



Environmental Education & No Child Left Behind Tips and Talking Points for Meetings with Newspaper Editorial Boards

Background: The No Child Left Inside Coalition is a national coalition of more than two dozen environmental and educational groups, representing hundreds of thousands of teachers, environmental educators and others. The Coalition was formed to alert Congress and the public to the need for our public schools to devote more resources and attention to environmental education.

Goal: The Coalition is working to support proposals by Rep. John Sarbanes of Maryland and Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island to include environmental education in the reauthorizations of the No Child Left Behind Act. The proposals would provide new funding for environmental education, particularly to develop rigorous standards, train teachers and to develop statewide environmental literacy plans. They also propose giving states that develop such environmental literacy plans access to additional funds. (See executive summary for more details on the legislation.)

Editorial Board Visits: We are hoping that environmental education leaders in many states can visit editorial boards at key newspapers to discuss this issue. Editorials can carry significant weight with elected officials. Most large and medium-sized newspapers have an editorial board made up of editorial writers (and sometimes the publisher) that sets the paper's editorial policy. The editorial page editor is typically in charge of this board.

We recommend the following steps:

1. Call the newspaper and identify the editorial page editor. Send him/her an email explaining the issue and asking for a meeting. Follow up with a phone call. Bear in mind that newspapers often have spam filters that screen out emails, so your phone call is critical.
2. In discussing the issue with an editor, stress the importance of the environmental education issue to local educators and readers. A national survey says that 96% of parents and 95% of adults believe that environmental education is important in the classroom.
3. Some newspapers will set up meetings of the entire board to hear about an issue. Others will assign one editorial writer to handle the meeting.
4. If you do arrange for a meeting, take no more than 2-3 people.
5. Be ready to explain the issue, using the attached talking points. If possible, bring a classroom instructor or a local environmental educator who can talk

knowledgeably about the problem. But make sure these educators are on topic and are well versed in the legislation.

6. Make sure to ask the editors to consider writing an editorial in support of our cause.
7. Ask the editor if the paper would consider running an OpEd essay about the issue either in addition to an editorial or in lieu of one.
8. Take printed material about the No Child Left Inside Act (executive summary, e.g.) and leave it with the editorial board. Designate someone to be a contact person for follow-up calls.

Key Talking Points:

1. Environmental education is critical now because of the complex environmental challenges confronting the nation and world, including human-induced climate change, air and water pollution and the loss of sensitive habitats.
2. We will be passing these complicated problems on to future generations. We must give them a solid understanding of these problems and the basic tools to overcome them and make informed choices in their own lives. Our public schools should be doing a better job of providing this environmental education.
3. No Child Left Behind has added new accountability to our schools. But its strong focus on high-stakes tests has crowded out other subjects beyond math and reading.
4. Across the country, teachers have been forced to cut back on the time they can devote to environmental education, in large part because the subjects covered in such instruction are typically not tested.
5. Teachers have had to give up on field trips and other environmental explorations as schools devote more and more time to subjects that will be tested.
6. Environmental education must not be considered merely an *optional* topic. Understanding the environment is a critical need for our young people.
7. The legislators' proposals would provide new resources and incentives to states to enhance environmental education. They would *not* add any new tests or requirements on school systems.
8. The new funding and incentives to expand environmental education will give states and school systems new tools to improve such offerings.
9. The proposals are not an either/or proposition. Environmental education can generally be incorporated into courses already being taught – including science or social studies classes.
10. The proposals will help establish relevant, rigorous standards for environmental-related instruction and will help train teachers to use the best methods to teach these topics.
11. Beyond the critical importance of teaching young people about the planet and its challenges, research has shown that environmental education leads to improved student performance. Students enjoy learning about the environment and become more engaged with their schoolwork.

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