



PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release
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Maryland Becomes First State in Country to Require Green Graduates

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION VOTES FOR COMPREHENSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY STUDIES FOR EACH PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT

BALTIMORE – In an historic action today, Maryland became the first state in the country to require its high school seniors be environmentally literate in order to graduate. Forty eight other states are in various stages of their own environmental literacy plans, a sign of the increasing popularity of environmental education.

“This is a momentous day not only for Maryland but for educators across the country who are watching what Maryland does, and hoping to increase outdoor learning in their states,” said Don Baugh, director of the No Child Left Inside Coalition (NCLI). “The reason environmental education is gaining popularity is simple: it works. Children learn more, think more, and get healthier.”

The Maryland action comes as legislation is being planned in Washington, D.C. to assist states in developing and implementing environmental literacy plans. U.S. Senator John Sarbanes of Maryland and U.S. Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island have said they plan to introduce a bill that would help provide some federal funding. The bill, to be titled the “No Child Left Inside Act,” also would provide incentives to states to develop environmental literacy plans, and encouragement to teachers, administrators, and school systems to make time and resources available for environmental education for all students.

The Maryland State School Board voted today that each child must receive a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary environmental education that meets the approval of the State Superintendent of Schools. School Districts don’t have to craft a separate course of study, but can integrate environmental content and experiences into existing curricula. However, schools must move beyond standard science courses that provide minimal focus on the environment.

The vote culminates several years of work. In 2008 Governor O'Malley appointed a special task force to explore how to improve and expand environmental education in the state. The state school board approved regulations last fall to implement recommendations from the task force, but confusion followed that action. Today's vote made clear the state's desire for an environmental literacy graduation requirement, and how the policy will work.

"This is a defining moment for education in Maryland," said Governor O'Malley. "By approving this environmental graduation requirement, the Board of Education is ensuring that our young people graduate with a keen understanding of and connection to the natural world. Only through exposure to nature and education about our fragile ecosystem can we create the next generation of stewards."

While many exemplary environmental education programs already exist in some schools across the country, not all students have access to these programs. That can occur when schools feel compelled to emphasize math and reading instruction over science and other subjects because of the 2002 federal No Child Left Behind law. Some schools also lack funding for staff development in environmental education.

"The No Child Left Inside Act would increase environmental education opportunities for students across the country," said Congressman John Sarbanes of Maryland, author of the bill. "Such opportunities are essential to grow the next generation of scientists, promote environmental stewardship, and encourage Americans to live healthier lifestyles."

Studies show environmental education has a measurable, positive impact on student achievement not only in science but in math, reading, and social studies. Business leaders also increasingly believe an environmentally literate workforce is critical in a burgeoning green economy. Field experiences and related activities when part of the regular school curriculum in environmental education also help students become healthier.

Forty-states have used gubernatorial executive orders, state laws, or other concrete actions to urge the development of statewide environmental literacy plans, and outdoor plans and strategies.

Other signs of the popularity of environmental education are abundant:

- The number of high school students taking the Advanced Placement Environmental Science course jumped 426 percent in the past 10 years compared to an average increase of 97 percent for all AP subject exams over the same period. [More information](#)
- At least 200 green charters schools have opened across the country in recent years using a research-based curriculum called EIC, or Environment as an Integrating Context for learning. The idea involves using nature and the environment as a teaching tool for everything from math to reading to history. [More information](#)

- Between 1995 and 2005 all 50 states expanded and strengthened their environmental education programs by 80 percent, measured by the number of key components implemented: dedicated funding, professional development, comprehensive EE plan, etc. [More information](#)
- Nearly 2,000 schools have joined the national Green School Alliance. Green schools are designed or retrofitted to consume less energy, to reduce waste, and to connect environmental education curriculum to a school's sustainable features. [More information](#)

The No Child Left Inside Coalition is a national partnership of over 2,000 business, health, youth, faith, recreational, environmental, and educational groups representing over 50 million Americans.

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