

Support Budget Amendments Item 374 #2h and Item 374 #2s to Boost Virginia's Office of Environmental Education

We urge legislators to support budget amendments that provide funding for two environmental education coordinator positions and reinvigorate Virginia's Office of Environmental Education.

The new positions will be charged with developing a statewide environmental literacy plan and coordinating statewide environmental education efforts with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the Virginia STEM Coordinator, and local school districts.

Environmental education combines many disciplines and builds teamwork as well as high-level thinking and problem-solving skills. Yet there is no one in the state to coordinate environmental education efforts, as Virginia's Office of Environmental Education was dispersed several years ago due to budget cuts.

By providing funding to reinvigorate a Virginia Office of Environmental Education, legislators can support local school districts and advance Virginia's STEM efforts, with the goal of creating a workforce ready to be successful in the high-paying and in-demand jobs of the future.

Learning how humans impact the environment positively and negatively and recognizing the value of Virginia's extraordinary natural resources is an essential part of our state education standards.

Leading educators and VDOE recognize that hands-on, inquiry-based learning outside has myriad benefits for environmental education and academic achievement more broadly.

Unfortunately, many districts are not connected to the curriculum resources, professional development, or local programs to offer these types of learning opportunities to all students. Students in urban communities, Southside Virginia districts, and small rural school districts are most likely to be left behind.

Additional statewide coordination will organize and distribute existing resources to all Virginia students and local districts as well as link new initiatives that would benefit from environmental education.



While advancements in communications and technology have undoubtedly improved our lives, the negative impacts on children are evident. For example, the average child can recognize over 1,000 corporate logos but identify less than 12 species of plants or animals in their backyard. They spend over seven hours daily in front of an electronic screen or in a similarly structured setting, often spending less than seven minutes of their day being active outside.

A majority of voters in Virginia agree that our youth need to engage more in their outside environment. The best way to achieve this is to support and expand statewide environmental education programs—but we need dedicated staff to advance these efforts

Aside from inspiring stewardship and reconnecting young people to Virginia's local rivers, streams, and other natural resources, environmental education has a positive impact on student achievement not only in science but in math, reading, and social studies. Environmental education has been proven to build critical thinking and relationship skills, foster leadership qualities, and offer all students equal chances for academic success.

Access to outdoor classrooms and experiential learning have been shown to bolster test scores and engage students more deeply in the learning process.

Environmental education is critical to preparing students for the 21st century workforce. In the July 2009 report, *Preparing Workers of Today for the Jobs of Tomorrow*, the President's Council of Economic Advisers noted that environmental-related occupations are expected to experience tremendous growth.

We urge your support for these budget amendments.