

Utah Project WILD Needs Analysis

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This report provides the findings of a needs analysis to systematically investigate Utah teacher perceptions and attitudes about Project WILD and “conservation education” in general in order to assist in improving teacher participation in Utah Project WILD.

Data was collected through numerous focus groups from a total of 51 Utah public school educators from five target districts in the state. Educators included a mix of those trained and those not trained in Project WILD.

The needs analysis focused on 1) perceived needs for success, 2) important elements of Utah Project WILD, and 3) barriers to conservation education. A summary of all responses is provided in the report.

Perceived Needs for Success:

Responses indicated that teachers clearly deemed student knowledge and awareness as a most important element in defining success in conservation education. Teachers also expressed that successful conservation education is learning that is action-based, provides real-world examples and experiences, and provides immediate application. It was indicated that resources, both human and material, were key in implementing a program and getting it to work. Teachers also expressed a need for support for conservation education from within the local community and the school administration, a need to find ways to integrate conservation education into the curriculum—including addressing the requirements for meeting curriculum standards, and the need for support from and networking with other educators addressing the same issues in their classrooms.

Important Elements of Utah Project WILD:

This question was discussed with teachers that had been trained in Project WILD. Teachers praised a range of elements in Project WILD, including the program’s overall design, workshop training, teaching manual, and ways in which the curriculum impacts students. Teachers also provided feedback on the kinds of things that attract them to workshops including incentives, workshop structures, materials, and convenience. Responses are summarized in the report.

Barriers to Conservation Education:

Barriers expressed by teachers included program design—a lack of conceptual clarity or focus; the challenge of instructional fragmentation; the need to address state core standards; the perception that Project WILD is only for science, or is only science on a peripheral, recreational level; limited ability and motivation to attend workshops; and reluctance or indifference on the part of school administrators.

The report summarizes the implications for Utah Project WILD and presents some overall actions that Utah Project WILD can take to increase implementation of Project WILD throughout the state and suggestions for specific school-based projects or activities to enhance existing efforts.

