

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: Creating a Sustainable Future for Albertans



Environmental education can create a fundamental change in how we treat our environment.
But are we getting the message? What more can be done? What more can **you** do?



Environmental education helps children and adults develop knowledge, values, skills and behaviours that help them meet present-day needs without compromising the well-being of future generations.

Albertans recently came up with a plan to help ensure life-long learning that creates a culture of environmental stewardship – see the back page for more information!

“Why do we support environmental education? Suncor is committed to enhancing Albertans’ quality of life through investments that strengthen communities, advance education, and address environmental issues. Environmental education helps deliver on all these priorities.”

– Lori Gammell, Suncor Energy Foundation

Environmental Education – Why Do We Need It?

Environmental education makes good business sense. Alberta’s natural assets need to be managed wisely. When citizens understand the issues, they can help ensure our natural capital is maintained for the benefit of future generations.

The public cares about the environment, but lacks knowledge. According to recent polls, Canadian adults place environmental issues at the top of the political agenda, yet only four percent believe that they know enough to keep the environment healthy.

More people means more pressure on the environment. Alberta’s population is growing faster than any other province in Canada. Environmental education helps us learn how to sustain the quality of our air, water, and other natural resources in the face of increased pressure.

We are all part of the solution. Solving today’s challenging environmental issues, and moving society towards sustainability, cannot be done by ‘experts’ and governments alone. It needs the combined support and active participation of consumers, voters, employees, and community and business leaders.

Education can change behaviour. Education is a major strategic tool – some think it is more important than regulation, policy, legislation, or enforcement. Only education can address the root cause of environmental issues, the values and attitudes that influence peoples’ behaviour.

Our choices affect the environment. Education helps consumers make responsible decisions that contribute to environmental solutions.

Losing touch with nature threatens our health. New research demonstrates that a disconnect with the natural world threatens our physical, psychological, and social well-being – and that nature can offer therapy for Attention Deficit Disorder, aggression, and depression.

Environmental education promotes sustainable development. Environmental education helps deliver on Canada’s commitment to support the United Nations ‘Decade of Education for Sustainable Development’ that began in 2005.

“First Nations people have always understood that the Earth is our mother. What happens to the earth will affect us all; society must consider the impact of its decisions on those who will be born seven generations in the future and beyond.”

– Mike Lickers, Executive Director, Ghost River Rediscovery

“The Alberta government is giving Albertans more say in how we look after our natural heritage. Effective environmental education is essential to help citizens understand the issues surrounding our natural environment, and to act accordingly.”

– John Kristensen, Assistant Deputy Minister, Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation, and Culture

What are the Potential Benefits?

Improved health. Human health is better protected as Albertans learn to make informed choices as consumers, and reduce or eliminate the contamination of our air, food, and water.

Sustainable development. Alberta moves in the direction of truly sustainable development, developing its natural resources while not spending its ‘natural capital.’

Stronger workforce. Our workforce becomes more knowledgeable about the environment and its links to economy and society, and implements sustainable practices in the workplace.

A Rich Legacy, But We Can Do More

Over 50 organizations create and deliver some kind of environmental education service in Alberta, and several national environmental education organizations are based here – BUT their efforts are often disjointed, fail to change behaviours, or lack coordination.

Corporations and foundations offer funding, BUT few resources are committed to evaluating and improving programs, and funds are not always directed where they are needed most.

A Vision for Alberta

The process has begun. Through a series of Summits on Environmental Education, Alberta stakeholders have expressed their vision of a province in which environmental education plays a key role in helping us keep our high quality of life. An increasing sense of urgency about the environment means we need to

Protection of nature. Alberta’s natural heritage is protected as we better understand and appreciate the things nature gives us.

“Anyone interested in the health of Albertans should first look at the health of our environment and the quality of our air and water. We have not made healthy ecosystems a priority, and as a result human health is suffering.”

– Dr. Gerry Duggleby, Alberta physician

Schools recognize the importance of environmental education and try to do it – BUT declining budgets, lack of curriculum fit, liability concerns, increasing classroom size, and lack of knowledge make it difficult for teachers to fit it in.

... stakeholders such as businesses, non-profits, schools, governments, the public and the media have the power to teach us about the environment and how to deal with the issues affecting our future on this planet. BUT barriers like these can prevent effective environmental education.

adopt a variety of approaches and audiences – not just for children, and not just in schools. This vision requires the entire community to work together, creating a culture of stewardship that improves the quality of our environment while maintaining a healthy economy and a vibrant society.

Where does environmental education take place?

Formal environmental education is linked with institutions of learning (schools, colleges, and universities). For example, an Edmonton grade four class visits a landfill, learns about waste, and creates a recycling program in their school.

Non-formal environmental education is an organized educational activity outside the formal system (community education, youth programs, corporate training, nature interpretation). For example, the City of Calgary uses social marketing techniques to convince residents to conserve water.

Informal environmental education is the life-long process by which people learn from everyday experiences (media, websites, interactions with other people, etc). For example, a radio interview featuring different stakeholders gives a balanced understanding of the environmental impacts of oil sands development.

“Kids hear a lot about climate change, endangered species, and other environmental problems. Our schools need to ensure that a good education includes appreciation of nature and environmental citizenship. If we don’t teach our students how to look after the earth – their home – then we will have failed them.”

– Pat Worthington, Principal, Ralph McCall School, Airdrie



The Next Step

Making Environmental Education “Second Nature” in Alberta

Recently hundreds of Albertans, representing over 140 environmental education stakeholder groups, met to identify opportunities to advance environmental education. Together they forged a comprehensive plan that shows how government, businesses, schools, non-profits, and citizens can work together to advance environmental education for all those who live, work, play, and learn in Alberta.

A Framework to Advance Environmental Education in Alberta makes connections between environmental education activities, outputs, and outcomes. To accomplish this shared vision, **we need your help.**

Only through the leadership of many sectors of society will environmental education move from extra-curricular to mainstream, from ‘side of desk’ to core business, from outputs to outcomes, from disconnected to synergistic – and from isolated learning events to integrated life-long learning that creates a culture of environmental stewardship.

Find out how you can make a difference.

Visit the following website where you can view the plan, learn about key events and timelines, give us your feedback, and get involved.

www.abcee.org/framework

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For more information contact:

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ACEE Alberta Council for
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ADVANCING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN ALBERTA

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“Peer-reviewed research has shown that students who learn using the environment as an integrating context do better academically, behave more responsibly, and graduate better prepared for the job market.”

– Dr. Gerald Lieberman

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