



*Commonwealth of Virginia*  
*Office of the Governor*

## *Executive Order*

**NUMBER FORTY TWO (2015)**

### **ESTABLISHING THE VIRGINIA ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY CHALLENGE**

#### **Importance of the Issue**

Virginia's natural resources and its environment are among the Commonwealth's most important assets. Our fields, forests, streams, and rivers help to grow food, and ensure that we have clean air and water. The Virginia Constitution details our responsibility to conserve and protect these resources, saying in part, "To the end that the people have clean air, pure water, and the use and enjoyment for recreation of adequate public lands, waters, and other natural resources, it shall be the policy of the Commonwealth to conserve, develop, and utilize its natural resources, its public lands, and its historical sites and buildings."

An educated population who understand the value of our environment is crucial to the protection of our natural resources. Future generations should be prepared to continue the important work of conservation. Meaningful outdoor experiences and field investigations allow students to learn science and other subjects through their observations of and interactions with nature. School sustainability programs can allow students to learn about the fundamental scientific mechanisms that make it possible to reduce the impact of school facilities on the environment. The teaching and learning of environmental and sustainability concepts will ensure that today's students will have the knowledge and skills to be ready to take up the mantle tomorrow. Our ultimate goal is to develop and nurture a future environmentally literate citizenry who will make informed decisions concerning the environment, and will develop the propensity to act on those decisions to improve the well-being of other individuals, societies, and the global environment.

Today, environmental literacy is advocated and promoted by state agencies, universities and non-governmental organizations through the Virginia Resource Use Education Council. Schools across the Commonwealth are learning more about environmental challenges and students are demonstrating that they are conserving natural resources and protecting the environment in their communities in significant ways. Students are learning to address complex issues, from science, economics and policy issues to cultural and global perspectives. Through the outdoor inquiry approach, students are becoming more engaged in learning, gaining content knowledge in all subject areas, and increasing awareness about individual actions they can take to restore the health of the natural environment.

This Executive Order is designed to complement and support the efforts of the Virginia Resource Use Education Council by establishing my long term vision for the Commonwealth that: 1) Virginia students graduate with the knowledge and skills to make informed environmental decisions; 2) educators responsible for instruction about or in the environment have access to sustained professional development opportunities, tools, and resources that support efforts to provide students with high quality environmental education; and 3) Virginia schools maintain their buildings, grounds, and operations to support positive environmental and human health outcomes.

### **Initiative**

Accordingly, by virtue of the authority vested in me as Governor under Article V of the Constitution of Virginia and under the laws of the Commonwealth, and subject to my continuing and ultimate authority and responsibility to act in such matters, I hereby create the Virginia Environmental Literacy Challenge. This challenge will involve schools at the classroom- and school division-levels. At the classroom level, individual teachers will be encouraged and supported as they engage their students in innovative learning and programs, which ultimately support environmental literacy. At the school division level, the challenge gives school divisions a pathway to engage and commit to taking a systemic approach to the promotion and improvement of environmental literacy.

This Executive Order requires state agencies participating in the Virginia Resource Use Education Council to take the following immediate actions:

1. Establish the Conservation Classroom Challenge. In recognition of the fact that classroom teachers are often the driving force behind environmental literacy and sustainability efforts, this classroom-level challenge highlights and will support the efforts of classroom teachers. The Conservation Classroom Challenge will provide educators with entry-level resources to introduce students to environmental concepts and actions. Teachers will be recognized for engaging their students in school-sustainability efforts and for participating in field investigations that connect to educational goals contained within the Standards of Learning.

Implementation: State education and natural resource agencies participating in the Virginia Resource Use Education Council shall:

- i. develop classroom level challenges for various grade levels that either: 1) engage students reducing the impact of their school's facilities on their local watershed, environment, and human health, or 2) engage students in meaningful outdoor experiences that increase their environmental literacy;
  - ii. develop specific challenges by working with nongovernmental partner organizations that are engaged in the promotion of environmental literacy;
  - iii. combine specific challenges from partner organizations and make them available to educators;
  - iv. establish an online tool for educators to self-report completion of these challenges; and,
  - v. promote the Conservation Classroom Challenge through websites, communications to school divisions, and information distributed to outside stakeholders.
2. Establish the Environmental Literacy Challenge for Systemic Sustainability (ELCSS). The best way to make a long-lasting impact on environmental literacy in the Commonwealth's schools is to take a systemic approach. Accordingly, ELCSS is designed to recognize and

encourage those school divisions that want to make a significant commitment to environmental literacy.

Implementation: State education and natural resource agencies participating in the Virginia Resource Use Education Council shall:

- i. establish criteria for meeting this voluntary challenge( in consultation with outside partner organizations), including but not limited to the following:
  1. developing a systemic plan for environmental literacy that identifies environmental literacy programs and learning opportunities at each grade level;
  2. identifying an environmental literacy lead to participate in regional environmental literacy training or conferences to be led by state agencies and nongovernmental partner organizations, to promote and support environmental literacy learning within the division, identify curricular connections, promote best practices, build partnerships, and design professional development;
  3. engaging teachers in trainings and professional development opportunities designed to improve their ability to use the environment as a context for learning in and out of the classroom;
  4. committing to provide significant numbers of student opportunities to participate in field-based environmental investigations and meaningful outdoor experiences designed to improve environmental literacy;
  5. providing environmental leadership training to principals and administrators; and,
  6. dedicating existing local and state funding or seeking outside funding partners for environmentally based activities in the public and private sectors;
- ii. develop an application for school divisions to demonstrate their execution of the practices identified above;
- iii. review applications on an ongoing basis and determine which divisions have completed the challenge;
- iv. promote the Environmental Literacy Challenge for Systemic Sustainability through their websites, communications to school divisions, and information distributed to outside stakeholders; and,
- v. coordinate with outside partners participating in the Virginia Resource Use Education Council to provide a list of potential outside funding partners to school divisions seeking to complete the Environmental Literacy Challenge for Systemic Sustainability.

### **Effective Date of the Executive Order**

This Executive Order shall become effective upon its signing and shall remain in full force and effect unless amended or rescinded by further executive order.

Given under my hand and under the Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia this 22nd Day of April, 2015.



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Terence R. McAuliffe, Governor

Attest:

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Levar M. Stoney, Secretary of the Commonwealth