S T A T E O F N E W Y O R K

4561

2009-2010 Regular Sessions

I N S E N A T E

April 24, 2009

Introduced by Sen. OPPENHEIMER -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Environmental Conservation

AN ACT establishing the New York state environmental sustainability education act

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, REPRESENTED IN SENATE AND ASSEMBLY, DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "New York State Environmental Sustainability Education Act".

S 2. Legislative findings. The legislature finds and declares that:

1. In recognition of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), as declared at the Johannesburg Summit of 2002, New York state deems it imperative to develop and implement an educational program geared towards improving the capacity of people to address environmental issues in the 21st century.

2. Our ability to fulfill our responsibility to equip New York's citizens with the required knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to create a sustainable future and enhance our quality of life have never been more critical.

3. More than any other time in recent history, New York's citizens have the capacity to dramatically affect their natural environment, and mitigate and possibly reverse our society's negative impact on our natural surroundings.

4. New technologies and research have availed unparalleled opportunities for us to develop and protect resources in a manner that enables people to meet current needs, while also providing that future generations can meet future needs.

5. To successfully confront these environmental concerns and sensitivities, we must put forth a vision of education that seeks to empower people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating a sustainable future.

EXPLANATION--Matter in ITALICS (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [ ] is old law to be omitted.

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S 3. Definitions. For the purposes of this act, the following words shall have the following meanings:

1. "Sustainability" shall mean development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Development that occurs in such a way ensures the capacity of the natural environment to meet present and future needs.

2. "Education for sustainability" (EFS) means to promote an understanding of the interconnectedness of environment, economy and society. EFS links this understanding with inquiry and action to help students build a healthy future for their communities and for the planet. EFS fosters the ability to integrate scientific, economic and social knowledge and makes education more pertinent to the changing world by moving beyond institutional boundaries of the disciplines and their content bias. EFS helps students identify their role in local communities and suggests ways to get involved. EFS shall consist of educational activities and training activities involving elementary and secondary students (K-12), as such terms are defined in the education law and by environmental education personnel.

S 4. Legislative directives and programs.

1. The department of education is hereby required to establish a model program to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of a comprehensive environmental sustainability education program to be made available to public schools, and assist them in developing curricula and training staff to adequately prepare students to participate as active and involved citizens in building a sustainable future.

2. The program shall be developed by the department of education, in conjunction with the department of environmental conservation, and modeled to promote and enhance an understanding of the concepts of sustainability and improve understanding of the natural and built environment, and the relationships between humans and the environment, including local and global aspects of environmental problems.

3. The education for sustainability program shall be constructed in line with the following principles:

a. A program that fosters clear awareness of, and concern for, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in all regions of New York, the United States and the world.

b. One that endorses an approach to teaching and learning that integrates the goals and benefits of conservation, social justice, renewable energy, cultural diversity and sustainable development into a vision for social improvement.

c. One that ensures that students appreciate and respect the intrinsic value of the whole environment, and develop an ethic of personal responsibility and stewardship towards all aspects of the environment.

d. One that encourages students to participate as active and involved citizens in building a sustainable future.

e. One that fosters appropriate applications of technology that help solve, not create, problems.

4. The sustainability education program shall include, but not be limited to, the following specific features:

a. The program shall be designed and tailored appropriately to suit all age groups covered by the K-12 state curriculum and the department shall design lesson plans and teaching strategies that are age appropriate. The department of education shall reserve the right to include or omit certain specified program requirements (listed below in this subdivision) when tailoring the principles of sustainability to be taught at

each grade level, depending on the suitability of the lesson's instruction at each grade interval.

b. The program shall specifically enumerate the key topic/issue areas to be studied, and shall integrate environmental education for sustainability issues and topics into specific key learning areas/subjects located within the broader curriculum framework such as creative arts, English, health and physical education, languages, mathematics and economics, science and geography, history and studies of society, environment and technology. The principles of sustainability shall be presented and integrated wherever appropriate.

c. The program shall promote education for sustainable development 'perspectives' across learning areas to include cross-curricular units, complementary teaching across several subjects, special projects, performances, excursions, and visiting experts. The program may also provide for collaborative projects with other schools (locally and globally) to promote equity, inclusivity, and respect for all people.

d. The program shall raise awareness of the nature and function of ecological, social, economic and political systems and how they are interrelated in addressing environmental and sustainability issues.

e. The program shall underscore the impact that people, business, industry and government have on environments and how the environment shapes human activities, with particular reference to unique and distinctive New York heritage traditions and settings, connecting past, present, and future perspectives and/or impacts.

f. The program shall emphasize the role of cultural, socioeconomic and political systems in environmental decision-making.

g. The program shall reinforce the value of innovative technologies with the aim to produce places, products and services in a way that reduces use of non-renewable resources, minimizes environmental impact, relates people with the natural environment, and conveys the importance of creating and maintaining a sustainable lifestyle.

h. The program shall include assessment strategies that emphasize problem-solving, teamwork, decision-making, holistic thinking, clarifying and analyzing values and opportunities for action, in order to gauge and improve the effectiveness and relevance of the program.

S 5. This act shall take effect immediately.