

West Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative Program Description

The MAISD Regional Mathematics and Science Center recently received funding from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust to establish a regional hub for place-based education and environmental stewardship. The award is part of the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative.

The Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative is a unique model that connects schools with their communities to create learning experiences for students that have lasting impact on the environment. Through regional hubs, teachers receive professional development to better facilitate inquiry-based learning and problem solving. Collaboration between schools and communities provides students with the opportunity to address local environmental issues. The resulting vibrant, hands-on learning experiences are designed to increase student achievement and help young Michigan residents become lifelong advocates for the Great Lakes.

Overview

The West Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative (GLSI) will strengthen the skills of teachers and capacity of schools to engage students in the meaningful work of their communities as they achieve academic and environmental stewardship goals. The counties served by the West Michigan initiative include Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, and North Ottawa. The initial funding period extends through June, 2009, with further funding subject to successful achievement of program evaluation outcomes.

All educators in the region will have access to the resources, activities, and services of the West Michigan GLSI's hub of community organizations. Interest in place-based education (PBE) among teachers in the region is exceptionally high. Teams of two or three teachers from up to 14 schools will be selected for full engagement. These groups will have full access to hub resources including professional development, outreach, community partners, stipends, mini-grants, and paid release time during the school year. A maximum of 12 schools with high interest and limited capacity will be selected for mentoring. Teacher teams from these schools will have access to many of the same resources. All educators in the region will be invited to spring and fall 2008 Resource Summits to learn more about the initiative's mission, outcomes, and activities. Program staff and representatives from the hub's partner organizations will be available throughout the project to guide schools to a higher level of readiness for PBE.

Reaching out

The first of three public forums will be conducted during the spring of 2008 to raise awareness of the West Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative, discuss community environmental needs, and invite communities and agencies in the region to become actively involved in the initiative.

Programs for teachers begin during the spring of 2008 with the Environmental Science Resource Summit, designed to introduce educators to the hub's partner organizations, the environmental science curricula and other resources available through the initiative. Teachers will be introduced to members of *Youth and Environment-Yes It Matters!*, a full spectrum of community organizations that are willing to partner with schools. Summit participants will meet members of these organizations, attend resource presentations, and learn about potential environmental projects.

Program staff will work with teachers and their principals to create a positive culture in their buildings that supports the engagement of classrooms and local organizations, as partners doing important work in the community. Teachers in the mentoring group and their principals will meet with program staff and community organizations to develop strategies for increasing their capacity.

Separate five-day summer professional development academies will be offered to experienced and less experienced teachers, based on their different needs. Members of community organizations will participate in various ways throughout both academies, culminating in commitments to partner with schools on specific projects and the creation of preliminary proposals.

Forging partnerships

Action teams composed of students, teachers, and community members will convene during late summer and throughout the 2008-2009 school year to strengthen partnerships, identify community needs, develop projects, acquire resources. Mini-grants, up to \$1,500, will be available for material costs of the project, release time for teachers, transportation costs for students, and support for community partners. Project budgets will be developed collaboratively by the school's action team.

Professional learning continues into the school year with daytime sessions where teachers, students, administrators, and community members can discuss PBE, environmental stewardship, and project development. These discussions occur four times throughout the school year, during the school day, and are closely linked to dinner and dialog sessions where teacher teams convene to learn new content, discuss progress, and refine their project design.

In addition to classroom PBE projects, students will be encouraged to undertake a School Stewardship Project. Teachers will learn how to mentor students who choose and design stewardship projects outside the school day. These projects may be unrelated to the students' PBE project and will be less complex and require fewer resources. A \$200 mini-grant will be available to each of the school teams participating fully and up to an additional 12 schools being mentored. These projects address our goal of increasing the frequency and quality of environmental stewardship in the community.

A Youth Stewardship Symposium will be held in the spring of 2009 as the culminating event of the program. Students will present and display their work to the public. Presentations will be followed by a luncheon, where students will have the valuable opportunity to interact with teachers and community members who value their work. After lunch, a panel discussion will allow participants from all stakeholder groups to share successes, challenges, and insights into successful school-community partnerships.

For more information including a complete calendar of events and a professional development schedule, contact Jennifer Haase at the MAISD Regional Mathematics & Science Center (231-767-7318), or go to www.muskegonisd.org/departments/mathscience/westmichiganlsi .