

Oregon Environmental Literacy Plan: Toward a Sustainable Future

Environmental Literacy Will Protect Oregon's Legacy

Since the earliest evidence of humans in Oregon, our relationship with the state's natural resources has defined the Oregon way of life. Our landscapes, waterways, coastline and wildlife have inspired our stories, supported our livelihoods and provided our legacy. Oregon's natural resources serve as a foundation of our state's economy and represent a vital heritage, one that Oregonians want to ensure for generations.

Preparing Oregon's children to protect this valuable legacy is complicated by the fact that many of our youth are disconnected from the natural world and have little understanding of their relationship to it. In order to address this challenge, the Oregon Legislature passed a law (HB2544, the No Oregon Left Inside Act) to create a statewide environmental literacy plan.

As per HB2544, the Governor appointed an eleven-member task force to develop the Oregon Environmental Literacy Plan (the Plan). The Plan is directed to state policy leaders, schools, districts, teachers, non-formal educators, community partners and other interested parties, and is intended to serve as a roadmap for the development and implementation of an educational program for environmental literacy.

The Plan puts forth a vision in which all Oregon students are lifelong stewards of their environment and community who are willing and able to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, who choose to interact frequently with the outdoors, who understand their multi-faceted relationship to the natural world, and who are therefore well-prepared to address the challenges the future holds. Integrating regular outdoor activity into a student's learning and life experience is integral to achieving this vision.

Environmental Literacy and Our Vision for the Future

The task force created the following definition for **environmental literacy**:

An individual's understanding, skills and motivation to make responsible decisions that

consider his or her relationships to natural systems, communities and future generations.

Our vision of Oregon in the year 2030, when the Plan has been supported and implemented:

Oregonians lead healthy lifestyles, enjoying frequent interaction with the outdoor environment. Oregon's vibrant and comprehensive education system leads us to develop a sense of wonder and curiosity about our natural world. We understand the interconnections between community, economy, and environment, are able to examine issues from multiple perspectives, and exercise the rights and responsibilities of being an environmentally literate citizenry.

Environmental Literacy Reinforces Educational Goals

While education for environmental literacy helps develop the knowledge and skills necessary to address complex environmental issues, it also contributes to academic achievement. Additionally, studies show that time spent outdoors for learning during the school day is critical to the intellectual, emotional and physical health of students. Providing students with quality opportunities to directly experience the natural world can improve students' overall academic performance, self-esteem, personal responsibility, community involvement, personal health and understanding of nature.

The Plan's five Environmental Literacy Strands articulate a comprehensive content and skills learning framework for K-12 students. Environmentally literate students, upon graduation from twelfth grade, will demonstrate proficiency in each of the following areas:

- 1) Understand the physical and biological world, and our interdependent relationship with it
- 2) Understand and apply systems thinking concepts and tools
- 3) Understand one's relationship to the local, regional, national and global community
- 4) Investigate options for, plan, and create a sustainable future
- 5) Understand and achieve personal and civic responsibility





Photos provided by:
National Farm to School Network
Oregon Parks and Recreation Dept.
Oregon Sea Grant
The Freshwater Trust



Oregon diploma requirements, including essential skills, personal learning and credit for proficiency, all present flexible options for aligning the Plan with existing graduation requirements. Diploma requirements can be used to support Environmental Literacy Strand components that are not reflected in existing Oregon Academic Standards.

Teachers Supported

Schools play a critical role in the preparation of environmentally literate students. Teachers, in particular, hold a large responsibility for guiding the learning experiences that lead to environmental citizenship. Designing and implementing an effective environmental literacy program requires a unique set of knowledge, skills and support. To achieve teacher efficacy in achieving environmental literacy, the Plan recommends providing professional development in environmental (and related subject) content knowledge, specialized techniques for teaching about environmental issues, and field-based pedagogical skills.

Assessment Seamlessly Integrated

The ultimate goal of the Plan is to improve the environmental literacy of all Oregon students. In

order to determine whether this is happening, we need to assess the current level of environmental literacy in Oregon and evaluate how that changes over time. Assessments will be based on the definition of environmental literacy in this Plan, student mastery of the five Environmental Literacy Strands, and the impact of outdoor learning on student achievement. Assessments will also be aligned with the Office of Assessment's existing tools, structures, systems and survey instruments as often as possible to maximize the efficiency and sustainability of our efforts.

Revenue Positive for Our Schools

Having an environmental literacy Plan in place will position Oregon to be eligible for pending federal funds through No Child Left Inside legislation, included in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Through this federal initiative, and with our environmental literacy Plan in place, Oregon has the potential to receive \$1-2 million in new funding annually to support the implementation of the Plan.

Additionally, the Plan has already garnered significant financial support from a diverse coalition of groups. Therefore, we project implementation of the Plan to be revenue positive for our schools.

A Road Map for Implementation

Implementation of the Plan will involve all aspects of the state's K-12 school system. A wide variety of stakeholders will be involved in each aspect of implementation. If support and integration at any level is missing implementation will not reach its potential. The task force recommends the following activities to build and ensure successful Plan implementation:

- Establish an Oregon Environmental Literacy Council that will further refine the Plan and coordinate its implementation to schools across Oregon.
- Create a sound infrastructure to support Plan implementation.
- Strategize for implementation at both the school and district level to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Secure funding and institute sound fiscal management for implementation.

It is imperative that the task force continue forging ahead to solidify essential partnerships, efficiencies, and funding for our schools, our communities and the preservation of Oregon's historic legacy.

To read the complete Plan, please visit:
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=2886>