



## ***Time Out: Outdoor Time Fuels Classroom Performance***

### *National Wildlife Federation Releases School Readiness Guide for Parents and Teachers*

Reston, Va. (September 2)—Back to School shouldn't mean back indoors for children. In fact, National Wildlife Federation's (NWF) new report ***TIME OUT: Using the Outdoors to Enhance Classroom Performance*** highlights the vast research linking time kids spend outside to increased classroom preparedness. American's childhood has largely moved indoors in the past 15 years. The increasingly indoor lifestyle causes several factors that work against high performance in the classroom.

The guide on school readiness, authored by NWF's Kevin Coyle, is for teachers and parents alike and includes tips on how to provide fun and valuable outdoor experiences for kids, even with their busy school-year schedules.

"Today's indoor kids are distracted, less fit, more aggressive, and hard to manage in the classroom. Some don't relate well to other students or adults on a personal level." says Vice President for Education and Training Kevin Coyle. "Outdoor time can improve overall health while lengthening attention spans, diminishing aggressiveness, improving test scores and ultimately advancing learning."

#### **Lack of Outdoor Time Affects Learning Readiness**

Spending life indoors means our children are less physically active and healthy, less creative, stressed, over-stimulated, and more isolated from important human interaction. The new *TIME OUT* guide aggregates the science behind the link of school readiness with time outside.

#### **Outdoor Education Improves Classroom Performance**

NWF's Back to School guide includes case studies that bolster the fact that outdoor education improves classroom performance. Environmental education (EE) creates more motivated and competent students. Schools with EE programs showed higher scores on standardized tests in math, reading, writing, and listening.

#### **Developmental Gaps**

The average child sits more than six hours a day inside looking at an electronic screen and snacking. As a result, the healthy and decompressing outdoor play experience many adults had as children is becoming a thing of the past. Researchers at University of Illinois report findings that indicate exposure to natural settings in the course of common after-school and weekend activities may be "widely effective" in reducing attention deficit symptoms in children. Lack of unstructured playtime in nature for some leads to:

- Shorter Attention Spans
- Increased Aggressive Behavior
- Higher Stress and Depression

#### **Nutrition and Physical Activity Implications**

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends kids relax and get about an hour per day of unstructured time to kick back and unwind. According to an analysis of federal data representing more

than 6,000 children, low vitamin D levels are particularly common among girls, adolescents, and people with darker skin. Low levels of this nutrient are blamed on a combination of factors, including a decreased amount of time going outside and getting healthy doses of sunlight. The indoor lifestyle has increased America's rates of:

- Poor Fitness and Obesity
- Sunlight and Vitamin D Deficiencies
- Nearsightedness

### **Solutions**

School administrations and educators have a critical role to play in reversing the negative impacts of the increasingly indoor childhood and helping children to experience, understand, and appreciate nature and the outdoors. Parents can alleviate overly packed schedules and offer sufficient outdoor time to lengthen attention spans, diminish aggressiveness, improve test scores and ultimately advancing learning.

The National Wildlife Federation's *Be Out There* campaign offers these suggestions for making sure the child in your life is getting some outdoor time, even with their busy school-year schedules.

### **10 Ways To "Be Out There"—Even After School Starts**

Homework, soccer practice, ballet—is there time in the schedule to play outside? Visit [www.greenhour.org/topten](http://www.greenhour.org/topten) to see 10 ways to **Be Out There**, even after school starts.

- Keep a picnic blanket in your car for an impromptu picnic after picking up a fast food dinner on any spot of green you can find.
- No backyard? Find your local parks using [nwf.org/naturefind](http://nwf.org/naturefind).
- For older kids, start stretching your child's boundaries, allowing them to go for unsupervised walks in the neighborhood with groups of friends. They'll love the feeling of independence.
- Have your child make a map of your neighborhood — using only natural landmarks. This will heighten his or her observation skills and can be the first step in creating a "field guide" to the nature in your neighborhood.
- Keep flashlights near the door, and go for a neighborhood night hike. Kids will love the novelty, and you can challenge them to identify "night sounds." Learn how to make a moon journal at [greenhour.org/moonjournal](http://greenhour.org/moonjournal).
- To cloud-watch with older kids, combine technology with the outdoors and go geo-caching or, the lower-tech version, letterboxing. There are about 20,000 letterboxes and 250,000 geocaches hidden in North America. Visit [geocaching.com](http://geocaching.com) and [letterboxing.org](http://letterboxing.org).

To view the full report, visit [www.beoutthere.org](http://www.beoutthere.org).

*National Wildlife Federation is America's conservation organization, inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future. [www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org).*

**Report author and Vice President for Education and Training Kevin Coyle available for interviews.**

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