

GREENHOUSE



Edited by Abigail Pouletre

ECOTREND

All the World's a Classroom

Add up a bunch of kids plus plants and animals, then multiply by natural habitat, and you get Green Charter Schools, a new equation for learning that integrates the environment into all aspects of a child's education. There are currently more than 100 Green Charter Schools around the country, with more opening up this fall.

Operated and funded as public schools, charter schools are given a bit more latitude regarding the focus of their curriculum in order to allow for more innovative teaching methods than those of standard public schools. Many charter schools focus on a primary area of interest, such as the arts or technology. At Green Charter Schools, the learning focus is the environment, and it's interwoven throughout the curriculum.

Core subjects such as math, English, and sciences are taught at Green Charter Schools just as they are at any other school; however, at these schools kids learn by doing projects. "The students take their skills and apply them to something real," says Melissa Pesh, cochair of the curriculum committee at Seven Generations Charter School, a new elementary school scheduled to open this fall in Emmaus, Pennsylvania.

"For example, if the children are studying frogs, they might apply math and science skills to figure out how large frog habitats need to be, or what depth the water needs to be in a pond where the frogs live."

Studies have shown that reading and writing test scores improve in schools where the environment is integrated into the classroom. "We're answering the question 'What does it mean to be an educated person' differently than public schools," says Senn Brown, executive director of the Green Charter Schools Network, which was founded just last year. "As the world retools for an emerging green economy, these schools are educating young people about critical environmental issues and broadening their understanding, so they'll become thoughtful decision makers about the wise use of natural resources." —*Diana Erney*

Philly-based Green Woods Charter School students study pond life.