

1437

2015-2016 Regular Sessions

I N   S E N A T E

January 12, 2015

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Introduced by Sen. PARKER -- 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 ASSEM-  
BLY, DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

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

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

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

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

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

17    4. New technologies and research have availed unparalleled opportu-  
18    nities for us to develop and protect resources in a manner that enables  
19    people to meet current needs, while also providing that future gener-  
20    ations can meet future needs.

21    5. To successfully confront these environmental concerns and sensitiv-  
22    ities, we must put forth a vision of education that seeks to empower  
23    people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating a sustainable  
24    future.

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

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

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

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

19 S 4. Legislative directives and programs. 1. The department of educa-  
20 tion is hereby required to establish a model program to guide the devel-  
21 opment, implementation and evaluation of a comprehensive environmental  
22 sustainability education program to be made available to public schools,  
23 and assist them in developing curricula and training staff to adequately  
24 prepare students to participate as active and involved citizens in  
25 building a sustainable future.

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

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

34 a. A program that fosters clear awareness of, and concern for, econom-  
35 ic, social, political and ecological interdependence in all regions of  
36 New York, the United States and the world.

37 b. One that endorses an approach to teaching and learning that inte-  
38 grates the goals and benefits of conservation, social justice, renewable  
39 energy, cultural diversity and sustainable development into a vision for  
40 social improvement.

41 c. One that ensures that students appreciate and respect the intrinsic  
42 value of the whole environment, and develop an ethic of personal respon-  
43 sibility and stewardship towards all aspects of the environment.

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

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

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

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

1 each grade level, depending on the suitability of the lesson's instruc-  
2 tion at each grade interval.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

36 S 5. This act shall take effect immediately.