



An Overview of the National Archery in the Schools Program

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The National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) is a cooperative effort between conservation agencies, private organizations, and school systems to engage more students in the educational process. Educators are rightly concerned about elevated school drop-out rates. Conservation organizations worry that young people have too few opportunities to learn and practice outdoor skills. These groups believe that archery can be used to stimulate improved educational performance and participation in outdoor-type activities among young people.

In Kentucky, 88 percent of students who drop out of school reported in exit interviews that they were not engaged in any school - based activity outside the classroom. Educators believe if the student can be engaged in some type of extra-curricular activity, that student will make better grades and be more likely to stay in school. Unfortunately, most common extra-curricular activities require the student to be tall, fast, strong, or otherwise athletically endowed, to enjoy success.

The NASP was co-created by individuals within the Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources, the Kentucky Department of Education, and Mathews Archery, based in Sparta, WI. The group hoped to create a program that would inspire students of all sizes, genders, backgrounds, and abilities to improve their performance at school while learning a skill that promotes appreciation and participation in the outdoors.

The National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) was launched in 21 Kentucky middle schools on March 3, 2002. Since that date, 39 states and Australia have adopted the program and are presenting target archery lessons to students in grades 4 thru 12 in nearly 3,000 schools. During the school year 2006-07 state NASP coordinators expect 667,000 students to take the two-week long NASP archery lessons from their Physical Education teacher. By the end of 2007 it is expected that schools in all 50 states will have adopted the program. Most Canadian Provinces have also inquired about starting the program as have people in 15 other countries, including South Africa, England, Spain, and Mexico.

There are examples of nearly every type of school currently in the archery program. Most of the schools in the program are public elementary, middle, and high schools. However, parochial, disciplinary, and special education schools are presenting NASP-style archery classes. In West Virginia, Kentucky, and Australia schools for the deaf have adopted the program because, archery is truly an activity that every child can excel in. In Kentucky, 580 of the state's 1275 schools have adopted the program. Ten other states have more than 100 schools in the program and are growing larger every day.

In March of 2006, the 4th annual NASP National Tournament was conducted indoors in Louisville, Kentucky. A total of 2,164 student archers participated in the single day event—the largest student archery tournament in North American history. Participating on the archery teams were typical and atypical athletes, boys, girls, minorities, special education students, and children with physical disabilities. Some of the physically challenged youth were confined to wheelchairs, walkers or had to have the aid of a sighted person to “see” the target.

The NASP has exceeded every objective and dream its founders envisioned. The program was expected to be in 120 Kentucky schools by 2005 — it was in 120 Kentucky schools by 2003. It was hoped the program might be picked up by 25 states by 2008 – on February 19, 2007 South Dakota became the 42nd state to adopt the program. New Mexico, Connecticut, Hawaii, and Nova Scotia are scheduled to adopt the program in 2007 also. It was never imagined that the program would attract interest from international citizens but Australia started the program in June, 2006. Australia's NASP is a cooperative venture between the Victoria police department, the school system, and the parks and recreation department and already has several corporate sponsors.

The program is so successful because it works for students and educators:

- **Archery is SAFE!** According to the National Safety Council, ping-pong is the only ball-sport more accident-free than archery. There has never been an archery accident in the school archery program.
- Students of all stripes “can do archery”.
- In a recent survey by Virginia-based, “Responsive Management” 94 percent of the students reported enjoying the program.
- 54 percent of students who take the archery class say they feel better about themselves afterwards.
- 49 percent of students in the archery program say they like school better, 72 percent say it provides them (student) opportunity to work more closely with their physical education teacher.
- The Lewis County Kentucky High School principal said core - content subject matter grades improved among students in the archery program.
- In Pulaski County Kentucky, 25 percent more 9th grade students participate in physical education class on “archery days.”
- Educators say attendance is 8 percent higher on days archery is taught.

- Many educators also report that student behavior is better when archery is offered because students don't want to be restricted from participating.
- The Assistant Superintendent of Public Schools in Madison County Kentucky says the archery program is better adapted for students who receive free or reduced lunches, minorities, and special education youngsters than any program he has seen in 18 years as a public educator.

One of the keys to the NASP's widespread acceptance, popularity, and success is its design. It is a "canned" program, easy for the often over - looked and over - worked teacher to implement. There are three requirements that every school must meet in order to participate in the NASP:

1. Every teacher in the program is required to undergo 8 to 12 hours of archery training, no matter the teacher's level of archery experience. The foundation of this training was created by the National Archery Association and National Field Archery Associations. The training has been redesigned to more closely meet the needs of more formal classroom-style teaching methods. The cost of training includes the \$30 training packet and on rare occasions an instruction fee of \$25 to \$30 per teacher. In most states teachers may receive professional development (PD) credit from the education department for undergoing the archery training. Most PD credit is far more expensive for a teacher to receive.
2. Every school in the program acquires, at discounted prices from NASP suppliers, a standard, safe, durable, modern, and universal-fit archery equipment kit. The kit is designed for teaching a class of 24 to 36 physical education students. Every child in the program, no matter the state or country, uses the exact same bow, arrow, target, and shooting style when learning the program. This standardization is one of the reasons the program has such high self-esteem benefits — no matter how much or little income the student's family might have, they all use the same equipment. The price of the NASP equipment kit @ \$2,500 - 2,700 each is sometimes an obstacle the school administration must overcome. However, many schools receive assistance from archery clubs and local National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) Chapters.
3. Finally, every teacher is provided education department-compliant "curriculum" or units of study that help the teacher relate archery to core content subject areas such as mathematics, history, and language arts. The development of these units of study, by curriculum specialists, has enabled archery to speak the language of today's modern, accountable education standards.

The NASP implementation strategy is to institutionalize the program in each state, province, or country. In most locations the local wildlife conservation agency (state wildlife departments) and the school systems work together to train teachers and administer the program. In every state private archery organizations, manufacturers, and NGOs such as the NWTf share in teacher training duties and help provide additional archery opportunities outside the classroom. This strategy of cooperation among agencies and organizations has led to rapid in-school adoption of the program and after-school archery clubs in 37 percent of the schools that implement the program.

The National Archery in the Schools Program is making common place something many experts didn't think was possible – teaching a shooting sport in the local school gymnasium (the target points on NASP arrows don't damage gymnasium floors, even according to Kentucky basketball coaches who are very protective of their courts). Founders think the clock has been turned back to a simpler time when shooting sports were seen as fun and cool by young people. Archery equipment makers are selling more product, fish & wildlife agencies are gaining new customers and excise taxes on equipment sales, but young people are the biggest winners in this program. In almost every school a teacher or parent can point to a young person or two for whom the NASP has turned around their life. As reported by their parents, some of these students would have been kicked out or dropped out of school or been put in jail had it not been for the stimulus provided by archery in the school.

The NASP continues to increase in popularity as word-of-mouth among educators and students sings its praises. However, the program would be made available to many more thousands of students, every year if it had a stronger financial foundation. State agencies need more resources to dedicate staff to teacher training, follow-up programming, and special "culminating events" such as the state NASP tournament. Some schools are desperately searching for funding to purchase start-up equipment and replacement and maintenance supplies. The NASP Foundation, a 501c(3) nonprofit educational organization, struggles to address expansion of the program to all the states and interested foreign countries and continue to evaluate the program's ability to improve grades, attendance, and student behavior. Individuals or organizations that care about the future of our young people and who believe that early success in school leads to a more motivated student and a better citizen, could do far worse than help the NASP take every child along for the journey.