

IN OUR OPINION

Teach kids about the great outdoors

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There's at least one proposal in the pending No Child Left Behind bill that Congress should have no quarrel with.

An aptly titled plan, No Child Left Inside would finally raise the profile of environmental education in the nation's classrooms. The bill would grant states \$100 million for five years to help schools train teachers, design environmentally themed curricula, and increase opportunities for students to "directly experience nature."

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This attempt to shine an overdue spotlight on environmental literacy in no way diminishes or compromises NCLB's focus on reading, math and writing proficiency standards. The draft of the new NCLB act remains focused on standards to help American students close the gaps in these key subject areas and to hold the nation's schools accountable for students' progress or the lack thereof.

As the draft is written, environmental education would essentially be an elective opportunity for schools, but one endorsed by the federal government and accompanied by a small pot of funding. Protecting environmental education in whatever final draft of the new NCLB act is worked out would be giant step forward.


Students are lucky to gain a rudimentary knowledge of issues such as conservation, greenhouse gases and climate change, issues that are rapidly changing the world around them. Teaching students to understand the impact just might entice some of them to help look for solutions later in life.

Congress deserves credit for at least trying to back environmental education and certainly for recognizing the importance of providing funding. Schools have to meet so many unfunded mandates, the last thing they need added to their agendas is another well-meaning but unfunded idea.

So long as leaders can keep the funding attached, Congress should work hard to ensure environmental education gets a higher profile in the nation's schools and in the law.

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