

# Environmental Literacy in Nevada

## Vision

Nevada citizens are environmentally literate and act to create an environmentally sustainable and just society.

## Vision for the Education System

PreK-12 students receive education and experiences at all grade levels which develop: a) an understanding of ecological concepts, b) a knowledge of how human actions and attitudes positively and negatively affect the natural and built environment, and c) an appreciation of the diversity of experiences, values and opinions that people bring to environmental issues. Students have frequent opportunities for: a) contact with the natural world, b) positive action through service-learning projects, and c) practicing the skills of democracy in their own life, their classroom and school, and their community.

## Why Environmental Education?

Environmental education effectively supports both the academic and civic engagement mission of schools:

1. Academic Performance: EE greatly enhances academic performance through subject integration wherein students work towards “literacy” in reading, writing, math, social studies, sciences and arts at the same time, making effective use of classroom time. Subject integration is inherent in the environmental education approach to learning and allows students to apply learning in one subject to solve problems in another subject and to construct knowledge in a unified manner.
2. Civic Engagement: EE develops the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by citizens in a democratic society, and provides opportunities for students to practice and participate as a citizen in their school and community.
3. Motivation: EE motivates students by providing: a) connections to the places they live and the people and values they care about, b) real-world application of their academic knowledge and skills, and c) opportunities to make a real positive difference in the world through their actions.

Environmental education achieves the common goal of an environmentally sustainable and just society by educating students and their families in:

1. Ecological Concepts: EE develops an understanding of ecological concepts such as energy flow and materials cycles which both set limits on human use of the environment and provide opportunities for improving human condition and economies by working more closely with rather than against nature and its capacity to meet our needs and desires.
2. Diversity: EE develops an understanding of and appreciation for the wide diversity of values, experiences and geography that contribute to differing attitudes, actions and solutions to achieving environmentally sustainable and just societies.
3. Human Effect: EE develops an understanding of how human actions and attitudes can positively or negatively affect the natural and built environments, and of how personal and group choices contribute to these positive or negative consequences. Students develop a practical understanding of how our democratic institutions and practices provide a venue for creating an environmentally sustainable and just society “for the greatest good.”

4. **Direct Contact with Nature:** EE provides direct contact with nature and develops a personal connection to nature necessary to sustain caring for and action to conserve and protect the environment. Early childhood and early schooling are particularly important times for developing a life-long connection.

## The Environmental Education Community

The environmental education community is not limited to those people who are professional environmental educators, but includes all teachers no matter what the grade level or subject area, administrators of schools, districts and the state, personnel and volunteers who work for agencies and organizations whose role includes nonformal or informal education, and everyone who supports and contributes to an environmentally sustainable and just society. This document addresses the education of PreK-12 students, not to neglect higher education, public programs and family contributions, but to maintain a focus on this critically important mission of increasing environmental literacy through environmental education of PreK-12 students.

## Goal of the Environmental Education Community

**The goal of the environmental education community in Nevada is to increase the quality and effectiveness of environmental education offered to PreK-12 students.**

## Strategies

To achieve this goal, several strategies will be used:

1. **Partnerships:** Create partnerships between schools (public county school districts, private and home school) and the nonformal education sector (agencies, organizations and businesses) which meet the specific needs and priorities of each school in educating their students. Closer alignment between nonformal offerings and school structures and priorities will further the missions of both schools and partners.
2. **Professional Development for Nonformal Educators:** Provide professional development to non-formal educators to increase knowledge and competency in providing services to schools, including pedagogy, behavior management, grade and age appropriate curriculum, alignment with state and national standards, working with teachers and administrative staff, skills for working with diverse audiences, and trends in schools. Both a environmental educator certification program and individual workshops and support will achieve this strategy.
3. **Program Alignment:** Bring programs offered by the nonformal sector such as lessons, classroom presentations and field trips into closer alignment with the needs of schools so that the academic and civic engagement mission of schools and the missions of the nonformal sector are met. Alignment would include state and national content standards, grade levels, subject integration, out-of-classroom experiences, and district priorities.
4. **Profile:** Increase awareness of, understanding of, and prominence of environmental education among educators and educational leaders, as well as agencies, organizations, businesses, and the public, in order to obtain support, participation and funding throughout the state.
5. **Master Plan:** A master plan for environmental literacy in Nevada will be developed by the community. The plan will include such elements as a training plan, literacy guideline, communications strategy, funding strategy, statewide Environmental Education Advisory Council, and county or community level collaborations. The plan will address the twenty Components of a State-Level Comprehensive EE Program in the program, structure and funding categories.

Each of these strategies will be defined in greater detail by the stakeholders in each area, and additional strategies may develop over time.