



# Back to School: Back Outside!



## Create High Performing Students

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by Kevin J. Coyle  
National Wildlife Federation

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# Back to School: Back Outside!

## How Outdoor Education and Outdoor School Time Create High Performance Students

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

by Kevin J. Coyle, National Wildlife Federation

*In this report, we summarize the available studies on the role of outdoor learning programs and outdoor play time in furthering children's overall education: improving their lifelong learning skills, prospects for career success and school test scores. American parents, educators and school administrators are faced with an unprecedented new educational challenge that is so broad, subtle and pervasive, that it is nearly invisible. They must wake up to the cold reality that American children are now spending an average of seven hours and 38 minutes per day (53*

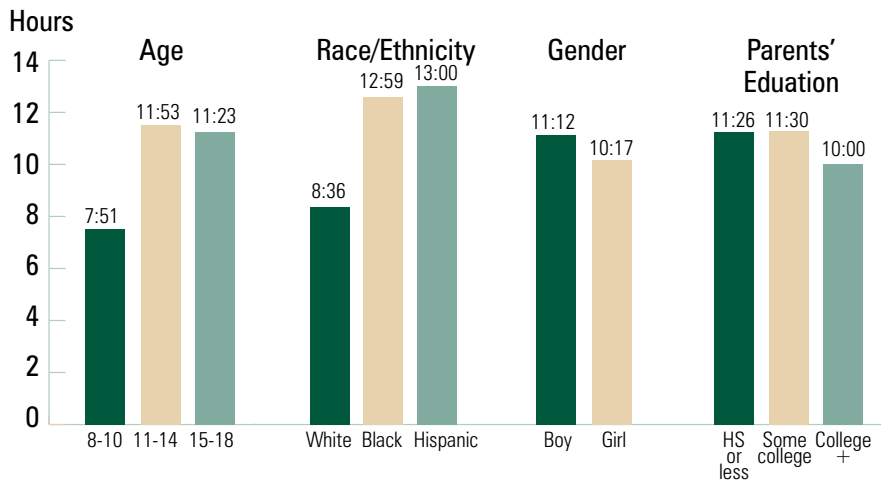
*hours per week) indoors, using electronic media such as television and video games. Regular outdoor time, especially time in natural surroundings, has become just minutes per day and is verging on becoming a thing of the past. This "indoor childhood" trend is an immense and unnecessary drain on our children's long term physical, emotional and educational development.*



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### TOTAL MEDIA EXPOSURE, BY DEMOGRAPHICS

Average amount of total media exposure by:



Kaiser Family Foundation, Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-olds, January 2010



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*Every child should have at least a daily “Green Hour” of outdoor time*

Today’s indoor children are less physically fit, less able to concentrate and are less able to relate to peers and adults than any previous generation of children. And, they are less able to be effective in the classroom. One partial solution is to give them more time outdoors: playing and learning. The goal for the NWF *Be Out There* campaign is for every child to have at least a daily “Green Hour” of outdoor time. We see this as necessary for a child to be healthy, to care about nature and, increasingly, to obtain a good education. In the past, we might have thought of the Green Hour goal

as being solely up to parents in a home setting. But we need to look at it more broadly today. Parents can and should facilitate their kids spending regular time outdoors, but schools will need to step up too. By doing so, schools will produce better educated students with stronger life skills.

The research in this report describes two key benefits if schools play a more active role in outdoor education and time for children. First, outdoor education and play time helps students become high-performance learners with skill sets that will be with them throughout their lives. And, second, outdoor education and play time help students perform measurably better on standardized tests.

To be more specific, the research reveals that outdoor education, greener school grounds and more outdoor play time in natural settings:

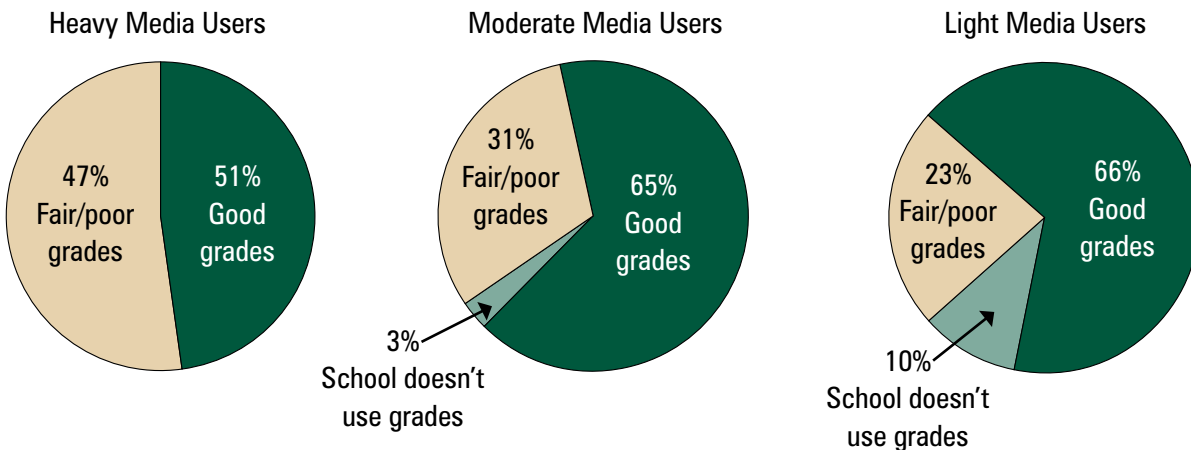
- Usefully employ all of a child’s native intelligences, ranging from math and science smarts to interpersonal communications
- Are particularly effective at helping under-resourced, low-income students perform measurably better in school
- Quantitatively increase student motivation and enthusiasm to learn
- Markedly improve classroom behavior with fewer discipline referrals and related problems
- Help students concentrate for longer periods and help mitigate attention deficit problems



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## MEDIA USE AND GRADES

Percent of heavy, moderate, and light media users who get mostly good vs. mostly fair/poor grades.



Kaiser Family Foundation, Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-olds, January 2010



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*Parents play an important role in helping children to have more productive school time by allocating home time for outdoor activities*

- Help students to learn across disciplines and make them better real-world problem solvers
- Help keep students engaged in their school work and make them less inclined to drop out of school,
- Measurably improve classroom performance in math, science, reading and social studies.
- Increase scores on statewide standardized tests in basic skills, reading, science and math.
- Improve performance on college entrance exams.

Parents can play a particularly important role in helping their children to have more productive school time by allocating home time for outdoor activities in natural settings and by being strong advocates for schools to offer more outdoor time and experiences to their children.

This report lays out a series of steps that schools can take to increase outdoor education and experiences for their students no matter what age, including: school ground greening programs, recommendations on when to have recess, outdoor education programs on site and at nearby areas, walking to school programs and more. It likewise provides advice to parents on specific actions they can take at home and with their child's school to increase outdoor education and play time spent outdoors.



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# About NWF's *Be Out There* Campaign



*Be Out There's* mission is to return to the nation's children what they don't even know they've lost: their connection to the natural world. Kids today spend twice as much time indoors as their parents did, missing out on the simple pleasures and lasting mental and physical health benefits of daily outdoor time.

*Be Out There's* practical tools for families, schools and communities will make being outdoors a fun, healthy and automatic part of everyday life. By raising awareness, inspiring behavior change and taking action, *Be Out There* will help get American children and families back outside—where they belong!

## Raising awareness

- Organizing **National Wildlife Week, Great American Backyard Campout, Hike & Seek** and other exciting *Be Out There* events for families, schools and communities
- Working with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and other respected medical bodies and professionals to advocate an hour of outdoor play per day
- Developing informative and engaging Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to help get the message across
- Commissioning studies to gain deeper understanding of the issue and its societal impacts



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MEDIA USE OVER TIME			
Among all 8- to 18-year-olds, average amount of time spent with each medium in a typical day:			
	2009	2004	1999
TV content	4:29a	3:51b	3:47b
Music/audio	2:31a	1:44b	1:48b
Computer	1:29a	1:02b	:27c
Video games	1:13a	:49b	:26c
Print	:38a	:43ab	:43b
Movies	:25a	:25ab	:18b
Total media exposure	10:45a	8:33b	7:29c
Multitasking Proportion	29%a	26%a	16%b
Total media use	7:38a	6:21b	6:19b
<i>Kaiser Family Foundation, Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8 to 18-Year-olds, January 2010-</i>			



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## Taking action:

- Development of national guidelines and training materials to bring natural play and outdoor learning areas to schools, parks, child care centers and zoos
- Working with Congress and state legislatures to pass laws and regulations that fund programs to get kids outdoors and remove red-tape that prevents outdoor educational opportunities
- Successfully advocating for legislation that will support added public funding for outdoor programming across America.
- Gathering over 25,000 signatures and the support of 250 national organizations on a petition to urge the Surgeon General to promote the benefits of daily outdoor play
- Encouraging people to call on the Presidential Administration and Congress to support federal funding for environmental education and outdoor recreation programs.



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## Inspiring behavior change

- A rich portfolio of online family resources such as **Naturefind** and **Wildlife Watch** give families ideas for being out there in their own backyard and beyond.
- *Be Out There's* presence on **social networking sites** keep you up-to-date on the latest and greatest about the outdoors.
- School-based programs such as **Eco-Schools USA**, **Schoolyard Habitat** and other NWF programs engage students around the country in conservation education and stewardship building.
- Award-winning publications, including *Ranger Rick magazine*®, *Your Big Backyard*®, *Wild Animal Baby*® and *National Wildlife*® magazine support the *Be Out There* movement.



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