



Louisville CAN!

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Earth Day Perspective

The Louisville Climate Action Network often receives requests for guidance on whether and—if so, how—school teachers, religious instructors and parents should teach children about the biggest threat to the environment, public health, international economies and geopolitics: global climate change. After all, wouldn't a threat that scares lots of grown-up be too much for kids? My thoughts:

Like so many topics, it depends on the maturity of the children. I'd not hesitate to teach the topic to high-school students and more mature middle-school students. But I think it is critical that the "problem" part of the discussion be balanced—if not outweighed—by the "solutions" part. I would take advantage of the many curricular connections to global climate change.

And while social studies teachers may choose to discuss the dwindling number of nay-sayers still denying that a crisis is unfolding, science teachers do not need to teach "the other side" of the issue. The scientists working in the transparent, peer-reviewed realm of science reached consensus years ago that climate change is happening now and is caused by excessive greenhouse-gas pollution.

In the case of younger and/or less mature students, I would just focus on solutions. After all, there are lots of reasons for—and benefits from—taking steps to reduce our carbon footprints. Most such steps not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but also other air pollutants that contribute to smog, asthma, etc. They usually save money, too!

I hope that all grown-ups reading this newsletter will use Earth Day 2008 as an impetus for discussing climate change with the children in their lives and what together they can do about it.