



Wisconsin's Plan to Advance Education for Environmental Literacy and Sustainability in PK-12 Schools

Introduction

Wisconsin's natural resources are the foundation of our economy, our life support systems, and a source of great pride for the people of our state. Wisconsinites have proven again and again that we are committed to ensuring our rich resource heritage, and the high quality of life it provides us, is sustained for future generations. Preparing Wisconsin students to understand and participate in managing the complex relationships impacting our communities is critical to continuing this legacy.

Citizens are looking for ways to live sustainably while supporting Wisconsin's economic prosperity. Innovations such as waste to energy and bio-fuel production are examples of this economic revolution. Education for environmental literacy and sustainability in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade (PK-12) schools provides a foundation where young people acquire the critical thinking and problem solving skills they will need to be successful in this changing world.

"Wisconsin's Plan to Advance Education for Environmental Literacy and Sustainability in PK-12 Schools" (Plan) proposes strategies to ensure all students graduate environmentally literate and prepared to contribute to a sustainable future. It outlines a comprehensive strategy to provide teachers and students in Wisconsin with opportunities to connect with nature and advance the health of our youth through strong interdisciplinary curricular connections that focus on education for environmental literacy and sustainability.

The *Plan* is meant to engage many agencies and organizations in working towards common goals that advance education for environmental literacy and sustainability through supporting Wisconsin's educational institutions. The *Plan* recommends strategies that are intended to be pursued over time. Ultimately, the success of the *Plan* depends on the support and participation of a broad range of collaborators throughout the state.

Goals of the Plan

The goals of the *Plan* are aligned with the pending federal NCLI legislation:

- 1) Prepare students to understand, analyze, and address the major environmental and sustainability challenges facing Wisconsin, the United States, and the planet,
- 2) Provide field experiences as part of the regular school curriculum and create programs that contribute to healthy lifestyles through outdoor recreation and sound nutrition, and
- 3) Create opportunities for enhanced preparation and ongoing professional development for teachers and school leaders by improving environmental and sustainability subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills in teaching about environmental and sustainability issues, including the use of interdisciplinary, field-based, and research-based learning, effective assessment practices, and innovative technology in the classroom.

To address these goals, the *Plan* identifies:

- 1) A description of how Wisconsin will measure environmental and sustainability literacy of students, including
 - A. relevant *Wisconsin Standards* and content areas regarding environmental literacy and education for sustainability, and courses or subjects where this instruction is integrated throughout the PK-12 curriculum, and
 - B. a description of the relationship of the *Plan* to Wisconsin graduation requirements.
- 2) A description of programs for professional development for teachers and school leaders to improve their
 - A. environmental and sustainability subject matter knowledge, and
 - B. pedagogical skills in teaching about environmental issues and education for sustainability, including the use of interdisciplinary, field-based, and research-based learning, effective assessment practices, and innovative technology in the classroom.
- 3) A description of how Wisconsin will implement the *Plan*, including securing funding and other necessary support.

Related Statewide Efforts

The *Plan* is coordinated with two additional state-wide efforts to advance the implementation of the outlined goals:

- *Wisconsin's Plan for Environmentally Literate and Sustainable Communities* considers educational needs and responses for communities and supports sustainable practices at home, work, school, and play to address the needs of all audiences in Wisconsin and incorporates this *Plan*.
- The *Plan* is closely coordinated with the development of a framework for *Education for Sustainability in Wisconsin*.

In 2010, the Department of Public Instruction and Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education initiated a process to cultivate education for sustainability in Wisconsin. This work will lead to the development of resources and services to implement education for sustainability in schools and address goals outlined in the *Plan*.

Benefits of a State Plan

A more coordinated and collaborative approach to education for environmental literacy and sustainability in Wisconsin PK-12 schools can help districts save money, prepare students with the skills and experiences they will need to be successful as 21st century citizens, and enable formal and non-formal education providers to better align their programs with school needs and circumstances.

No Child Left Inside (NCLI) Act funding

The federal NCLI legislation was introduced in 2007, 2009 and again in 2011 to support local and statewide efforts to educate PK-12 students about the environment and natural resources and to provide enhanced professional development opportunities for educators.¹ Having an environmental literacy plan in place will position Wisconsin to be eligible for proposed federal funds through No Child Left Inside legislation, included in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Through this federal initiative, Wisconsin has the potential to receive in new funding annually to support *Plan* implementation.

¹ United States Congress. (2009). "No Child Left Inside Act." Senate Bill 866. Retrieved from: www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=s111-866