

**Environmental PORTAL Meeting  
Washington Park Arboretum  
October 18, 2004**

In attendance:

**Kevin Barth**, West Seattle High School  
**Chris Berry**, Washington Park Arboretum  
**Nanda Blazej**, Cascadia Consulting Group  
**Dawne Brevig**, Metrocenter YMCA  
**Emily Carlson**, Alliance for Education  
**Kirsten Cook**, EarthCorps  
**Terry Cornelius**, Cleveland High School  
**Darlene Evich**, NW Environmental Education Council  
**Michelle Hall**, University of Washington  
**Chuck Lennox**, Cascade Interpretive Consulting

**Karen Matsumoto**, IslandWood  
**Ron Mirabueno**, Seattle Parks & Recreation  
**Mark Plunkett**, Seattle Aquarium  
**Leanne Reuss**, NW Environmental Education Council  
**Kirstin Ruf**, United Way of King County  
**Fe Sheryl Siangco**, NW Environmental Education Council  
**Emily Sprong**, Seattle Audubon  
**Lisa Steele-Maley**, Olympic Park Institute  
**Andrew Tarter**, NW Environmental Education Council  
**Linda Versage**, North Seattle Community College

**I. Welcome and Introductions**

- Meet someone new and talk about the last time you worked with students and what that looked like. (An opportunity to learn about the work of other Portal members and see where connections could be made.)

**II. Highlights from Symposium**

- Thanks to those who helped plan and to those in attendance
- Could be the foundation for our future work to build on...

**III. Welcome to the Arboretum – Chris Berry**

- 230 Acres in the middle of urban area set aside for conservation of plants and for education. City of Seattle owns the land, University of Washington owns tree collection, Arboretum Foundation funds the project. Shauna and Chris are the education coordinators. Looking to introduce this space to youth throughout the city; Can be an extension of traditional classrooms. Currently connected to MOHAI, Gear Up, King County “Wheels to Water” programs. Trying to find ways to connect with middle and high school students.

**IV. The Evolving Work of the Environmental Portal**

- PORTAL is about **Connecting** and **Building Capacity**
- Overview of where we are at—
  - Review of information we have already collected and the foundational work that has taken place
  - Recognizing that many connections have already been made (through e-mail, individual relationships etc.)
- How can we pool our resources to better serve students without putting added pressure on teachers?
  - Teachers are often too overwhelmed to do the preparation work needed to facilitate *meaningful* community-based learning experiences.
  - Do we have to go through teachers to get access to students? What can we do to minimize the demands on teachers and be seen as an aid vs. a burden?

**V. Proposal: Focus on Service Learning and Culminating Project Requirements**

- Both service learning and culminating projects are graduation requirements and could be integrated
- Both have a lot of flexibility and can be tailored to students’ interests (and could incorporate an environmental theme)
- Would it be worthwhile to organize an event for youth to give them tools to meet service learning and/or culminating project requirements?
  - Lead teachers from the environmental related academies (HEAL at Cleveland and ESA at West Seattle) said this addressed a definite need and could be extremely beneficial
  - Nanda: There is an obvious need to ensure that service-learning and culminating projects have a “learning component”. It is important to making the learning component relevant.
  - Need to expand thinking “service to the environment” beyond Ivy pulls and planting... This could facilitate some really meaningful projects

- As a teacher it is a lot of work to maintain class, ensure students are meeting requirements, provide meaningful community learning opportunities etc... Trying to get some uniformity in terms of project structure and requirements.
- Should we focus our energy on organizing an event? (Centralized event vs. a rotating workshop)
  - Intent would be to provide students with the tools and resources they need to create meaningful work yet not put lots of extra pressure on teachers
  - Kevin (teacher at West Seattle) supports the idea. "Kids enjoy getting out of school to learn more about opportunities. It's good to start early and stay consistent. If kids saw different projects going on it would make more of an impact."

## **VI. If we focus on organizing this type of event, what needs to happen?**

- Need to ensure that it would have perceived value and be well attended
  - Need to gather information from the audience (students)? What do students need / want? What would be the best location? What types of workshops would most be beneficial? Need to make it as easy as possible for kids to get there. Feasibility study is needed.
- Identify other events that target a similar audience and/or have a similar purpose... What potential partnerships could be formed?
  - Earth Service Corps. Symposium is usually at the end of January and involves workshops, guest speakers, with options for service projects throughout the day – this event is planned in partnership with students.
  - Islandwood hosts an event each year where students share with other students about their service project events. Event is in May.
  - Seattle Public Schools service-learning showcase event is usually in May
- Get students involved in the planning and presenting roles
  - Linda Versage: Have the kids lead all the presentations – improves credibility and buy in from students.
  - Kevin Barth: Kids need to have an outlet to "share" their work. It is good to have professionals in the field to come see them present their work.
- Determine target audience (this doesn't mean that it would be exclusive to this group)
  - Michelle Hall: An event targeted towards Academies may be a good start as it would give us an indicator of future success (and we already have relationships that we could build from). Could be a benefit to get students together to share ideas and talk about projects
  - Kevin: it would be good to connect academies with each other. Academy teachers can leverage students to go to events. Teachers can define the requirements and build them into academy structure. All requirements and culminating project should be linked to classroom curriculum.
  - Terry: most teachers at Cleveland are new to the area and need to know more about opportunities. Though at the same time they are already overwhelmed. It is hard to find time to work opportunities into the daily work. This event could help relieve the burden and uncertainty.
  - The Academy Programs would be the easiest groups to work with – they have the most flexible structure to work with. Kids want to develop, design and stay involved long term – not just do grunt work.
  - Chuck: Target 2 high schools meet face to face with teachers – students can come by and learn more about opportunities. Maybe start with these first two schools and based on the results – make it into a bigger district wide event.
- Recognize other partnerships
  - Kevin – Academy Steering committees can help with this work
- Could establish a theme and/or some guiding parameters
  - Karen: We can build on opportunities that are within communities – therefore they have a direct connection to the community where they live.
  - This would be one way to organize the many resources/opportunities that are out there

## **VII. Concerns about Organizing this Type of Event**

- Kirsten – Need to determine details of event and ensure that it will fill a niche... I don't want to waste my time organizing an event for students and teachers that only other environmental educators will attend.
- What is the PORTALS goal/role in this? If we are not the service-learning experts, should we be taking on this work?

## VIII. **Q/A about Service-Learning Requirement**

- Wondering how teachers view service learning... Do they know what the requirements are? Is there someone teachers can go to – to get clarification on requirements?
  - Kirsten Ruff : In general it is on a school – by school basis. Some classes do classroom based service learning to help students meet their requirements (such as the West Seattle ESA). There is inconsistency in the value of service learning for the students. The Service Learning Seattle group is working on refining this process (If you are interested in learning more about this group or would like to be a part of it, please contact Emily).
- Is there a requirement for each student to do service learning?
  - Kevin Barth: Yes – students must do 60 hours of community service / service learning though there is not currently a distinction between the two. “They generally do whatever is the easiest.” We are looking at how we can better integrate this requirement into the work/expectations of the Environmental Sciences Academy.
- Last year, there was discussion at the district level about changing the requirement to a project-based requirement vs. an hours-based requirement (Although this change would help facilitate the “service” requirement so it is done in a meaningful way, this change would require a significant amount of work, training, and coordination.)
- Who within the school district authorizes the service-learning requirements? There is no one, central person, that is why there is little consistency.
- Service- learning opportunities could be tied into a class or outside the classroom.
- Kristen Cook: Completed a survey with the Carlson Center – asked “what types of service learning opportunities have folks been involved in” 90% of college freshmen indicated that their main experience was a community clean up.

## IX. **Other “Connections Tools” / Opportunities**

- United Way of King County hosts a website of referrals for posting service learning opportunities. Why are folks not using the United Way Website? Teachers don’t know about it.
- If anyone is interested in sitting on an academy advisory committee, contact Emily. it is an opportunity for a deeper connection. PORTAL is an avenue for people who are interested in providing learning opportunities for students but may not be able to attend monthly meetings.
- Chuck Lennox: OSPI is developing a website for students in the state to go to for resources for culminating projects. OSPI does not lists district specific information.
- OSPI will have an RFP coming in the next few months, focusing on environmental educations that can offer learning opportunities/resources to students/teachers
- Northwest Environmental Education Council: Some people are already contacting schools and principals to get answers to these questions. 709 schools who took a 2000 survey are being targeted. Response has been good, schools from Seattle are really responsive to this idea. Work from a volunteer contact data base or signed up at a “Storming the Sound” conference to recruit volunteer speakers to go out to schools. Teachers have asked for a list of workshops they can offer. Hoping to re-open the Washington State office for Environmental Education – though resource may no longer exist.

## X. **Next Steps: Continue to move our work forward**

- Establish a stronger connection with the Environmental-related academies
- Notify Emily if you are interested in becoming a part of the planning committee and/or have input on Portal’s work
- Please let Emily know of upcoming connection opportunities