

**Environmental Education in Urban New Jersey:  
A Step Toward Improved Metropolitan Relations and Sustainability**

by  
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Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to identify the most promising approaches for delivering effective environmental education services to urban area populations in New Jersey. Two key factors are taken into consideration in making this assessment. The first is the current organizational structure in New Jersey concerning environmental education, one which has been built by both public and private entities within the state over the past three decades and which has intensified and expanded its activity in recent years. The second factor examined throughout this analysis is the lack of adequate funding for environmental education at the federal, state and local levels and how activities are being managed under these financial constraints.

A proposed statewide environmental education policy is reviewed in depth with special attention to its significance for urban residents. An understanding of this policy's origin and of its implications for future actions in New Jersey is gained by tracing its various stages of development and by identifying not only the players who were most closely involved in its formulation, but also those who were not included in this process.

The challenging task of providing environmental education services to all of the state's diverse communities, both urban and suburban, is framed within the context of improving the human dynamics affecting entire metropolitan areas. The economic, political and social relationships that exist among the inhabitants of central cities and those of the surrounding urban fringe, suburbs and suburban fringe are examined within an environmental context. Considering New Jersey's high level of urbanization, these are relationships that must be addressed in an education program if the state is indeed committed to the goal of environmental sustainability and of creating an environmentally informed and active citizenry.

Despite the fact that the voluntary practice of environmental education and of organizing around environmental issues has existed in the state for many years, the development of an official New Jersey environmental education policy is still in its formative and, one might suspect, malleable stages. Through the efforts of the New Jersey Environmental Education Commission (NJEEC), the legislative foundation for promoting and supporting environmental education is gradually being established, however, the actual implementation of the program is far from being realized. These policy formulators, that is, the members of NJEEC and the government officials to which they make their recommendations, may still be quite responsive to citizen pressure. Possibilities for applying this pressure by means of increased urban, grassroots, political participation is explored in this work.

This investigation aims to evaluate the soundness of the NJEEC policy initiative in its most recent form. A judgment is formed as to whether or not the activities that have been recommended by the Commission, to be carried out over the next five years, would guide the state in a worthwhile direction; that is, can these policy recommendations be significantly improved and, if so, how? In this thesis, I conclude that grassroots organizing within and across urban communities is the best course of action for influencing and accelerating the creation of policy to support environmental education delivery to urban, lower-income, predominantly minority areas of residence in New Jersey. Urban community-based organizations (CBOs) can play a vital role in fostering this type of political participation and, in doing so, provide valuable communication links connecting urban community members to federal, state and local public officials and to suburban community members.