

# EDUCATING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A challenge we face today is creating a shared understanding of the natural resources that exist in Virginia and how to best protect and conserve them. In order to create an environmentally literate Commonwealth, we need to prepare our teachers to effectively teach environmental concepts.

## CHALLENGE

As a Commonwealth, we are facing pressing environmental challenges. To respond to these challenges, Virginia needs an engaged citizenry equipped with the knowledge and motivation to conserve our natural resources and protect our public health. Virginia's next generation of environmental engineers and stewards begins with meaningful environmental education. Of the *21st Century Skills* students will need to find success in their future careers, environmental and conservation literacy are called out specifically.<sup>1</sup>

Many schools, especially those that are traditionally under-represented and underserved, struggle to incorporate environmental education as a regular and meaningful part of their curriculum. Many teachers are ill-prepared to lead lessons about the environment. This is partially because they were not necessarily taught about the environment when they were in school, and there is not a significant focus on this topic in teacher preparatory programs.<sup>2</sup>

## SOLUTION

In order to prepare our classroom teachers and teachers-in-training to effectively teach the environmental literacy concepts already woven into the Virginia Standards of Learning, we need to offer a quality program to ensure competency in this environmental education. Virginia Association for Environmental Education (VAEE) offers a certificate program that is aligned with the North American Association for Environmental Education's standards. Although this program was developed with input from the Virginia Department of Education, there is no formal incentive for teachers to complete this or other pre-service environmental education learning opportunities. We propose investigating incentives for teachers to complete the certification, including adding an endorsement to their licensure, providing scholarship funds to pay for the costs of the certificate, and providing a pay scale increase upon successful completion.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a study through the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Education, and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to look at all the possibilities for incentivizing teacher engagement in Virginia-centric environmental education certifications, including the VAEE certificate program. The study will emphasize looking at ways to engage underserved school districts.

Education program on the Rappahannock River

Photo by Lis Hera

