

Environmental Education in Maryland

Op/Ed

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“Environmental Education ... where students apply academics while planting trees, implementing energy conservation programs, and restoring streams.”

Our environment is a gift to be protected, maintained, and restored, and education can play an important role in the process. I am proud to say that in Maryland, we place a strong emphasis on environmental education. As we celebrate Earth Day, I am reminded of the thought provoking words of Aristotle, "In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous." Education helps us stand guard over these marvelous surroundings.

Governor Martin O'Malley has proclaimed the entire month of April as Environmental Education Month. Students and teachers from across the State will be engaging in hundreds of hands-on projects in April, May, and June as they capitalize on springtime and the desire to get back outdoors.

More than 390,000 Maryland students are directly participating in preservation and restoration projects across the state this year through their daily classes, Service Learning projects, clubs, and after-school activities. High school students in Frederick County, partnering with Thorpewood, are using biotechnology in a bid to restore the majestic American chestnut to Maryland's landscape. Arlington Echo Outdoor School, in cooperation with the Anne Arundel County Department of Public Works, is engaging more than 225 students from Arundel Middle, Arundel High School and Odenton Elementary School to plant native species as part of a large state-of-the-art stream restoration. This past March, student teams from every high school in Harford County presented the results of a year's environmental work at their second Environmental Science Student Summit, an event designed, organized, and run by students.

We can find projects like these in every school system in our state. Programs like these can help move our culture from awareness to action. As we move from environmental awareness to environmental action, myriad opportunities are presenting themselves to motivated and knowledgeable students in our schools. They have the wonderful opportunity to remake the world they will be living in.

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This is a time in which we all must rethink what we do and how we do it. Our students will need to develop ways to meet increasing energy needs without polluting and poisoning our air, soil, and water. They must develop new models of food production and transportation for an increasing population. They must rethink the kind and nature of the materials we use everyday – plastics, metals, and ceramics – to imitate the models nature shows us – 100 percent reusable structures.

Maryland's students have great opportunity. Environmental education provides a rich and diverse avenue for students to pursue. We all care deeply about the earth that our children will inherit. By continuing to teach ourselves and our children about preserving and improving our surroundings, we can help to ensure a healthier planet in the coming years. I encourage you to get involved in the environmental programs that are occurring in your local school. It could be implementing an energy conservation program in school and at home; it could be restoring streams and wetlands, planting native wildflowers and meadows to attract wildlife; or it might be establishing a no-idle zone in your school's driveway.

This is the perfect time to stop for a moment, experience that internal stillness that we often forget, and listen to the sounds of our surroundings while reconnecting with nature. It is also a wonderful time to rediscover Maryland's State Parks with your family and friends. It is Environmental Education Month—let's make a difference!

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