



### **Grant Awarded to Friends of Lakeside Lab - Nature Connections for Nature-based Early Childhood Training**

Nature Connections, a local group of early childhood professionals coordinated by the Friends of Lakeside Lab, has been awarded \$17,842 by the REAP Conservation Education Program (CEP). These funds will be used to support a unique, nature-based program for early childhood professionals entitled "Young Investigators" throughout the Fall of 2012.

Young Investigators will be led by Dr. Judy Harris Helm, developer of a national movement supporting learning based on children's natural curiosity. A national and international speaker and trainer on best practices in education, Dr. Helm has authored seven books on project work, documentation and assessment; *Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years* will be utilized during the training this Fall and provided to all participants.

Nature Connections is a diverse consortium has made considerable impact on early learning in Northwest Iowa. It is staffed and facilitated by Jane Shuttleworth, an Iowa Lakeside Lab & Regents Resource Center education professional. Recognizing the high impact of professional development, and the need to expose teachers to the outdoors as part of their training experience, Nature Connections has conducted four major "Outdoors Explore!" conferences reaching nearly 200 teachers, administrators, and professionals each year. Keynote speakers have included staff from Dodge Nature Center and Preschool, a premier early childhood environmental education program located on a nature reserve and farm in St. Paul, MN (2008); Dr. Martha Erikson, internationally recognized early childhood development expert and consultant and author of *Children and Nature, a Natural Attachment* (2009); Nature Explore/Dimensions Education Research Foundation from Lincoln, NE (2010); and training in the nationally acclaimed "Growing Up Wild" curriculum (2011).

Nature Connections Partners include: Child Care Resource & Referral - Mid-Sioux, Creative Ventures, Dickinson County Conservation Board and Foundation, Early Childhood Iowa: Lakes Region, Friends of Lakeside Lab, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Lakeside Laboratory Regents Resource Center, Patrice & Rita Leary Foundation, Prairie Lakes AEA, retired early-childhood educators, and UDMO Head Start/Early Head Start.

To learn more about Nature Connections visit: <http://www.friendsoflakesidelab.org/connections.html>

More information about the REAP - CEP grant program is available at:

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/Environment/REAP/REAPFundingatWork/ConservationEducation.aspx>