

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF  
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THE CENTER FOR ECOLITERACY**

**FIELD HEARING ON ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: TEACHING OUR  
CHILDREN TO PRESERVE OUR FUTURE  
BEFORE THE EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY  
EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
APRIL 25, 2008**

My name is Zenobia Barlow. I am cofounder and executive director of the Center for Ecoliteracy, a national nonprofit foundation based in Berkeley, California that is dedicated to education for sustainable living.

I am pleased to submit written testimony before the House Education and Labor Committee, subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education, on "Environmental Education: Teaching Our Children To Preserve Our Future."

I want to thank Chairman Miller and Reps. McKeon, Kildee, and Castle for including much of the No Child Left Inside Act (H.R.3036) in the Education and Labor Committee's staff draft of the NCLB reauthorization bill and respectfully urge them to help achieve passage of the NCLI Act in this Congress. I also applaud them for their leadership in helping to close the achievement gap.

I have been engaged in education for sustainability for more than 17 years, and cofounded the Center for Ecoliteracy in 1995 with systems theorist and author Fritjof Capra (*Tao of Physics, The Turning Point, Web of Life*) and philanthropist and former CEO Peter Buckley.

Since then, the Center has provided financial, intellectual, and practical support to hundreds of schools committed to organizing their curriculum and community around environmental project-based learning, and reached thousands of educators through our active web and publishing programs. We have developed and offer seminars and professional development institutes attended by educators from across the United States and 10 other countries. With support from the California Endowment, the W.K. Kellogg

Foundation and other funders, we also developed the Rethinking School Lunch program, which has been widely adopted to assist schools in improving school lunches and making learning connections between food, health, and the environment in the curriculum.

Through our work, we have repeatedly seen how important it is that young people understand the web of life upon which we are dependent for our well-being. Making connections between what we do as individuals, families, communities, and nations – and the impact on the Earth – is the highest goal of education for the environment. It is also critical to all education that will prepare students for the world in which they will live.

As you know, the No Child Left Behind Act has done just the opposite – significantly narrowing the curriculum and diminishing the role of environmental education. This is a most untimely development with potentially devastating consequences for the future economic and environmental well-being of our nation.

With the rise of environmental problems such as global warming and worldwide food and water shortages, there is today an urgent need to prepare young people to meet the challenges that have already begun to destabilize our society and societies around the globe. There is also a vital need to help them learn what they need to know to create more sustainable societies in the future, societies that better harmonize human needs with those of the natural world upon which we depend.

This essential work can only be accomplished by advancing environmental education in K-12 schools nationwide – education in which experiences in nature are linked to classroom experiences that help students develop the knowledge, values, and skills to understand what they observe in nature. This kind of education also enables students to develop the ability to deal with downstream consequences of individual and community actions and the capacity to care about those who are affected.

The good news is that many school communities are integrating such indoor learning with outdoor experiences while promoting an understanding of the natural world as one interconnected system or biosphere, the web of life that holds all humanity and everything we value.

Now we must put the financial and institutional supports in place that will encourage and enable more educators to do the critical work of preparing America's young people for the environmental challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.