

A BRIEF HISTORY OF K-12 ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY IN CA

*"There's a demand, there's an interest, and I encourage all teachers to explore and look for ways they can help their students live in the world as adults by improving their environmental literacy."
- Dr. Gerald Lieberman*

2003

Assembly Bill 1548 (later refined with AB 1721 in 2005) launched the Education and the Environment Initiative (EEI). The creation of this multi-agency partnership was to facilitate the development of the Environmental Principles & Concepts (EP&Cs), the big ideas about the environment that every student should know, and to complement existing standards and the EEI Curriculum.



2004

The State Board of Education approved the EP&Cs. The EP&Cs became the foundation of environmental content taught to foster environmentally literate students.

2010

The EEI curriculum was completed and approved by the State Board of Education, becoming the first environmental curriculum to be formally adopted by the State of California. The curriculum is regarded as suitable substitute for the more standardized textbooks.



2013

California adopted the Next Generation Science Standards. It was fifteen years since science standards were revised. This move created the opportunity to construct new curriculum frameworks which tie in the EP&Cs.

2014

Former State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Torlakson, launched a taskforce to write a Blueprint for Environmental Literacy. Then, only 13% of Californian schools had integrated environmental learning into their curricula.

2015

California published its Environmental Literacy Plan, A Blueprint for Environmental Literacy, under the guidance of former State Superintendent for Public Instruction Tom Torlakson and his Environmental Literacy Task Force. The Blueprint was set to position environmental literacy central to the education of every child in California and essential to achieving the ambitious vision of the Next Generation Science Standards and the Common Core State Standards.

2016

Torlakson formed a steering committee, which is now operating as the California Environmental Literacy Initiative (CAELI). Led by Ten Strands, members of CAELI bring together a wide range of expertise and resources in education, environment and the community.

The EP&Cs were included in the California Science Test Blueprint and integrated into the assessment of student progress in the 5th and 8th grades, as well as in high school. The EP&Cs were also integrated into state curriculum frameworks, leading with Science and History-Social Science.

On a national scale, the No Child Left Inside (NCLI) Act and Every Student Succeeds Act were passed. Funding for environmental education was made more explicitly eligible and available.

San Francisco was the first district (and county) to hire a dedicated Environmental Literacy Coordinator. San Mateo, Santa Cruz, San Joaquin, Santa Clara, San Diego, and Orange counties followed in subsequent years. Most recently Solano county has made a similar commitment.

A BRIEF HISTORY CONTINUED...

2018

Sponsored by Ten Strands, Senate Bill 720 (Allen) codified California's EP&Cs into the California Education Code as the state's definition of environmental literacy. The bill included environmental justice and climate change in the list of covered topics. This legislation supports the ongoing work to ensure that all public-school students have access to high-quality environmental education programs. Two months later, the State Board of Education approved 29 K-8 science programs that incorporate the EP&Cs.

2019

The EP&Cs were integrated into the state's Health Framework. This was the third curriculum framework in California that integrated the EP&Cs.

2020

The State Seal of Civic Engagement was announced. It is awarded to students who demonstrate excellence in civic learning, participation in civics-related projects, contributions to their community, and an understanding of the United States Constitution, the California Constitution, and the American democratic system.

The EP&Cs were integrated into the Arts Framework.



As we move into 2021, there's much to look forward to. There is a growing need to bring students out of the classroom and recognize the real-world issues happening within their community and beyond. California has 350,000 public school teachers, 6.2 million K-12 students, and over 1,000 school districts.

As Dr. Lieberman said, "it's like moving a giant ship", and it looks like the ship is on the move!



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environmental literacy, community action