

AB 1603 (Stone)

Outdoor Environmental Education

BACKGROUND

The Outdoor Environmental Education and Recreation Program, signed into law in 2003, required a study on the benefits of outdoor environmental education for at-risk youth and underserved demographic groups. The program was intended to encourage conscientious use and preservation of the environment and natural resources. It ended January 1, 2006.

The study found that science test scores of children who participated in outdoor environmental education activities increased by 27 percent. Children who participated also had improved conflict resolution and problem solving skills, self-esteem, and motivation to learn. According to the Santa Cruz County Office of Education, "Studies have also indicated that outdoor education enhances the awareness that youth have of the natural environment and provides a strong incentive for them to play an active role in protecting it."

In many underserved communities, outdoor environmental education and recreation programs provide the only exposure that children have to nature and the environment. Outdoor environmental education provides students with memorable real-world experiences with the environment, which increases interest in science and environmental stewardship. Encouraging interest in environmental stewardship may help students increase their interest and abilities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, which will help ensure that California remains a leader in these fields in the future.

EXISTING LAW

The California Environmental Protection Agency currently runs the Education and Environment Initiative (EEI). EEI provides the State Board of Education approved environmental curriculum as a supplement to current science and history-social science curriculum for grades K-12. EEI

curriculum is targeted for use in the classroom; while it connects teachers with local resources and environmental education programs, EEI does not provide teachers with lessons to be conducted outside or in the environment being studied. It also does not provide funding to participate in environmental education programs.

SUMMARY

AB 1603 establishes an Outdoor Environmental Education Program under the Department of Parks and Recreation. Grants would be awarded to education programs that are operated by public entities or nonprofit organizations. The director of the Outdoor Environmental Education Program would provide a report to the legislature detailing how programs are selected for grants by January 1, 2016. The bill prioritizes organizations that work to increase the ability of underserved and at-risk populations to participate in outdoor recreation and educational activities. Priority would also be given to programs that align with Common Core standards and integrate instruction in STEM subjects. The provisions in AB 1603 expire January 1, 2019.

SUPPORT

- O'Neill Sea Odyssey
- Camp SEA Lab
- Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools
- Land Trust of Santa Cruz County
- Friends of Edgewood Natural Preserve: Junior Explorers

OPPOSITION

None received.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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