted and secured lead sponsors from the Oregon Senate and House, and helped to pass into law Senate Bill 439 (the Outdoor School Law) in 2015.¹⁰ SB 439 (which became ORS 327.390) provides a framework and structure for outdoor school programs ensuring equal access to all students, regardless of background or geographical location. It established but did not fund an "outdoor education fund" within the Oregon State Extension Service as well as directing the Extension Service to oversee the statewide program (an important partnership as Extension Services are involved in many conservation education programs and have high approval ratings with voters).

This legislation does not prescribe a top-down, one-size fits all approach – nor does it mandate that all students must attend Outdoor School. Instead, it directs Oregon State University Extension Services to support outdoor school programs by providing general guidelines and educational content to ensure quality educational experiences, allowing each school district or educational service district to structure the program in a way that meets local needs. While all school districts and education service districts can access these funds,

¹⁰The measure was sponsored by Senators Roblan & Thomsen, and Representatives Sprenger & Komp, at the request of the Oregon Outdoor Education Coalition, and pre-session filed. The bill passed the Senate with just one "no" vote, and passed the House unanimously on a roll call vote. <http://gov.oregonlive.com/bill/2015/SB439/>

participation is voluntary. Gray FF provided much of the support over several years for outreach, polling and message development leading up to the adoption of SB 439.

Funding: When the Oregon legislature passed the Outdoor School Law, they did so without identifying a funding source to ensure that the law could be fully implemented. The Coalition realized that a legislative solution to the lack of a funding source was unlikely: in addition to the state's budget problems, legislatures are generally very reticent to tap existing revenues for new programs, and raising new revenue is always difficult.

So, the Coalition's next challenge was to identify a potential revenue stream. They engaged a respected polling company to research the public's support for tapping into one of the various state revenue streams. Their research showed that tapping the state lottery proceeds had the highest level of public support. They then decided to use Oregon's citizens ballot initiative process to ask voters to designate a portion of lottery funds for outdoor school. They drafted Measure 99 ("Outdoor School for All"), and launched the "Outdoor School for All campaign" to pass it. Measure 99 creates an Outdoor School Education Fund within the State Treasury, which is funded by proceeds from the Oregon State Lottery up to \$22 million annually and, through the Oregon State University Extension system, makes these funds available to education service districts, school districts and schools for outdoor school programs.

Measure 99 Campaign: The campaign began with a petition to place Measure 99 on the ballot to fund the already-passed Senate Bill 439, and the coalition members worked hard to pass Measure 99. The major steps in this process included:

- Recruiting a Steering Committee of 29 members representing a diverse cross-section of Oregon organizations and residents from a wide variety of backgrounds
- Tracking and compiling extensive research on the positive, long-term effects of residential outdoor education on participants
- Creating a database of elected officials and education leaders for use by Coalition partners and activists
- Laying the groundwork for a future where outdoor education is fully-funded by conducting and compiling additional research on outdoor education programs, schools, camps and outdoor education facilities in Oregon
- Engaging and stewarding individuals, corporations, nonprofit organizations, grantmakers and community leaders to fund and promote the mission and goals of the Coalition
- Creating regional hubs and a statewide grassroots network of over 1,000 activists committed to the Coalition's mission
- Conducting statewide public outreach meetings to obtain community feedback, raise awareness and build enthusiasm among stakeholders in every corner of the state

Clearly, community buy-in - especially deliberate, broad-based coalition building - and committed leadership over long periods of time were essential to the success of this campaign. The Coalition also wisely used extensive, professional polling to guide their efforts along the way. They used research-based messaging that avoids exclusionary language and reflects shared values such as family, health, legacy, pride of place. For example, polling showed that rural citizens responded much better to the term "outdoor school" than to "environmental education", so the campaign made no reference to environmental education. In another unusual move for the environmental education community, they researched the economic impact of providing additional funding to outdoor schools in the state, which showed that over 600 FTE

jobs and over \$27 million in income would be generated by the measure. They also engaged a professional lobbyist to help build support in the legislature. The campaign relied heavily on social media to build support.

The Ballot Measure campaign cost an additional \$1.4 Million with support coming from Gray FF as well as numerous individuals and corporations throughout the state.

Since Outdoor School is a popular program in Oregon and Oregon has a relatively progressive voter base, opposition to the campaign was limited and opponents focused their message on the potential loss of economic development funds from the lottery because of the diversion to fund Measure 99 programs. "Outdoor School for All" passed in November, 2016, with 67% of the public voting in favor, winning majorities in 34 of Oregon's 36 counties.

Next Steps: As of February, 2017, Oregon is facing a \$1.8 billion budget shortfall, and legislators will have to make difficult decisions about the massive cuts required. Outdoor School supporters across the state are now working to ensure their voices are heard and the voters wishes are reflected in the decisions made to balance the budget.

Written in consultation with Nancy Bales, Gray Family Foundation, and Rex Burkholder, Social Entrepreneur and Strategist.

Stages of Policy Creation Simplified

Stage 1 of the process for establishing successful education policies is envisioning the framework and goals for individual policies and where a new policy could meet a perceived need. Each of the above examples represents a different environmental education goal and outcome, with the underlying common theme of increasing student environment literacy. In each case, a different perceived need was addressed.

The envisioning process may not be formal in the beginning, but it does require creating working relationships and partnerships among educators, government officials, and NGO representatives. These relationships underpin both long-term and short-term efforts, and can grow or shrink as appropriate to the goal. This stage can include preliminary polling and other communications work to support overarching themes and values (e.g. "outdoor education is good for children" or "environmental literacy is critical for the modern workforce"). Such work can also identify areas of support specific measures as envisioned during stage 2.

Stage 2 involves framing the specifics, drafting the implementing measure or measures that build on credible precedents, identifying legislative sponsor or sponsors, and recruiting a broad network of supporters through formal and informal channels. The legislative champion will need credible, broad-based support; defensible positions that differ by audience but share common language; and continuing polling and other public opinion research. The coalition of organizations (and individuals) in support will also benefit from the communications research at every level of what must be a multi-faceted effort that includes: social media, earned press, appropriate information sources (e.g. website, flyer, brochure, etc.), and credible spokespeople making public appearances. This stage includes the cultivation of additional legislative support and of course, gratitude and celebration when a campaign is successful.

Stage 3 is what comes after the press release declaring victory. It is important that the coalition that led to success stay engaged to support implementation. It should be noted that, while these policies described above are now legislative success stories, they remain works in progress in terms of implementation. California still needs to get the EEI curriculum into much broader distribution and use in order to fulfill its promise, as well as execute the Blueprint.

Maryland still needs to complete a relatively large teacher training effort in order to fulfill the graduation requirement's promise. And as this document is being written, the Oregon coalition needs to stop the legislature from possibly raiding the funding source for Oregon's Outdoor School for All - the state lottery - to fill a large state budget deficit before the first dollar is even spent on outdoor schools.

Conclusion:

Each reader will find their own lessons and takeaways from these stories. The following seem universal:

- Rarely does significant policy change come out of nowhere; it inevitably builds on smaller steps (and partnerships) made earlier, and the emergence of champions.
- While perhaps less so in the case of Oregon, both the California and Maryland successes depended heavily on long-standing cooperation and collaboration between the environmental education stakeholder community and the state education and environmental agencies.
- The political landscape is constantly changing, often in unpredictable ways. Champions must be very attentive and flexible to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities which open up along the way. This means, among other things, that compromise is inevitable if one wants to win – so as former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan says: stay "tight on the ends and loose on the means."
- There are myriad legislative tools - executive orders, amendments, bylaws, study bills, etc. - that can be employed to achieve policy goals. If one isn't working, try another.
- Passing a new bill is not the last step; it is the end of stage two. The best laws on the books will sit on the shelf without continuing effort by champions to implement and improve them. Most states that have some form of formal environmental education program at the state level. Few of these have been fully implemented, and others have been stopped by a change in state leadership. For example, Florida's environmental literacy plan was developed by the League of Environmental Educators in Florida and the state's Department of Environmental Protection Office of Environmental Education and Sustainable Initiatives in partnership with the Florida Department of Education Office of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, and Florida Department of Education Office of Healthy Schools, with additional input from a wide range of stakeholders in the education and environmental communities in 2014. Unfortunately, the Office of Environmental Education and Sustainable Initiatives was abruptly dissolved in summer 2015, leaving the process without a lead government implementer. Political climates change, often quickly. But sometimes they also can change in our favor.

The ever-changing political landscape creates challenges for consistent policy implementation, a reality not limited to environmental education. Even if a policy initiative does not achieve its goals or full implementation is stymied by lack of funding, changes in political leadership or climate, simply engaging in the process of policy change can be immensely helpful. It can be educational for the participants (stakeholders, champions, legislative and agency members, etc.), it can help embed and advance environmental education in the minds of decision-makers, it can provide a platform on which future champions can build, and it can have any number of (sometimes unexpected) ripple effects.

Every state's education system should provide graduates with a grounding in the principles of the natural systems around them, and an understanding of the positive and necessary role played by healthy natural resources in building successful communities. To what extent individual states help their own students to graduate environmentally literate is up to the state legislators and the environmental education stakeholders. The good news is that there are multiple pathways forward, and many eager partners to support the creation and passage of good environmental education policies.

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Editing by Angel Braestrup, Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation