

Environmental Education

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why do kids need environmental education?

Research shows that most Americans believe they know more about the environment than they actually do. Most people accumulate a diverse and unconnected smattering of factoids, a few (sometimes incorrect) principles, numerous opinions (often from the media), and very little real understanding of their vital dependency on the environment for their, and their children's, very survival. And this "environmental literacy gap" is increasing over time.

2. Can environmental education fit into an already overloaded school day?

Yes. Environmental education does not need to be taught as a stand-alone course, although some consider that to be optimal. Environmental principles, concepts and examples offer a terrific context for teaching other subjects, especially science. Even reading comprehension has been shown to increase by using books with environmental themes or issues. In high school, some aspects of environmental education can be provided by offering the Advanced Placement Environmental Science course.

3. Is this going to create more work for teachers?

Many teachers may initially need professional development help as well as model curricula and standards to become proficient in teaching environmental education. But after this help, extra work on their part should not be necessary – especially if teaching about the environment is incorporated into other subjects rather than creating separate courses for it.

4. Are there any existing resources to help a state advance environmental education?

Yes. For example, California developed an exemplary k-12 environment education model curriculum that is available for adaptation and adoption by other states. Washington's environmental and sustainability education standards, or Maryland's legislative language creating an environmental literacy graduation requirement, could also be used as a basis for developing similar efforts in another state.

5. Is environmental education a bipartisan issue?

It can – and should - be. Studies have shown that over 90% of the American public support environmental education being taught in schools, and 85% feel that government agencies should support environmental education programs. Teaching environmental education has been shown to increase student achievement while reducing discipline problems. Environmental education's core concept of conserving natural resources is both a conservative and progressive value.

5. What's the difference between environmental education and environmental literacy?

Environmental education is the process of learning about the environment, and environmental literacy is the intended outcome of that process. For example, an environmental education course may cover pollution; a student in that course would then demonstrate his or her environmental literacy by passing a test on pollution.

For more information, contact the
Campaign for Environmental Literacy
Director James Elder at elder@fundee.org



NCEL

National Caucus of
Environmental Legislators

202.744.1006 • www.ncel.net • 1100 17th St. NW Suite 600 • Washington, DC 20036