



Schools & Education

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On North Haven Island, students put on their muck boots and tramped around the island clam flats, investigating what happened to the clamming industry in their community. They interviewed families who had been clamming on the island for generations, and shared their data with the Maine Department of Marine Resources.

On islands, the school and the community are deeply connected, each learning from the other. Teachers embrace the resources the islands provide—the people and the sea—and engage students to make learning more relevant.

The Island Institute's education programming is grounded in the idea that the key to a sustainable island community is a healthy, thriving school. Island schools are a testament to what education should be—where all children are known by their teachers and other adults in the community, and no student is left behind. When class time is finished, island schools are places where the community gathers, to meet, cheer sports teams, share community meals, and celebrate holidays and special events. Islanders realize that if their school is in danger, so is the heart of their community.

Since 1985, the Island Institute has worked with Maine's 14 year-round island schools, providing support by fostering communication, offering professional development opportunities to teachers, and nurturing students' college and career aspirations. All of the Institute's education programming is based on the philosophy that statistics and test scores are incomplete measures of education. A closer look at what is working in island schools reveals what these schools can teach the state and nation about educating children.

Place-based education (PBE) is a powerful learning approach that draws curricular connections to meaningful issues students experience in their day-to-day lives. PBE is now seen as cutting-edge educational reform, but it has always been done in island schools. Island schools may not always have the same resources as mainland schools, but the creativity and ingenuity of islanders, along with the beauty of the islands themselves, have inspired teachers to use their islands as a platform for learning.

For example, on Chebeague Island students in grades three, four, and five conducted a study that looked at the impact the lobster industry has on their community. They interviewed lobster-

men, scientists, other students, business owners and many others. Then they partnered with Bowdoin College students and created a website, complete with videos, drawings and essays by students. By studying and tackling real community issues, students become community leaders, reinforcing the school as a local resource and empowering students to become engaged citizens.

Island teachers in partnership with the Island Institute are taking this philosophy to the next level. Schools on islands and the isolated Maine coast are some of the only places in the country looking at how to combine place-based education with cutting-edge technology to develop an educational model that could work in any rural school throughout the country.

As part of the clamming project, North Haven Community School students studied why their local clam flats were no longer viable. Using ethnographic interview techniques and digital video technology, students interviewed local elders to learn about the history of the resource. Students studied local clam population dynamics and used Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to map their findings. They talked with leading state scientists about why their clam flats were closed, and created websites to communicate their findings to the larger community. In this one example, students employed interdisciplinary techniques to study a local issue, meeting state and national learning standards while making valuable connections with their community.

New methods to connect island schools are being used via Information

and Communications Technologies (ICT), such as webcasting, video conferencing, blogging and more. In the summer of 2008, over 150 island and remote coastal middle and high school students gathered for a week to work with their teachers on integrating technology into the school curriculum.

One afternoon, all 95 students and 45 teachers gathered in an auditorium to share their innovative work with students in Boston and leading education researchers throughout the country, all via video webcasting. For two hours, Maine's island students exchanged stories about their community-based technology learning experiences with students from Boston's inner city and with educators from the National Science Foundation. The event centered on fostering communication, and students accomplished this by sharing stories about how they make connections with their community through technology and education. Their presentations revealed that island schools are thriving, and can serve as a model for rural education across our nation.

Emerging communications technologies can provide the resources necessary to extend the walls of the classroom a little more each day: with a new island teacher mentoring program; inter-island teaching; and more opportunities for island kids to work together and socialize with other island students, across Maine and around the world. With the limitless creativity of island schoolteachers, the curiosity and technological expertise of today's students, and the support of island community members, the sky is the limit.