



*Wolf Ridge
Environmental Learning Center*

K-12 Community Needs Assessment Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gather information from community members within the Minnesota Lake Superior Coastal Program area regarding their thoughts and ideas pertaining to coastal zone resources and environmental education (EE). The community meetings and surveys took place during November 2007. Information from these surveys and meetings will be used to help develop future projects for schools and funding priorities to address those identified educational needs.

Community input meetings were held in four representative communities within the coastal zone. Two were held in the city of Duluth (Ordean Middle School and Kenwood Edison School), one was held in a smaller community near Duluth (Hermantown Elementary and Middle School) and one was held in a small rural community along the North Shore (William Kelley School in Silver Bay). Parent Teacher Organizations from schools identified in the Minnesota Lake Superior Coastal Zone agreed to serve as hosts for these input meetings. Four community meetings were held with a total of 36 individuals in attendance (28 parents, three administrators, and five teachers, two from grades K-2 and three from grades 3-5). The results from the meeting discussions and surveys are provided in this document.

Environmental Education Needs

Environmental Education Content Knowledge: All of these content areas are important components of environmental education. Please rate the following content areas in terms of which areas you would like to see **more or less** of for students at your school.

Topic	Rank
General environmental issues (climate change, acid rain, etc.)	4.19
Contemporary interactions of humans upon natural resources (forestry, recreation, development, mining, etc.)	4.19
Outdoor recreation (x-c skiing, hiking, etc.)	4.06
Wildlife	4.03
Earth Sciences (geology, watershed, etc.)	4.00
Aquatic ecosystems	3.94
Personal growth and team building	3.91
Physical sciences (weather, chemistry, etc.)	3.86
Specific coastal resource management issues (fisheries, forestry, development, etc.)	3.85
Historical interactions of human culture(s) upon natural resources (fur trade, logging, mining, etc.)	3.64
Birds	3.60

Less (1)-More(5)

Environmental Education Resources: All of these resources can be important to achieving the goals of environmental education. Please rate the following resources in terms of which areas you would like to see **more or less** of for students at your school.

Less(1)-More(5)

EE Resource Needs	Rank
Field trip opportunities	4.61
Funding for EE activities & resources	4.47
Speakers	4.31
Student clubs	4.06
EE professional development & training	4.00
Outdoor school site	4.00
EE curriculum resources & supplies	3.91
Development of teacher networks	3.78
Meetings with colleagues to share, network, & learn	3.71
Lesson plans and written curriculum ideas	3.67
Mailings regarding EE information & opportunities	3.47

Community Meeting Discussion Questions

Environmental Education at your school

- 1) *To what extent do you agree with the level of environmental education at your school? Why or why not?*

While discussion groups stated that environmental education is being taught within the schools, many individuals responded with a desire to have better integration of environmental education within other subject areas. Some advocated for collaboration time for teachers to develop methods for integrating environmental education into their existing curriculum. Others mentioned the importance of providing professional development time to learn new EE curriculum. Some also suggested the creation of an Environmental Education Specialist position that would help teachers find and use EE resources in their classes. This specialist position could help teach EE to students as well.

- a) *Are teachers comfortable teaching environmental education?*

Most discussion groups stated that some of the teachers at their schools were comfortable teaching environmental education. Typically, those that were had the interest in the area and thus, resulted in them teaching EE in their classrooms. For those that did not have an particular interest, EE was not necessarily being taught. Also, some stated that with current budget and time constraints, many of their teachers are doing a good job teaching EE. Some individuals expressed concerns over the alignment of graduation standards with environmental education and that this issue should be addressed as well.

- b) *What types of activities/instruction is your school doing?*

Several of the discussion groups stated a variety of different field trip opportunities that their students participate in during the school year. Also, some individuals mentioned school-wide assemblies that focused on environmental education themes (i.e. Will Steger's Global Warming 101). Some of the discussion groups mentioned that their schools have a school forest and many of their students are frequently outside on site

learning about the environment. They mentioned that this is a good way for students to develop a sense of place.

- 2) *Where would you like to see environmental education at your school occur?*
a) *Should it be field based?*

Many of the discussion groups advocated for more and repeated opportunities for students to take field trips and get to have real-world experiences outside of the classroom. These experiences would help reinforce prior learning at younger age and help meet the needs of a variety of learning styles. Some mentioned that we have so many great natural resources in our region that students should have the opportunity to experience. They also emphasized the value of talking with local experts to help provide students with a better understanding of the importance of many different aspects of the environment.

- b) *Should it occur on site?*

While some schools mentioned the use of their school forest, others noted that if EE were to occur on site, it would need to be integrated into the existing curriculum. Others mentioned that it would need to fit within the structure of the school day with pre-activities in the classrooms, an all school assembly, and then post-activities in the classroom. Others described the use of after school clubs or parent nights that could focus on environmental education.

- c) *Should it be integrated with the current curriculum?*

Several of the discussion groups emphasized the need for integrating EE into the existing curriculum. This could be accomplished by providing professional development time for teacher to plan and collaborate with one another. Some also mentioned that by integrating it into the current curricula, it could address some of the existing academic content standards.

- 3) *Based upon your feedback, how prepared is your school and its teachers to accomplish this goal?*

Several of the discussion groups mentioned that given current circumstances, they were somewhat prepared to teach environmental education at their schools. However, many individuals described the need to provide funding for students to participate in field based learning opportunities as well as bring in guest speakers and local experts to teach about the environment. Several individuals mentioned the need for class sets of field guides, books and other printed resources.

Potential Barriers to Environmental Education

- 4) *What are some **barriers to teaching environmental education** in your school?*

As mentioned above, several of the discussion groups identified that funding and time were two major barriers to teaching environmental education at their schools. Additional funding could be used to address some of these other barriers in a variety of ways. Several individuals mentioned that time served as a barrier for teachers to find existing resources (printed curricula, field trips, guest speakers, grant monies, etc.) that would help them incorporate EE into their teaching. Time also served as a barrier to allowing adequate opportunities for teachers to collaborate with one another to share ideas and resources.

5) *What direction do you think should be taken to help remove these barriers and accomplish your identified goals for environmental education at your school?*

Several discussion groups commented on the need to fund resource personnel that could help find EE resources that teachers need and help coordinate EE within the school. These personnel could come from a variety of sources, including paid specialist positions, trained volunteers, Americorps Staff, etc. Many individuals also mentioned that they would like to see more hands-on resources for students to use coupled with training for teachers that will help them incorporate these resources into their curriculum. Others mentioned that professional development for teachers in specific areas of EE might be helpful in attaining their goals. Other individuals called for bringing in more local experts into the classroom to teach students about different aspects of the environment. Several people commented on the need to fund transportation costs to get students to the field-based sites that help them learn about the environment.



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Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program is a voluntary federal-state partnership dedicated to the comprehensive management of our coastal resources. The Program provides technical and financial resources for the local community, by bringing federal dollars into Minnesota for the Lake Superior coastal area.

The Coastal Program's goal is to preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, restore or enhance coastal resources along Minnesota's North Shore of Lake Superior. Our annual Grant program is an important funding source for local communities to help them balance protection of coastal resources with providing places for people to live, work, and play.

