

To Whom It May Concern:

Naturalist education allows students to apply factual scientific knowledge in the greater science lab of the outdoors. However, learning about wildlife and diverse habitats is more than that. It is an opportunity to engage in activities that strengthen social-emotional connections between students and nature. When students learn how to become effective stewards of nature they become better citizens overall. Students feel better about their own place in the world and their ability to protect it. Students learn how communities impact nature and work out ways to interact with nature and sustain it. In order to build the next generation of capable naturalists, rangers, biologists, arborists, firefighters, and technicians we have to ignite a passion for all things WILD within students as young as possible and beyond.

Project Wild allows students to engage in activities with instructors from all arenas --not just in the classroom. It is a program that can be useful in a variety of learning communities such as after school clubs or with metroparks programming. Programs like Project Wild have been around for decades providing new and experienced teachers with tried and true lessons that require guesswork. Teachers like myself, who have been teaching over 20 years, still rely on the same activities from Project Wild. The reasons are very simple. The lessons are simple, effective, and engaging. They require low cost materials and low prep time. Project Wild, in my opinion, is better than any basal curriculum and has stood the test of time. No undergrad education program should be without it. No teacher should ever enter the classroom without having had training in a Wild program. The program is just outstanding for building STEM/STEAM curricular units without much work or hassle. Wild activities can be a springboard into almost any topic and can be used in any lesson plan anywhere.

Teachers have more responsibilities than ever. It could be very easy to skip enriching science and social studies lessons because such lessons are difficult to plan and execute with fidelity. Wild makes learning fun, personalized, and engaging for every student. I, personally, find that students need to be more in nature as it can be a safe place, an oasis of peace. Wild activities are more than just playing. Students feel better after participating. They feel more calm after spending a short amount of time in the field. They trust others a bit more. They feel more confident about interacting with nature. They are less afraid and more curious. Wild learning is like educational meditation. This kind of learning is unique and should be protected and fostered for many generations in the future to experience.

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