

Connecticut Environmental Literacy Plan

Working together to ensure that all CT citizens are environmentally literate.

The Need for Environmental Literacy

In today's world, it is critical that everyone understands how the natural and human environment are connected and mutually dependent. Environmental education fosters learning that can transform how we think, make decisions, and lead our lives.

An Environmental Literacy Plan (ELP) for Connecticut is an important stepping-stone for our state's future. It is imperative that we act now to prepare today's students - tomorrow's policy makers - with the proper knowledge and skills to make critical decisions regarding our global and local resources and environmental health. The ultimate goal is for all citizens in Connecticut to use environmental literacy for individual and social purposes to create and maintain sustainable communities.

What is Environmental Literacy?

Broadly defined, environmental literacy includes:

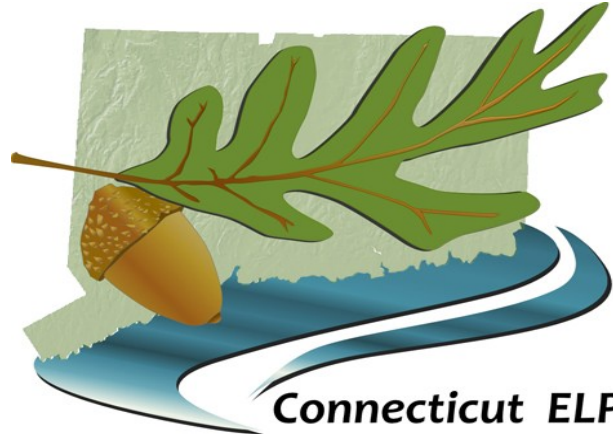
- A fundamental understanding of the systems of the natural world and the interactions between the living and non-living environments.
- The ability to make responsible decisions based on scientific, economic, cultural, and ethical considerations.
- The confidence, motivation and skills to exercise rights and responsibilities as a member of a community.

Benefits of Environmental Education

Environmental education (EE) unites subject areas and provides real-world context that gives deeper meaning to academic content. Through active, hands-on learning about the environment, students develop the knowledge and skills to address challenges in their communities.

Environmental education has been shown to contribute to overall academic achievement when it is integrated into the curriculum. Quantitative and qualitative studies highlight the immense benefits of an integrated environmental education framework. Evidence gathered from various studies indicate that students learn more effectively within an environment-based context than within a traditional educational framework. Observed benefits include:

- Better performance on standardized measures of academic achievement in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies.
- Reduced discipline and classroom management problems.
- Increased engagement and enthusiasm for learning.
- Greater pride and ownership in accomplishments.



Connecticut ELP
Environmental Literacy Plan

Key Partners Working Together

Connecticut's ELP includes three key partners that must work collaboratively to achieve the goal of an environmentally literate citizenry.

Education Partners

Formal and informal educators are central to achieving environmental literacy. Many opportunities exist within and outside our schools for students to engage in meaningful learning that connects them to the environment.

Community Partners

Our local communities play a vital role in educating children and adults about environmental issues. Communities can offer direct learning experiences as well as support efforts to promote environmental education.

Government Partners

Government entities must develop policies and laws that support environmental education efforts. Providing the necessary funding for these efforts is key to their success.



Goals of the Connecticut Environmental Literacy Plan

Working together to ensure that all CT citizens are environmentally literate.



Key Partners Working Together

Education Partners include:

- Informal Environmental Educators
- Pre-K through Higher Education Teachers
- Teacher Associations
- School Administrators and Staff
- Parent-Teacher Organizations
- Boards of Education
- State Department of Education
- Regional Educational Service Centers
- Non-profit Educational Organizations

Community Partners include:

- General Public
- Business Groups
- Civic Organizations
- Youth Groups
- Libraries
- Religious Organizations
- Neighborhood Associations
- Local and State Media
- Health Professionals
- Non-Government Organizations

Government Partners include:

- Governor and State Representatives
- Mayors and Town Supervisors
- Town Councils
- Local Land Use Boards
- Municipal Leaders and Committee Members
- State and Local Agencies
- Advocacy and Policy Officials
- State Department of Environmental Protection

Education Partners

Learning Opportunities for All

Goal: Integrate environmental education into the PreK-16 curriculum and instructional programs to insure that all CT students are environmentally literate upon graduation.

Goal: Promote collaboration between informal EE centers and non-profit educational organizations with schools and provide direct learning experiences to improve the environmental literacy of learners of all ages.

Environmental Leadership Development

Goal: Support high quality EE professional development for formal and informal educators, administrators and support staff.

Goal: Develop a body of environmental education leaders in all school districts, informal learning centers and non-profit educational organizations.

Preservation and Use of School Grounds, Green Spaces and Natural Resources

Goal: Utilize grounds and facilities in all educational settings as environmental education learning laboratories and to model environmentally sustainable practices.

Goal: Promote collaboration between education groups and community partners to identify and utilize local environmental resources for outdoor learning opportunities.

Implementation and Funding

Goal: Collaborate to ensure the implementation of the CT ELP among education partners.

Goal: Coordinate a statewide effort, led by the CT ELP Steering Committee, to secure necessary funding for the success of the ELP.

Awareness, Communication and Collaboration

Goal: Increase awareness of the importance of environmental literacy among educators and develop effective communication and collaboration strategies to support the CT ELP.

Research and Assessment

Goal: Conduct research on and assessment of the effectiveness of EE programs and initiatives within the state and use this information to implement effective changes when needed.

Goal: Assess the environmental literacy of students and education partners in Connecticut at the local and state levels.

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Community Partners

Learning Opportunities for All

Goal: Continuously provide EE opportunities in community settings for all citizens for lifelong learning.

Goal: Connect schools with community resources to provide EE opportunities and to learn about and model sustainable practices.

Environmental Leadership Development

Goal: Develop a team of environmental leaders within each local community to coordinate environmental literacy opportunities.

Preservation and Use of School Grounds, Green Spaces and Natural Resources

Goal: Preserve and use local community resources for environmental learning opportunities.

Implementation and Funding

Goal: Develop effective ELP implementation strategies within each community.

Goal: Identify and secure local sources of funding to support the goals of the ELP.

Awareness, Communication and Collaboration

Goal: Increase awareness of the importance of environmental literacy among community leaders and the public and promote better communication and collaboration between community partners.

Research and Assessment

Goal: Utilize the results of research to encourage the use of effective environmental programs.

Goal: Assess the environmental literacy of the general public.

Government Partners

Learning Opportunities for All

Goal: Support and sustain environmental learning programs throughout the state.

Environmental Leadership Development

Goal: Develop a team of environment leaders within local and state agencies to promote and advocate for the CT ELP.

Preservation and Use of School Grounds, Green Spaces and Natural Resources

Goal: Preserve and use state and local community resources for environmental learning opportunities.

Implementation and Funding

Goal: Provide support for the implementation of the CT ELP.

Goal: Provide sustainable funding sources to support the goals of the CT ELP.

Awareness, Communication and Collaboration

Goal: Promote awareness, communication and collaboration of the CT ELP and its goals among government partners.

Research and Assessment

Goal: Support efforts to research and assess the effectiveness of EE programs and environmental literacy of all citizens in CT.



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Elements of CT's ELP

Each of the following elements plays an important role in ensuring environmental literacy for all of our citizens.

Learning Opportunities for All

The CT ELP suggests ways to identify **instructional opportunities** for using existing models and programs (e.g., outdoor learning, STEM, service learning, etc.) for teaching about the environment in all grades. The ELP also considers how environmental literacy might be incorporated into the state's **graduation requirements**.

Environmental Leadership Development

Both pre-service and in-service teachers need to be prepared to teach their students about the environment, in and out of the classroom. This requires high quality **professional development**. Partnerships between K-12 school systems and experienced environmental/outdoor educators can provide excellent models.

Preservation and Use of School Grounds, Green Space and Natural Resources

Our local communities and schools grounds should provide easily accessible green spaces and natural resources to use as opportunities for students to learn about their environment. In addition, all learning environments should incorporate and model environmentally sustainable practices.

Awareness, Communication and Collaboration

All citizens must have an awareness of environmental issues and their local natural resources as the first step toward environmental literacy. Working together, citizens have the ability to magnify their efforts and increase their impact.

Implementation and Funding

To help with implementation, the ELP identifies model EE programs that might be replicated throughout the state. The ELP also addresses potential funding sources. This includes the use of existing programs and funds that can be used to support the plan as well as areas where new policies and funding sources are needed.

Research and Assessment

Research on the effectiveness of EE programs is critical to their ongoing success. The ELP describes methods that can be used to measure and report on the status of environmental literacy in Connecticut. This includes traditional assessments, counts of student participation or performance, and other mechanisms.

Goals and action items have been established for each of the six elements.

Development of CT's ELP

The development of the CT ELP began in 2009 in response to the proposed federal **No Child Left Inside** (NCLI) legislation. The NCLI bill currently includes \$500 million for state educational agencies to distribute to equip teachers with the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to integrate the environment into their curricula. Only states with qualifying Environmental Literacy Plans will be eligible for a percentage of this funding. The development work was coordinated by the ELP Steering Committee which convened development sessions throughout 2009 and 2010. A series of informational and input sessions took place in the spring of 2010 at various venues (e.g., state educator conferences and workshops, open forums, etc.). In addition, members of the ELP Steering Committee have participated in meetings and conference calls with representatives from fellow New England states that are also developing ELPs. Drafts of the ELPs have been shared among the states. A time for public comment was available in fall of 2010. Numerous individuals and organizations have signed on as supporters of the CT ELP.



For Further Information about the CT ELP

Go to www.coeea.org to view the complete CT Environmental Literacy Plan. You can also sign on as a supporter of the plan and help us achieve the goal of environmental literacy for all of our citizens.

