



Fact Sheet: Neighborhood Environment Education Project (NEEP)

The Neighborhood Environmental Education Project (NEEP) at the Urban Ecology Center is the cornerstone program in a multi-pronged approach to keep our parks safe, teach neighborhood kids about the natural world and improve the neighborhoods in which the Center operates.

Young people today spend an increasing amount of time confined indoors while green spaces in and around cities are under-used and often abused. The increased lack of exposure to nature and outdoor time during childhood has adverse affects on development, environmentally sound behavior and retaining science concepts.

The Neighborhood Environmental Education Project combats these problems by offering local K-12 schools a program for students to enjoy and learn from the forests and wetlands in their own neighborhoods. Students receive high-quality science and environmental education in the 15-acre natural area along the Milwaukee River in Riverside Park and in the 125-acre Washington Park. Since most of these schools have no natural land of their own, the Urban Ecology Center becomes their permanent outdoor laboratory.

The Urban Ecology Center contracts with entire schools, as opposed to just a single class, to work consistently with groups of students year after year. In this way, NEEP is designed to establish lasting relationships with children by partnering with neighborhood schools. During multiple visits throughout the year, students become familiar with the park under the guidance of an experienced environmental educator and build upon science concepts introduced in the classroom.

Since the program's inception, it has grown from serving 11 schools out of a double-wide trailer to serving 44 schools in two locations in the 2009-2010 school year. Some other numbers about the program:

- **40+** schools are eligible to participate in NEEP. NEEP serves schools within a two-mile radius of each of the UEC locations to ensure that the Center is in walking distance of low-income area families who may not have access to a car.
- **85%** of NEEP students are on the National School Lunch Program, which provides free or reduced lunches to those living below the poverty line. Approximately 75 percent of this population

is African-American, 15 percent is Latino, 5 percent is Asian and less than 5 percent is Caucasian or other races.

- UEC maintains a **1:14** teacher/student ratio in its programming. To maintain this ratio, volunteer educators help when needed.
- **5 to 10** programs, designed to meet grade-specific learning goals, are available to teachers. The Milwaukee Public Schools topical framework and Wisconsin Model for Academic Standards in Science and Environment Education were used to develop the programs. Teachers also have the option to have the Center teaching team design a program around specific learning goals.
- Participating schools receive **24** half-day field trips throughout the four seasons. Consistent contact is maintained through trips to the UEC year after year.
- **15** passengers fit on each of the UEC's minibuses, which provide transportation to and from the Center. Learning begins the moment students board the bus; UEC teachers are the bus drivers and programs include a bus-ride activity.
- Partnering schools pay **\$4,000** per year to participate in NEEP. The actual cost of the program is \$9,000. Foundations and businesses fund the remaining \$5,000.
- The number of schools served by NEEP has increased **3times** between 2003 and 2006.
- Participation in weekend programming has increased **100%**, which is largely because of the increased number of participating schools.
- The Center hosted **19,000** educational visits through the NEEP program in 2008-'09.

For more information about NEEP, contact Beth Fetterley, Director of Education and Strategic Planning, at bfetterley@urbanecologycenter.org or (414) 964-8505.

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