

# AN EVALUATION OF DISCOVER NATURE SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

Fidelity of implementation (FOI) is the extent to which a program is implemented as designed. I evaluated the Discover Nature Schools (DNS) program, a pre-K-12 conservation education curriculum developed by the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), using a case study approach that included teacher focus groups, an intensive classroom study, and a statewide teacher survey. I found that DNS does a good job of teaching content, although there were mixed results for teaching scientific inquiry. Teaching students outside increased students' environmental sensitivity and self-assessed knowledge of behaviors to help wildlife, regardless of whether or not students were in the DNS or comparison classrooms. Teachers had varying levels of implementation of DNS, with few teachers saying they taught DNS "by the book." Institutional barriers, alignment of DNS with academic standards, outside support, and challenges teaching lessons outdoors affected FOI. The amount of instructional time, teacher content knowledge, school district support, and support from MDC predicted FOI. The DNS program had some components of FOI, such as teaching outside, that were not included in the operationalization of FOI of general math and science curricula. I also found there is not a straightforward relationship between FOI and outcomes for the DNS program. I recommend further study, including refining how FOI is defined and measured, of FOI in conservation education programs.