

Support House Bill 538

SPONSOR: Delegate Joshua Cole



This bill establishes the Virginia Environmental Literacy Grant Fund, to be administered by the Office of Environmental Education at the Department of Conservation and Recreation. The purpose of the Fund will be for awarding grants on a competitive basis, to any public school district or community partner that seeks assistance to initiate, expand, or improve their school district environmental literacy plan, that will support teacher professional development opportunities or student environmental education programs that align with the content and objectives outlined in the Virginia Environmental Literacy Plan.

Why are environmental literacy plans important?

Environmental literacy plans are important because they create localized action with community buy-in to support the school districts in educating our youth about the environmental issues most relevant to them. These plans help define the local community's priorities in terms of what are the most pressing regional environmental issues. The plans outline steps to achieve student literacy specific to these priorities. They support long term partnerships between the schools and community partners.

Why is this fund needed?

- **TEACHER RETENTION**

Virginia has made commitments in the Standards of Learning (SOL) and with the federal government through the Bay Agreement to graduate environmentally literate students. But there is no comprehensive support to train teachers in this rich approach to learning. Hiring and retaining top talent in the field of education is increasingly difficult. Providing support for teachers to fulfill the requirements in the SOL by providing professional growth opportunities improves teacher retention. Teachers who feel supported stay and have better success.

- **PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM LACK OF CAPACITY/RESOURCES**

Many Virginia school districts lack the capacity to create environmental literacy plans. It is not necessarily that they do not want to create the plan or have the knowledge, it is more about the time and staff capacity to organize, get feedback and publish. Community engagement is an essential element to creating a plan that will be successful and have long term support. Finding the time and resources to engage the local community in an appropriate capacity is something school districts need support doing. They also need support in making sure teachers and administrators are engaged in the process and have input at all levels.

- **EQUITY**

Environmental literacy offers all students equal chances for academic success. In addition, it increases equity in a number of ways including allowing Virginians to more fully participate in the civic process surrounding environmental decisions, helping communities understand issues impacting their health and wellness, and providing all students equal access to natural resources and outdoor space.

- **STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

Hands-on, inquiry-based learning outside has myriad benefits for academic achievement. It has been proven to build critical thinking and relationship skills and fosters leadership qualities. In addition, local environmental project based learning has been shown to bolster test scores and engage students more deeply in the learning process.

Questions?

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