

Vermont Education for Sustainability Project

NEWSLETTER • WINTER 2003



Vermont EFS and Shelburne Farms Launch the Sustainable Schools Project

Our fifth year brings exciting developments for the Vermont Education for Sustainability Project and its new focus, the Sustainable School Project. A partnership of Shelburne Farms and VT EFS, the Sustainable Schools Project (SSP) has begun at the first pilot school, Champlain Elementary in Burlington. Our work there and the future of this schoolwide approach to EFS have received a high level of interest from schools, funders and the EFS network. We are excited to be expanding our staff and our initiatives in 2003.

With the generous support of the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust and the Henderson Foundation, we are thrilled to be working with Champlain Elementary as our first pilot school for the SSP while refining the project model, developing evaluation strategies and beginning the selection process for the second

school. In addition, SSP has joined the Place-based Education Evaluation Collaborative to enhance our

“THE CURRICULUM DESIGN PROCESS OF THE SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS PROJECT HAS HELPED US ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS, TO CLARIFY WHAT WE ARE REALLY SAYING, TO BREAK THINGS DOWN SO THEY ARE MEANINGFUL.”
Champlain School Teacher

resources and ability to contribute to the research on school improvement and civic engagement. (See <http://cee.schoolsgogreen.org/PEEC/> for more information.)

Led by principal Nancy Zahniser, Champlain's warm, energetic and talented community has begun to explore the possibilities of sustainability education in diverse

ways. Champlain's teachers are using sustainability as an integrating context for their curricula, asking essential questions that engage students in understanding and improving their local natural and human community. Meanwhile, Burlington literacy specialist Jane Miller is helping develop a focused approach to integrate sustainability studies and service-learning with the district's literacy improvement program. (See p. 2 & 3.)

Project Expansion

As the SSP seeks its second pilot school, VT EFS and Shelburne Farms are collaborating to create a strong EFS team for long-term school and statewide projects. We are pleased to announce the hiring of Jennifer Cirillo to work with coordinator Erica Zimmerman. Jen brings strong experience in place-based and sustainability education from

What is The Sustainable Schools Project?

The Sustainable Schools Project is a dynamic new model for school improvement and place-based learning. The project helps schools use sustainability as the “integrating context” for curriculum, community partnerships and campus practices. This engages the whole school community in inquiry and practice to improve the quality of life for all present and future generations. Specifically, the Project:

- ▶ Facilitates staff, community and/or student priority-setting for curriculum, community and campus projects; ongoing study groups and/or inservice sessions.

- ▶ Supports teaching through curriculum consultations, classroom support, resource library, and network of community partners.

- ▶ Offers professional development on sustainability topics and skills, concept-based/integrative curriculum development, standards-based assessment, place-based teaching, schoolyard habitat improvement, and service learning.

- ▶ Identifies funding sources for school sustainability projects, professional development, training, etc.



Letter from the Sustainable Schools Project

Community. Ecology. Food systems and energy. Local involvement. Global awareness. Decision-making. Connecting to place. Collaboration. Service. Integration. Long-term planning. Many of us in education value these interests - for our students, communities, and our profession. But we also sometimes feel that they can pull a school and a curriculum in too many directions, especially as we strive for continued school improvement.

The Sustainable School Project facilitates schoolwide coordination and collaboration on these priorities for real-world learning opportunities and citizenship. Starting from the larger goal of sustainability - improving our communities economically, environmentally and socially for current and future generations - we help teachers find common ground that bridges grade levels and subject areas, curriculum and school operations, parent and community partnerships. Then we help a staff use these common interests as the context for working on its instructional priorities. With our experience in developing essential questions, standards-based assessments, and stewardship projects, the SSP leads a school to develop its own meaningful, coherent approach for improving curriculum, community partnerships and campus ecology.

We are excited to be offering this new educational model to the staff, students, and community of the Champlain School in Burlington, and we look forward to sharing it with other schools. We welcome inquiries from schools and communities interested in applying to be the second pilot.

Erica Zimmerman, Coordinator, Sustainable Schools Project

from Champlain and other Burlington schools to learn to use their schoolyards for science teaching and watershed protection.

"I CAN CLEARLY SEE LOTS OF POSSIBILITIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS AT CHAMPLAIN - BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY I AM NOW SEEING THE ENDURING VALUE THAT SUCH A PROJECT CAN HAVE ON OUR INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL AND FAMILY COMMUNITY."

Champlain School Teacher

Two projects developed last summer have created more community-based learning opportunities for Champlain students and their families. Fieldstone Foundation provided funding to VT EFS and Linking Learning to Life to support sustainability-oriented internships for teachers. Colleen Cowell and Georgine Gregory have developed the Legacy Card, a learning tool for students and families to discover the ways area businesses and organizations support Burlington's sustainable community development. Betsy Rosenbluth of the Legacy Project has provided ongoing guidance to this project, a prototype for other neighborhoods. (The Legacy Project was created in 1999 as a process for citizens to develop a comprehensive action plan to preserve for the economic, environmental, and social health of Burlington for years to come.) Linda Deliduka began a summer program for primary students that teaches literacy and math skills through organic gardening. She has worked with National Gardening to develop the curriculum.

her previous work with many of Burlington's community development and education projects and her master's degree program with Audubon Expeditions Institute. Jen will join Shelburne Farms educator Tre McCarney in supporting Champlain teachers' development of community and schoolyard learning activities and partnerships. With the leadership of director Megan Camp and the VT EFS steering committee, Erica and Jen will continue work on the EFS resource guide, natural resource standard revision, and VT EFS Network (*See p. 4 for network updates*).

SSP Sparks Community Connections

The SSP has generated numerous initiatives to enhance the curriculum. Through the Antioch Green Schools program, Champlain is collaborating with Marc Companion of Ocean Arks International to build a seven-chamber living machine that can become the heart of the school's ecological studies and complement community-based learning. With support from the Lake Champlain Basin Program, Burlington's summer science institute and camp will provide professional development for teachers

Special Thanks to Fred Bay of the Josephine Bay Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundation, whose impassioned support for sustainability has cultivated the partnerships responsible for this Project.



Champlain Elementary: The First Sustainable Schools Pilot

Champlain Elementary's Sustainable School Project is off to an exciting start, as teachers focus on deepening their students' ecological literacy and on using the schoolyard for habitat studies, gardening and stewardship. Throughout Champlain, the Sustainability Schools Project has inspired greater use of local place as both the focus of learning and the connector of science and literacy.



Teachers at the summer workshop work with Jane Miller to prepare their professional development calendar.

Teachers are using their sustainability themes to choose fiction and nonfiction literature, partnering those lessons with outdoor studies and inspiring student writing and art.

A common interest in water systems and wetlands led to the construction of a living machine--an indoor aquatic ecosystem--in the school's learning center, the crossroads of the school. SSP staff helped teachers with a successful grant application to Antioch's Green Schools program and lined up Ocean Arks' Marc Companion as an ongoing consultant for this project.

In the primary grades, observation and action have become the processes for learning, and the schoolyard has become the context, whether students are creating a schoolyard map, drawing the living machine's resident turtle, or explaining how they produce the

turtle's food by growing worms in their classroom compost bin. Their teachers are especially excited to see these skills carry over to reading and writing. And the high motivation for their sustainability studies is helping students of all abilities participate in more complex projects.

The first grade's community studies now include schoolyard ecology as a foundation for teaching sense of place and stewardship. The third grade's curriculum about diverse cultures now features local cultures, animal species and geologic history. All grades now use the school's living machine as the focus for journaling and for Book Buddies interactions.

In the fourth and fifth grade team, students have created a "quality of life index." Using sustainability as a framework, students set goals for improving their school community, which now provide the context for all subject areas and the focus for science/social studies. The index inspires the students'



Students at Champlain School explore "The Living Machine," an indoor aquatic ecosystem, in the school's learning center.

choices for their small-group service-learning projects.

As the first year of work on the SSP wraps up, the Champlain community will celebrate its learning with an exposition of class projects and schoolyard stewardship. Over the summer, the staff will consider how to build on their work by further developing each grade's curriculum and by more thoroughly integrating literacy and sustainability studies.



Champlain fifth graders presented their sustainable community projects to Burlington's Legacy Town Meeting in December.

"WE WERE RIGHT! WE'VE ADDRESSED ISSUES OF SUSTAINABILITY ALL ALONG - BUT WITH A FULLER UNDERSTANDING WE'LL WORK TO ADDRESS THE THREE COMPONENTS. MOST VALUABLE IS TO BE EVER MINDFUL OF THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY AS THE UNDERLYING FORCE THAT DRIVES US."
Champlain School Teacher



News from the Vermont EFS Network



Ray McNulty, Former Commissioner of Education, honors teachers at the State House in April 2002 for their work in Education for Sustainability.

State House Recognition of EFS

While 2002 saw the Vermont Education for Sustainability Project's statewide professional development project come to a close, the seeds it planted are growing vitally in many parts of the state. Funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Josephine and C. Michael Paul Foundation, the past year's teacher institutes, standards workshops and small grants programs have resulted in a vital network of diverse educators all striving to integrate sustainability into curriculum.

In April 2002, 58 educators were honored at the Vermont State House. Leaders of the House and Senate Education Committees, the Departments of Agriculture, Education, and Public Service, and the Agency of Natural Resources welcomed the EFS Network. Teachers, students and organizations created a gallery of student work and to receive commendation from the state agencies and institutions that founded Vermont EFS.

Interdisciplinary EFS Efforts in Vermont's High Schools

Three Vermont EFS Network leaders joined coordinator Erica Zimmerman to present their curricula at Vermont Institutes' and Vermont Science Teachers Association Pathways conference in December 2002 at Lake Moree. Tom Sabo of Montpelier High School has developed a three-

dimensional approach to support the school's goals through EFS. His science courses include sustainability concepts, skills and resources. The extracurricular student Earth Group focuses on social and economic dimensions of environmental work. And he coordinates a School Improvement Team of faculty that focuses on finding ways for different courses and different aspects of school life to address EFS and improve the sustainability of the school's energy use and food systems.

At Williamstown Middle/High School, social studies teacher Alicia Rominger and science teacher

Dennis DeLena are in the second year of teaching an interdisciplinary tenth grade course called Living Systems. Together they focus their classes on the conceptual connections among human, natural, economic, social and political systems in a variety of contexts, from local to global. From creating living machines to utopian communities, students engage in the complexity and commonalities of sustainable systems.

Place-based Education Conference

Erica Zimmerman and Jean Berthiaume, social studies teacher at Harwood Union High School, led a roundtable on service learning at *The Promise of Place*, an exciting regional conference presented by the Northern Forest Center and Shelburne Farms in November in New Hampshire. This dynamic diverse network of place-based educators looks forward to meeting again in 2004.

EFS in the News...

- ▶ CCTV in Burlington featured Champlain Elementary's Sustainable Schools work on two programs this winter.
- ▶ ASCD highlighted VT EFS's curriculum design work in its

Curriculum Handbook supplement, "Focus on Integrated Curriculum," published in the Summer 2002 edition.

- ▶ *Stumbling Towards Sustainability*, a vast and valuable new compendium, recognized Vermont's sustainability standard in its chapter on K-12 education: "*Vermont in particular, is to be commended for the inclusiveness of its standards development process, which may explain why it is the only state with explicit standards to teach sustainability.*"



Former Commissioner of Agriculture Leon Graves and former Agency of Natural Resources Secretary Scott Johnstone commend Williamstown students and teachers at the State House event.