



Learning With Public Purpose

School Planting Project in Poland, Maine

Students in Poland, Maine worked with the Town Planning Board and the School Maintenance Department to plan and plant an appropriate vegetative border between the school and the road.

Essential Question

How can we successfully vegetate the school perimeter? (Keeping in mind erosion, weather, soil conditions, ATV and snowmobile use, and the politics associated with the Town Planning Board and School Committee).

Introduction

Working for 80-minute blocks every other day starting in February (2005), grade 11/12 students along with Michelle Garcia, science teacher, started their mission to re-vegetate the perimeter of the school grounds. They met with several community groups—including the Androscoggin Valley Soil and Conservation District, Art Dunlap, Code Enforcement Officer, high school maintenance manager and a local Nursery owner—to create a plan for the area along Route 11. After careful consideration of safety issues, plant survival and watering issues, the students presented their multi-year plan to Poland's town planning board. The planning board enthusiastically endorsed the students' proposal, since the original plantings installed by the town seven years ago when the school was built had not survived, and there are no funds available in the town budget to correct the resulting erosion and run-off problems.

Project Goals

- Engage students as partners in work with peers and community members.
- Expand students' understanding on issues related to erosion, soil conditions, and appropriate native plants.
- Promote critical thinking and problem solving skills by applying them to real world scientific issues.
- Engage students in place-based learning in science.
- Expose students to the collaboration and politics involved in large community projects.

Implementation

On May 25, 2005, the Poland Regional High School terrestrial biology class along with 30 other student and adult volunteers planted over 60 trees, shrubs and flowers along Route 11. This year, students will add additional plants and continue to nourish the vegetation. These students and those who helped with the planning last year hope their investment will prevent ATV and snowmobile use, as well as erosion and parking, and provide a visual barrier. Vanessa Ring, one of the five students involved in the early project planning, said, "It was a very challenging, yet rewarding project that required numerous hours of research and project planning. In the end, it was well worth every moment. I'm glad I volunteered my time." These plants will continue to need care but the students hope they have given something back to the community.