

“NO CHILD LEFT INSIDE” By Brad Strong, NCOEA President

As public school educators I do not have to tell you what the “No Child Left Behind Act” has done to public education. I do not have to explain all the ways public education has negatively changed since this unfunded mandate has been forced upon our school districts. In many school districts they have eliminated Consumer Science (Home Economics), Industrial Tech (Shop) class, Music classes, Art classes, Electives classes at High School have been greatly reduced, Outdoor Education has been reduced, and Science & Social Studies in the elementary grades have been reduced to little more than twice a week conversations.

Recently a bill called “No Child Left Inside” has been introduced by Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) and Congressman John P. Sarbanes (D-MD) to deal with the Environmental Education. Why is environmental education important? The Chesapeake Bay Foundation puts it like this:

“Our nation’s future relies on a well-educated public to be wise stewards of the very environment that sustains us, our families, and communities, and future generations. It is environmental education which can best help us as individuals make the complex, conceptual connections between economic prosperity, benefits to society, environmental health, and our own well being. Ultimately, the collective wisdom of our citizens, gained through education, will be the most compelling and most successful strategy for environmental management.”

When environmental education is integrated across the curriculum a measurable positive impact on student achievement has been found in science, reading, math, and social studies. It was also found that when the core subjects are taught with environmental education the following are demonstrated:

1. Reduced discipline and classroom management problems
2. Increased engagement and enthusiasm for learning, and
3. Greater student pride and ownership in accomplishments.

A recent study found that children spend an average of 6 hours a day in front of the computer or TV but less than 4 minutes a day in unstructured outdoor play, leading to what Richard Louv calls “Nature-Deficit Disorder.” The extreme amount of time spent indoors in front of screens vs. outdoor play and discovery has been correlated with negative psychological and physical effects including obesity, loneliness, depression, attention problems and greater social isolation due to reduced time with friends and family. When there are increased studies of science and nature in the outdoors, it has improved cognitive functioning, reduced symptoms of attention deficit disorder, increased self-discipline and emotional well being.

Senator Reed’s & Congressman Sarbanes’ legislation would provide new funding for environmental education to train teachers, develop rigorous standards, and develop statewide environmental literacy plans. I am asking you to lobby your legislators on the importance of Environmental Education using the following talking points:

1. Environmental education is critical now because of the complex environmental challenges confronting the nation & world, including air and water pollution and loss of sensitive habitats.
2. We will be passing these complicated problems on to future generations. We must give them a solid understanding of these problems and the basic tools to overcome them and make informed choices in

their own lives. Our public schools should be doing a better job of providing this environmental education.

3. NCLB has added new accountability to our schools. But its strong focus on high-stakes tests has crowded out other subjects beyond math and science.
4. Teachers have been forced to cut back on the time they can devote to environmental education, in large part because the subjects covered in such instruction are typically not tested.
5. Teachers have had to give up on field trips and other environmental explorations as schools devote more and more time & money to the subjects that will be tested.
6. Environmental education must not be considered merely an optional topic. Understanding the environment is a critical need for our young people.
7. The legislators’ proposal would provide new resources and incentives to states to enhance environmental education. They would not add any new tests or requirements on school systems.
8. The new funding and incentives to expand environmental education will give states and school systems new tools to improve such offerings.
9. The proposals are not an either/or proposition. Environmental education can generally be incorporated into courses already being taught including science, social studies, or outdoor education programs.
10. The proposals will help establish relevant, rigorous standards for environmental-related instruction and will help train teachers to use the best methods to teach these topics.
11. Beyond the critical importance of teaching young people about the planet and its challenges, research has shown that environmental education leads to improved student performance. Students enjoy learning about the environment and become more engaged in their schoolwork.

“No Child Left Inside” is endorsed by the NEA and many environmental organizations. For more information on “No Child Left Inside” or to **CYBER LOBBY YOUR SENATOR or CONGRESSMAN** in Washington DC, please go to www.naaee.org/programs-and-initiatives/ee-advocary or www.eenclb.org.

**PRIMARY ELECTION DAY
MARCH 4, 2008
PLEASE VOTE!!!**

No matter what your politics, PLEASE get out and exercise your right to vote. Keep in mind that almost everything that affects education is decided by politicians. Like it or not, those are the FACTS.