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Mobile science program offers new ways for Massachusetts students to learn about the environment

Hands-on learning will allow environmental lessons to stick with the students.

By [Stephanie Ebbs](#), [Julia Jacobo](#), [Daniel Manzo](#), and [Ginger Zee](#)

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Unpacking environmental education

"GMA3's" Ginger Zee investigates the status of environmental education across the United States.

The classroom is coming to life for elementary students in Massachusetts, who are experiencing new ways to learn about the environment.

Some students in the Bay State are now learning from an environmental education nonprofit called Change is Simple, which offers "touchable lessons" aboard a mobile science lab that allows kids to learn about climate change and sustainability in ecosystems, landscapes and waters that they may never get to experience in real life.

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One lesson could involve interactive tents set up in classrooms that contain photos and objects for environmental settings around the world, including the ocean, the Arctic and the rainforest. Other lessons could educate children on sustainable energy and the harmful effects of the greenhouse gases that are emitted with the extraction of oil, natural gas and coal.

Students can also enter the lab, equipped with monitors and any necessary equipment for out-of-the-box learning scenarios.



Nonprofit Change is Simple is bringing hands-on lessons about climate and environment to elementary school students in Massachusetts.
ABC News

These unique lessons offer perspectives of what is happening in environments around the world that the students otherwise may not experience, said Ann Crawford, a teacher at Shamrock Elementary in Woburn, Massachusetts.

"Most of our kids are not going to the rainforest," Crawford told ABC News. "They're not going to the Arctic ... When they're getting hands-on and they're seeing it and they're reading about it. It sticks with them."

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Change is Simple was conceptualized by Lauren Belmonte and her husband, Patrick Belmonte, who drew inspiration from Patrick's brother, an elementary school teacher whose experience made him realize how little time there was in the curriculum for science, especially environmental science, they told ABC News.

The nonprofit now supplements science education for more than 8,000 students across Massachusetts, Lauren Belmonte said.



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Climate change is already having a direct effect on the state as the waters off Massachusetts' coasts warm at alarming rates, especially the Gulf of Maine, which [research shows](#) is warming faster than any other body of water on the planet. Rising sea levels are leading to coastal erosion and causing the fisheries industry to become more unpredictable.

Earlier this year, state lawmakers proposed legislation that would establish a science education trust fund and require state standards for science curriculums to include climate change.

However, those bills did not pass during 2023 legislative season. Other states, such as Connecticut and New Jersey, have passed similar education requirements.

MORE: Young people experiencing 'widespread' psychological distress over government handling → of looming climate crisis, researchers say

Twenty-nine states in the U.S., including Massachusetts, have science standards of a B+ or better for how they address climate change, according to a [report](#) by the National Center for Science Education and the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund that took a close look at how state standards handle the consensus on climate science, the impacts of climate change and possible solutions.

Seven states are ranked at a D or F, including Ohio, West Virginia, Florida, Virginia, Alabama, Georgia and Texas, mainly for poor or lack of framework on addressing climate change and environmental issues.

Change is Simple was implemented at a time when curriculums in public education systems is facing increasing political pressure, but the subject matter the nonprofit teachers has nothing to do with politics, Lauren Belmonte said.

"It's very discovery-based for the kids," she said. "We stick to the facts, and we stick to the science."



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ABC News

Rather than telling the students what choices to make in their daily lives -- whether it has to do with using less plastic or conserving water -- the educational nonprofit focuses on lessons that allows the kids to solve problems.

"We want kids to know that even in third grade, even in first grade, you can do something right now," Lauren Belmonte said. "Because I think that's so important for kids to feel empowered -- to do something and to help them understand the bigger picture as they grow."

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