



Wyoming Department of Education

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MEMORANDUM NO. 2009 – 091

TO: School District Superintendents
School District Principals

FROM: Jim McBride, Ed.D. *Jim McBride*
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Milward Simpson *Milward Simpson*
Director, State Parks and Cultural Resources

Jack Shea *Jack Shea*
Executive Director, Teton Science Schools

DATE: June 5, 2009

SUBJECT: Wyoming Youth Congress on Children and Nature

RESPONSE REQUESTED

Every once in a while a powerful idea comes along that leads to long-lasting and positive impacts on our students, our state, and our shared future. We are pleased to let you know that just such an idea is planned for October 2009: the first-of-its-kind *Wyoming Youth Congress on Children & Nature*. The Wyoming Department of Education along with the Governor's Task Force on Recreation (WY REACT) and Teton Science Schools are pleased to invite you to participate.

The first way in which you can join in is through your role as School District Superintendent. *We are asking you to take the lead in identifying the Congressional Participants by selecting one girl and one boy from the eighth grade to represent your school district at the Wyoming Youth Congress.* If you are interested in having a greater role in the Congress, there are additional opportunities for you to become involved and we will stay in touch with you as we approach the date of the Youth Congress.

This three-day gathering, to be held at Teton Science Schools in Jackson Hole from October 15-18, 2009, will furnish Wyoming's kids with an unequalled opportunity to engage with other students and contribute creative ideas for ways in which kids and families from every corner of our state can take advantage of the unparalleled outdoor opportunities of Wyoming.

This letter along with the enclosed details represents our first step in getting the word out about the Wyoming Youth Congress. We wanted you to begin thinking about how you will identify the two students who will represent your school district – to help, we have prepared some ideas of what the characteristics of a Congressional Participant might be.

Thank you for your attention to this request and thank you for contributing to this worthy and timely idea.

Enclosed: Wyoming Youth Congress Information and Agenda

Why a Youth Congress?

An opportunity to address the disconnect between kids and nature and its consequences...

- Approximately 176,500 children and adolescents suffer from diabetes.
- Approximately 9 million (16%) of US children aged 6-19 are overweight or obese.
- Visits to state and national parks have declined every year since peaking in 1987 down 25%.
- 25% fewer hunting and fishing licenses are being issued since the peak in 1981.

What will the Wyoming Youth Congress achieve?

Creation of a forum for kids from every corner of Wyoming to...

- Explore the causes of the growing disconnect between children and nature;
- Identify creative ideas and opportunities to re-integrate children and nature;
- Engage with other Congressional Participants to become change leaders in Wyoming;
- Inspire other youth, adults and decision-makers about the value of time spent outdoors.

Last Child in the Woods

The Wyoming Youth Congress builds on the ideas first presented in journalist Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* (2005). Since its debut, Louv's words have received nation-wide notice sparking a movement to re-connect children and nature. Parents, teachers, physicians, outdoor industry professionals, public lands' managers and others have united to address the concerns inherent in the growing decline in the amount of time kids spend outdoors. Issues that range from the health and well-being of children to the future of our cherished outdoor places, public and protected lands across the United States.

The Wyoming Youth Congress stands out from the national dialogue because it represents the first time that kids will have an opportunity to voice their ideas on this topic.

The Power of Time Outdoors

- In greener, natural settings children with ADD exhibit less severe symptoms.
- A 20 minute walk in nature has been linked to better concentration in children with ADHD.
- Children benefit academically from physical activity during gym class and recess.
- Children observed in green outdoor spaces engaged in more play and more creative forms of play than children in barren spaces.

Details of the Wyoming Youth Congress on Children & Nature

While many adults have become engaged in the movement to reconnect children and nature, the key stakeholders in the issue, the children themselves, have had a very little input or commitment in the movement. To give voice to the youth directly impacted by this disconnect, **Wyoming REACT (Governor Freudenthal's Task Force on Recreation), Wyoming Department of Public Instruction and Teton Science Schools are partnering to engage youth in the First Wyoming Youth Congress on Children and Nature.**

WHO: Two exceptional eighth-graders (one boy and one girl) from each of Wyoming's 48 school districts

WHEN & WHERE: October 15-18, 2009 in Jackson Hole, Wyoming at the Jackson Campus of Teton Science Schools

WHY: The Wyoming Youth Congress will give youth an opportunity to become active problem solvers in curbing the growing disconnect between children and nature. Each Congressional Participant will be responsible for surveying their own friends and family about time spent outdoors and use this and developments of the Youth Congress to create their own plans to get more kids outside in their own communities.

HOW: *As a School District Superintendent, we are asking you to select the two eighth-grade students (in eighth grade during the 2009-2010 school year) to represent your school district at the Wyoming Youth Congress.* Please ask each Principal of 8th grade students in your district to nominate 1 boy and 1 girl to you by September 11, 2009. Then select the two students who you feel will best represent your district. Congressional Participants may exemplify the following characteristics:

- Wyoming Native (*or lived in Wyoming at least ¾ of life*)
- Trendsetter
- Capacity for leadership
- Connector among peers and adults
- Friendly and outgoing
- Knows lots of people in and outside of school
- Active in extracurricular activities
- Possibly comes from a large family
- Generally good physical health
- Representative of the diversity within your school district including underserved and minority students
- Interested in participating in the Wyoming Youth Congress on Children & Nature

Please submit the names of the 8th grade male and female students from your school district to Leslie Cook at leslie.cook@tetonscience.org by September 18, 2009.

COST: All costs, including lodging, meals, program and supplies will be covered for the two students thanks to generous donors across the state of Wyoming.

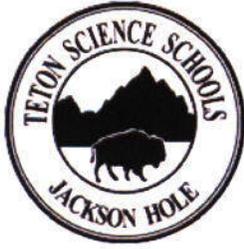
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: Parents who choose to bring their 8th grade student to the Congress can reserve a room held in a block at the Wyoming Inn in Jackson and are invited to enjoy Jackson Hole for a long weekend.

CREDITS: One Journeys School High School credit will be awarded to each participant in the Wyoming Youth Congress.

PROGRAM: Please see the enclosed agenda to find out more about how the students will be learning about and discussing the connection of children and nature in Wyoming.

CONTACTS: If you have any questions or comments about the Wyoming Youth Congress, please feel free to contact Wayne Turner at 307-734-3753 or Leslie Cook at 307-734-3736 of Teton Science Schools.

Thank you for helping to make the First Wyoming Youth Congress a great success and for helping to support getting children outdoors in Wyoming!



First Wyoming Youth Congress

October 15-18, 2009

Agenda
{Tentative}

Teton Science Schools

Introducing the 5H Model: Head, Heart, Hands, Health & Home

Thursday, October 15, 2009

- 5:00 – 6:00 pm Arrivals
6:00 pm Orientation and Welcome: *Why We Are Here*
7:00 pm Wyoming State Dinner, featuring Wyoming-Grown Foods
7:45 pm Opening Keynote Presentations:
The Task at Hand and Why Your Help is Needed
(Inspiring the HEAD & HEART)
- Larry Selzer, CEO, *The Conservation Fund*
 - Diane Shoer, Director, *Wyoming Travel and Tourism*
 - Milward Simpson, Director, *Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources*

Friday, October 16, 2009

- 8:00 am Breakfast
9:00 am – 12:30 pm Connecting to Nature – Recreation Activity: *Outdoor Exploration, Natural History Interpretation and Personal Reflection*
(Strengthening the HEART and Improving HEALTH)
- Options to include:**
- Vogel's Hill Hike
 - Northern Coyote Canyon Exploration
 - Swan Pond Stroll
 - Snake River Dike & Emily's Pond Walk
- 12:00 pm Field Lunch
1:00 – 3:00 pm Afternoon Session: ***Exploring the Existence of a Disconnect Between Children and Nature***; Examining Data and Personal Stories
(Engaging the HEAD and the HEART)
- 3:30 pm Depart for Wildlife Watching
(Focusing the HEAD and HEART)
- 5:30 pm Picnic Dinner in the Field
Evening Elk Bugling in Grand Teton National Park –
(Focusing the HEAD and HEART)

Saturday, October 17, 2009

8:00 am Breakfast
9:00 – 12:30 am Connecting to Nature – Stewardship Activity: *Serving the Community and the Natural World*
(Linking HEART, HEAD, HEALTH, HANDS)

Options to include:

- Improving Wildlife Habitat with Fence and Post Removal
- Viewscape beautification on Teton Pass
- Cody Creek Bank Restoration
- Karns Meadow Restoration

12:00 pm Field Lunch
1:00 – 3:00 pm Afternoon Session: Exploring *the Causes of the Disconnect between Children and Nature*
(A HEAD & HEART Activity)
3:00 – 5:00 pm *Nature and Learning*
(Engaging the HEAD)

Options to include:

- Art and Nature with the National Museum of Wildlife Art
- Science and Nature with the Conservation Research Center of Teton Science Schools
- Business and Nature with Hotel Terra
- Health and Nature with Teton County Wellness and Wyoming Department of Health
- Hunting, Fishing and Nature with Wyoming Game and Fish
- Recreation and Nature with Jackson Hole Mountain Resort
- Education and Nature with Wyoming Department of Education and National Outdoor Leadership School

6:00 pm Dinner
6:45 pm *Kids and Nature Film Festival* with Facilitated Discussion

Sunday, October 18, 2009

7:30 am Breakfast
8:30 – 9:30 am Pack and Clean-up
9:30 – 10:00 am Congressional Participant Press Conference
10:00 – 11:00 am Planning for Home: What You Can Do About the Disconnect and How We Can Stay Connected
(HEAD, HEART, HOME)
11:00 – 11:30 am Closures
(Uniting HEAD, HEART, HANDS, HEALTH & HOME)
11:30 am Departures
(Returning HOME)