

Testimony of Ariel Trahan
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Submitted to the Committee on Government Relations and the Environment
RE: The Implementation of the Healthy Schools Act, D.C. Law 18-20
Submitted for December 9, 2010 Public Roundtable

Thank-you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the Healthy Schools Act of 2010. My name is Ariel Trahan. I am an Environmental Educator at the Anacostia Watershed Society and I am testifying here today as a member of the District of Columbia Environmental Education Consortium (DCEEC).

I would like to focus my testimony today on Section 502 of the Healthy Schools Act, the creation of an Environmental Literacy Plan. As providers of environmental education, DCEEC and its members are in a unique position to be, with the participation of the stakeholders mentioned in the Healthy School's Act, at the forefront of developing an Environmental Literacy Plan for DC.

The development of an Environmental Literacy Plan is part of a nationwide movement to ensure that we are not only creating environmentally literate students but are also ensuring our students are prepared to meet our future environmental challenges.

The Environmental Literacy Plan will be a key component to fully realizing the goals of the Healthy Schools Act and bringing broad based support for environmental education in order to connect DC youth with the natural world and the communities within which they live.

As outlined by the No Child Left Inside Act, an environmental literacy plan should include:

- 1) A description of content standards, as well as courses and subjects where instruction will take place.
- 2) A description of how DC high school requirements will ensure that high school graduates are environmentally literate.
- 3) A description of professional development opportunities that outlines programs for teachers that will improve their environmental content knowledge, their skills in teaching about environmental issues, and their field-based pedagogical skills.
- 4) A description of how the environmental literacy of students will be measured.
- 5) Finally, the plan will contain an implementation mechanism that clearly describes how the goals of the plan will be achieved. This implementation plan will describe how funding and other support will be secured for the initiatives outlined in the Environmental Literacy Plan.

In June 2010 members of DCEEC, in coordination with DDOE, contacted stakeholders and called a meeting to form the Environmental Literacy Plan Working Group (ELPWG). The ELP Working Group, which meets monthly, has researched and identified best practices in the development of other states ELPs. This enabled us to begin to chart the best course for the development of the District's ELP. We identified key stakeholders that we hope will see it in their interest to participate in the creation of DC's ELP. Lastly, since the Healthy Schools Act does not provide a clear source of funding for the development of the ELP; the working group is seeking funds by writing grants. The first Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) grants we wrote resulted in the working group developing a clearly laid out plan, as well as a timeline and budget. Despite our best efforts we were not awarded the EPA grant, and hope to hear from NOAA in the near future.

We hope that you will agree that we have made considerable progress in a short amount of time. That being said there is a lot to be done before DC has charted an Environmental Literacy Plan.

With that goal in mind the ELP Working Group recommends:

- 1) An amendment to the Healthy School Act to include a timeline for the completion of the ELP. With no timeline there is little incentive for the various agencies to become involved with the ELP. In order for there to be widespread support for the ELP, there needs to be involvement of all the stakeholders from the beginning of the process. A mandated timeline will provide the working group a tangible due date as well as provide stakeholders that have so far not come to the table a sense of "urgency" in participating.
- 2) Financial resources. The lack of financial resources for the development and implementation of an ELP will continue to be an obstacle to its development and implementation.
- 3) Leadership from the council to bring attention to this issue and engage the necessary stakeholders. The ELP working group believes that the ultimate implementation of the plan will be more successful if all of the stakeholders are involved in the creation of the plan.

DCEEC would like to take this opportunity to thank Council member Cheh for participating in DCEEC's celebration of School Garden Week this past October. We appreciate your support of DCEEC and look forward to moving forward together to ensure the successful development of the Environmental Literacy Plan and a full funding and implementation of the Healthy Schools Act.

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