



No Child Left Inside (H.R. 2054 and S. 866)

Congressional Action: Ensure that legislation that expands environmental education identifies park and recreation agencies as entities eligible for direct funding:

Current Need:

Many children have become isolated from exploring nature and understanding their environment. Increased time spent playing video games and watching television all contribute to this isolation. The result is that many children are not educated about their environment and do not grasp the responsibility they have to become stewards of their environment as they grow to adulthood.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is commonly known as “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB), has inadvertently contributed to this problem. NCLB links the allocation of federal dollars for education to specific performance goals holding schools across the country accountable for academic improvement based on standardized tests which measure reading and math scores. Since funding is tied primarily to reading and math test scores, the preponderance of instruction at elementary and secondary schools across the nation now focuses on these two subjects. This has produced an unintended loss of instruction time in a number of subjects, notably environmental education, as many schools have been forced to devote more time and resources to improving reading and math scores.

Legislation in the 111th Congress

The No Child Left Inside Act seeks to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and expand environmental education, create environmental stewards and produce graduates who are equipped to address the challenges, adjustments and opportunities of the 21st century. A key component to this legislation is the use of field experiences to provide students with opportunities to directly experience nature in ways that improve the students’ overall academic performance, personal health (including addressing child obesity issues), and understanding of nature. Other components include:

- NCLI is a voluntary program and therefore does not implement unfunded mandates;
- \$100 million would be authorized for 2010-2014;
- In order for educational agencies within a state to receive NCLI grant funding, the state educational agency must work with state environmental and natural resource agencies to develop and implement a state environmental literacy plan for pre-kindergarten through grade 12;
- Provides grants for environmental education professional development of teachers and educators;
- Creates an environmental education grant program to prepare children to understand and address major environmental challenges facing the U.S.; and to strengthen environmental education as an integral part of the elementary school and secondary school curriculum;

- States receiving NCLI grants are enabled to award subgrants, on a competitive basis, to local educational agencies and eligible partners – such as a federal, state, regional or local environmental or natural resource management agency, or park and recreation department- to initiate, expand, or improve environmental education programs.

Important Role Of Park and Recreation Agencies In Implementing NCLI

Local and State park agencies are uniquely positioned to assist in the expansion of environmental education curricula as envisioned in the No Child Left Inside Act (NCLI). Undoubtedly, local and state park systems are the best and most logical partners to help schools and education agencies across the country develop truly effective environmental education programs. These agencies provide:

- Easy and safe accessibility to nature and the outdoors;
- A wide variety of unique learning opportunities;
- Existing trained and knowledgeable staff, such as interpretive naturalists, and wildlife biologists provide benefit to students and teachers through “field” learning experiences at nature centers, science centers, demonstration farms, and in park and wildlife refuges;
- Many local, urban, county, regional, and state park systems currently work with school systems to provide environmental education programs and there are unlimited opportunities for them to do more in partnerships with schools.