**National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) Position Statement**

# Informal Science Education

## Preamble

NSTA recognizes and encourages the development of sustained links between the informal institutions and schools. Informal science education generally refers to programs and experiences developed outside the classroom by institutions and organizations that include:

- Children's and natural history museums, science-technology centers, planetaria, zoos and aquaria, botanical gardens and arboreta, parks, nature centers and environmental education centers, and scientific research laboratories
- Media, involving print, film, broadcast, and electronic forms
- Community-based organizations and projects, including youth organizations and community outreach services

A growing body of research documents the power of informal learning experiences to spark curiosity and engage interest in the sciences during school years and throughout a lifetime. Informal science education institutions have a long history of providing staff development for teachers, and enrichment experiences for students and the public. Informal science education accommodates different learning styles and effectively serves the complete spectrum of learners: gifted, challenged, non-traditional, and second language learners.

## Declaration:

NSTA strongly supports and advocates informal science education because we share a common mission and vision articulated by the National Science Education Standards:

- Informal science education complements, supplements,deepens, and enhances classroom science studies. It increases the amount of time participants can be engaged in a project or topic. It can be the proving ground for curriculum materials.
- The impact of informal experiences extends to the affective, cognitive, and social realms by presenting the opportunity for mentors, professionals, and citizens to share time, friendship, effort, creativity, and expertise with youngsters and adult learners.
- Informal science education allows for different learning styles and multiple intelligences and offers supplementary alternatives to science study for non-traditional and second language learners. It offers unique opportunities through field trips, field studies, overnight experiences, and special programs.
- Informal science learning experiences offer teachers a powerful means to enhance both professional and personal development in science content knowledge and accessibility to unique resources.
- Informal science education institutions, through their exhibits and programs, provide an effective means for parents and other careproviders to share moments of intellectual curiosity and time with their children.
- Informal science institutions give teachers and students direct access to scientists and other career role models in the sciences, as well as to opportunities for authentic science
- Informal science educators bring an emphasis on creativity and enrichment strategies to their teaching through the need to attract their noncompulsory audiences.
- NSTA advocates that local corporations, foundations, and institutions fund and support informal science education in their communities.
- Informal science education is often the only means for continuing science learning in the general public beyond the school years.

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http://www.nsta.org/159&psid=13

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