

# Strengthening Science Education and Environmental Literacy in California's New Era Of Local Control: The Toolkit

September 2016

## For School Districts: ASSESSING DISTRICT SUPPORT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY THROUGH HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE (HSS) EDUCATION

This document provides a set of questions to ask of districts and schools to better understand their capacity to support **environmental literacy** through their Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) in a systematic way. These questions can be used by district leaders and teachers to assess and identify key district **environmental education** and history-social science program capacities and provide a means to engage administrators, staff and teachers in dialogue about efforts and resources needed to support **environmental literacy through history-social science education**.

### Key Capacity 1: Vision and Reality

- Does the district have a widely shared, common vision for teaching and learning across subjects in support of environmental literacy?
- Does the district have a widely shared common vision for good history-social science teaching and learning, as well as how to integrate environmental literacy into instruction?
- Does the district have a widely shared programmatic vision for its K-12 environmental education program?
- Does the district have a plan for the implementation process of environmental literacy for all students?
- What gaps are being anticipated in the district's ability to reach implementation goals?
- Does the district know what kind of environmental education is happening across the district?
- Does the district know what kind of history-social science instruction is happening in classrooms, and whether environmental literacy is embedded into formal instruction?
- Does the district currently provide history-social science programs (formal and informal) that use the environment as a context for teaching local and state history?
- Does the district have a system in place for gathering and using data to assess the quantity and quality of environmental literacy instruction in history-social science teaching and learning? If so, how is it being used?
- What is the district timeline to address the California Environmental Principles and Concepts, what are the milestones and how will progress be monitored towards those milestones?
- What resources and strategies does the district use to ensure the shifts envisioned by the HSS Framework, including the incorporation of the Environmental Principles and Concepts, will occur in every classroom?

### Key Capacity 2: Leadership

- Does the district have an environmental literacy "point person" at the district office – someone with the time, knowledge and energy to ensure environmental literacy is being addressed across the district?
- Does the district have a history-social science leadership team that ensures that history-social science, together with environmental literacy, is being addressed across the district? Does this team include teacher leaders from elementary, middle, and secondary who are familiar with the Environmental Principles and Concepts?
- Does the district have environmental literacy through history-social science instruction "exemplars" that can serve as visible examples of high-quality instruction (incorporating environmental literacy) for other teachers and schools?
- Does the district have support and active involvement to improve environmental literacy from different administrative levels of the district, including the superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of curriculum and instruction, school board members and principals?
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- In what ways is the district building partnerships with and accessing support from history-social science experts and community leaders, such as historians, museums, state historic parks, historical societies, higher education institutions, and business and civic leadership in the community that can advocate for history-social science? Are there learning opportunities beyond the classroom where history-social science content can be reinforced by environmental education programs?
- How is the district determining the needs and roles of key players (e.g., district administrators, teacher leaders, site administrators, parents, afterschool educators, etc.) in supporting environmental literacy across the district?
- How are parents and key stakeholders in the community being engaged to support environmental literacy and build momentum for experiences that are truly best for students?

### Key Capacity 3: Instructional Improvement

- What is the level of knowledge and understanding regarding environmental literacy in the district at this point?
- What is the level of knowledge and understanding regarding the HSS Framework at this point, its new instructional shifts, and the inclusion of Environmental Principles and Concepts in HSS instruction?
- Is the district using environmental education strategies to support history-social science learning and engagement?
- Do all students have access to environmental learning opportunities available at off-campus facilities (e.g., state historic parks and working landscapes such as the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, shipping ports, or agricultural or timber operations) to support and reinforce environmental literacy in the history-social sciences? How are these strategies being developed to ensure teaching and learning aligns to the HSS Framework?
- Professional learning
  - Does the district offer ongoing support to all K-12 teachers that help them to improve their history-social science instruction through the integration of environmental literacy?
  - Does the district offer ongoing support to all school site leaders that help them to identify what high-quality history-social science teaching looks like, including how to teach with the HSS Framework's instructional shifts and the Environmental Principles and Concepts?
  - How will the district build the capacity of school leaders and district office leaders to better understand what high-quality teaching and learning looks like in relation to environmental literacy?
- Curriculum and instructional materials
  - Does the district have well-established curricular expectations for environmental literacy through history-social science (what is to be taught, how it is to be taught, and how much is to be taught)? Does every school site know these expectations? Is every school meeting these expectations?
  - Does the district have instructional materials that provide students with a wide range of experiences that support environmental literacy through history-social science and? Do teachers use these materials regularly? If not, why?
- What additional supports will teachers, schools, and district administrators need to support environmental literacy within history-social science?

#### Key Capacity 4: District Policies and Priorities

- Has the district made environmental literacy for all students a priority and expressed that priority clearly with policies, finances, and support?
- How is the district integrating environmental literacy and education with other existing district plans, programs and initiatives that focus on ensuring students are prepared for college and careers upon high school graduation (e.g., Common Core, English Language Development, afterschool programs, etc.)? What mechanisms already exist that will help environmental literacy and education to be fully integrated into the existing plans of the district?
- In what ways is the district allocating the financial resources necessary to implement environmental literacy and education across a variety of student learning experiences within the district? What modifications need to be made to the district's budget?
- In what ways will the district identify and resolve barriers that may stand in the way of providing access to high-quality environmental learning opportunities to all students?