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The *Natural Start Alliance*: Building Collective Impact for Early Childhood Environmental Education

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Last year, the North American Association for Environmental Education launched the *Natural Start Alliance*, a new initiative to advance environmental education for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. One year into this new initiative, we would like to share a number of updates and progress in several key areas, and invite you to join us.

Information and resources

Natural Start launched its website, *NaturalStart.org*, in October 2013. At the site, visitors can find:

- A monthly feature story that explores environmental education themes in depth
- A blog on recent news and ideas from the field
- A member spotlight highlighting Natural Start members
- Upcoming events and professional development opportunities
- A filtered list of early childhood environmental education resources
- A searchable map of Alliance members

Networking opportunities

The Natural Start Alliance has focused on creating more opportunities for the early childhood environmental education field to network and share ideas and resources, including efforts such as:

- Connecting through social media such as Facebook (fb.com/naturalstartalliance), Pinterest (pinterest.com/naturalstart), and Google Groups (groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/natural-start-alliance).
- Support for the Nature-Based Preschool Conference held this year in conjunction with the Association of Nature Center Administrator's Annual Summit, which brought nature-based preschool professionals from across the US and Canada together for professional networking
- Networking events at the 2014 North American Association for Environmental Education Annual Conference and Research Symposium

Connecting to broader initiatives and audiences

Natural Start also participates in advisory groups, other alliances, and collaborations with like-minded organizations in order to build support for early childhood environmental education, including partnerships such as:

- Outdoors Alliance for Kids
- Association of Zoos and Aquariums and Disney's "Nature Play Begins at Your Zoo or Aquarium" Advisory Group
- The World Forum Foundation's Nature Action Collaborative for Children, North American Leadership Team
- Research Advisory Team for the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dimensions Educational Research Foundation, and Outdoor Classroom Project study of nature-based outdoor learning environments

Coming soon

Natural Start also has several projects in development that will soon be available, including:

- Fact sheets on the benefits of early childhood environmental education, developed in conjunction with Stanford University's Woods Institute for the Environment
- White papers that explore how policies shape early childhood environmental education, and how we can work together as a field to advance our work through policy
- Tools for finding resources related to designing effective, nature-based outdoor learning environments for young children
- A new area of NaturalStart.org that will feature nature preschools

Join the alliance!

Educators, administrators, parents, and professionals in fields from architecture to landscape design to environmental conservation all have a role to play in connecting infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to nature and the environment. Natural Start provides an opportunity for key players to convene, share ideas and resources, and move together toward our shared goals. When organizations join the alliance, they appear on our searchable map of alliance members, helping the field become more visible and connected. Join today at NaturalStart.org to help keep the early childhood environmental education field moving forward.

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