



## Overview

The U.S. public suffers from a significant lack of understanding about how humans interact both positively and negatively with our environment. This “environmental literacy gap” is growing rather than shrinking over time.<sup>1</sup> This gap makes it difficult for individuals to recognize how their decisions and behavior affect the environment on a local and global scale, and thus for society to properly address complex environmental issues.

This gap can be addressed through both formal and informal environmental education. In formal k-12 education, environmental education can be taught as a standalone set of courses, or infused into existing courses such as science, history, math and reading. Informal education includes after-school programs, community-based organizations, nature centers, museums, and media, all of whom can (and sometimes do) include environmental learning in their programming.

## KEY POINTS

- Over 90% over the American public supports teaching environmental education in our schools.<sup>1</sup>
- Environmental education, beyond preparing students to be good stewards of the environment, also improves student overall achievement, and reduces student discipline and classroom management problems.
- The majority of a family’s environmental behavior, such as conserving energy and recycling, has been shown to be a direct result of the children’s education in school.<sup>2</sup>

## Legislation

- In 2011, **Maryland** became the first state to pass an environmental literacy high school graduation requirement (COMAR Title 13 A subtitles 3 and 4). Every local school system in the state must now provide a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary environmental education program infused into current curricular offerings and aligned with the state environmental literacy standards, which in turn every student in the state must complete.
- The state of **Washington** mandates that instruction about conservation, natural resources, and the environment shall be provided at all grade levels in an interdisciplinary manner through science, the social studies, the humanities, and other appropriate areas with an emphasis on solving the problems of human adaptation to the environment (WAC 392-410-115). However, simply mandating that all students be instructed about a subject is not as strong as mandating that all students must also demonstrate a specified level of proficiency in a subject.
- The **California** EPA developed a fully sequential and integrated K-12 model curriculum as a result of AB 1548. This \$12 million curriculum, with 85 engaging units that teach core academic content standards to mastery in science, history-social science, and English language arts, is available for adaptation by other states.

## Other Resources

- Maryland Association for Environmental & Outdoor Education resources: <http://maeoe.org/>
- California Education and the Environment Initiative <http://californiaeei.org/>
- Environmental Education Works! <https://naaee.org/our-work/programs/eeworks>

For more information, contact the  
**Campaign for Environmental Literacy**  
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<sup>1</sup>Environmental Literacy in America by Kevin Coyle (2005)

<sup>2</sup>Environmental Attitudes and Environmental Behavior by Efrat Eilam and Tamar Trop, Sustainability (2012).