



"Words from the Woods"

By:
Jean M. Wallace
Academic Director and CEO

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Green Woods Charter School—Leaving No Child Behind or Inside

Earlier last month the U.S. House of Representatives, by a vote of 293 to 109, passed The No Child Left Inside Act (H.R. 3036). The bill, as approved by the House,

would authorize new spending on environmental education and provide incentives to states to develop plans to enhance environmental literacy. The federal funding could also be used by states to train teachers and to create environmental programs.

Once again, it seems that Green Woods' teachers and our educational program are way ahead of the curve.

Since August of 2004, the GWCS instructional team has focused all of our attention on building a solid academic foundation rooted in the core concepts outlined in the Environment and Ecology standards. Cemented in this foundation was our collective belief that children learn best when information is presented to them multiple times and in multiple ways.

Time and time again research has proven that education that uses the environment as a focus can advance overall academic performance in science as well as non-science areas.

Ninety percent—90%! of our 4th grade students scored Proficient or Advanced on this test. Eighty-five percent of those students scored in the Advanced category. Incredible!

Our 8th grade students did remarkable in this assessment, as well. Over 80% of our students scored Proficient or Advanced.

The statewide scores have yet to be released, but PDE has assured me that our scores are well above the state average. PDE is very proud of our efforts.

The No Child Left Inside Act

was generated from a grassroots effort and supported by government leaders who expressed concern about whether we are losing our competitive edge in science. Our representatives in the House believe that young people are less interested in science and girls, especially, have been singled out as being least interested in pursuing science careers. Ha! These leaders have obviously never met or talked with our Green Woods students!!

For over three years we have put our faith and trust in this research as well as in our own beliefs, expertise and training.

Our efforts were realized when the results came in from the first-ever PSSA in Science which was administered, statewide, to 4th and 8th grade students last spring by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). The test results were released last week and our scores are phenomenal!!!



Chris Lehmann, Principal of Science Leadership Academy, has commented to me many times about how well prepared our students are (girls and boys) for the strong science focus at SLA. SLA is a “special admission” high school that partners with the Franklin Institute and Drexel University. This will be the fourth year that students from Green Woods will apply to SLA for admission. In addition to SLA, our students are selected to attend schools such as Central, St. Joseph’s Prep, and LaSalle College High School.

For several decades, environmental education has been a part of instruction in America’s schools. Responding to the need to improve student achievement and prepare students for the 21st century economy, schools throughout the nation have offered some peripheral form of environmental education.

Thankfully, Pennsylvania has been a true leader in this field as we are the only state in the nation to develop a specific set of standards for Environment and Ecology and then to assess student learning based on those rigorous standards. While some might suggest that environmental science is not “real science” our PSSA Science results leave little room for doubt or debate.

According to the National Environmental Education Training Foundation (NEETF) at a time when the nation needs an environmentally literate citizenry, many schools are being forced to eliminate environmental education programs altogether. Fewer students are able to take part in related classroom instruction and outdoor learning. State and local administrators and teachers point to two reasons for this disturbing shift: the unintended consequences of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and a lack of funding for these programs.

Many elementary schools, in particular, have abandoned environmental education, and science instruction in general, in order to invest time and resources in math and reading. In the classroom, NCLB has been the reason public school teachers and administrators often give to bypass science and other subject areas when they do not appear to relate directly to state tests. Beyond the classroom, teachers have to give up valuable, hands-on field investigations rather than take time away from test-

related instruction. As you know, this is not the case at Green Woods where environmental science concepts are not placed on the periphery, but rather infused throughout our entire curriculum.

If passed by the Senate, the funding allocated under No Child Left Inside will create an environmental education grant program for the improvement and advancement of environmental education. This grant program will also support the dissemination of proven environmental educational models and the development of new state or national financing sources for environmental education.

A successful outcome to this legislation will, hopefully, mean additional funding for Green Woods through our ongoing partnership with the PDE.

Depletion of our natural resources, air and water pollution, and other environmental challenges are ongoing and complex issues that threaten our own human health, economic development, and national security. Finding wide-spread agreement about the specific steps we need to take to solve these problems is difficult. Clearly

the passage of No Child Left Inside is one giant step in the right direction. Please contact your Senate leaders. Tell them about the success at Green Woods. Ask for their support of No Child Left Inside!

As our Senate deliberates this important piece of legislation, rest assured that our rigorous, integrated environmental program will continue, regardless of the outcome of NCLI. We are adamant in our resolve, confident in our approach to teaching and learning, and we are determined to build on our success.

Now and in the future, Green Woods Charter School students will not only ace the test, but they will leave us having the knowledge and skills necessary to work together and address the many complex issues facing our nation and the world.

Our high quality in-school instruction, coupled with the excellent outdoor experiences supported by our Schuylkill Center partners, will ensure that our students are neither left behind nor left inside.

