



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 effects on development, environmentally sound behavior and retaining science concepts. “Our senses are the scouts of our creativity. Nature stimulates the senses and invites creativity through the complexity of possibilities for play and learning and work” (Richard Louv, 2016).

The Neighborhood Environmental Education Project nurtures an appreciation for the natural world 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, along the Hank Arron Trail and in Three Bridges Park at our Menomonee Valley location, 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 62 schools in three locations in the 2016-2017 school year. Some other numbers about the program:

- 66+ 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.

- Approximately 55 percent of this population is African-American, 25 percent is Hispanic, 14 percent is Caucasian. 6 percent is Asian and less than 1 percent is other races.
- UEC maintains a 1:14 teacher/student ratio in its programming. To maintain this ratio, volunteer educators help when needed.
- 86 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 \$4,600 per year to participate in NEEP. The actual cost of the program is \$10,000. Foundations and businesses fund the remaining \$5,400.
- The Center hosted 30,000 educational visits through the NEEP program in 2015-'16.
- Scholarship priority is given to students attending our 2016-17 NEEP partner schools.

To find out more about why the Urban Ecology Center is more than just a field trip site, contact Kirstin Anglea, Environmental Education Manager, (414) 964-8505, or kanglea@urbanecologycenter.org