



Pilot Name: Earth Science - An Outdoor Experience
School/District: Gardiner Area High School/MSAD#11
Contact: Sharon Gallant

Overview:

Gardiner Area High School needed to change the instructional method of their freshman earth science course to rebound from alarming negative trends. Similar to what other districts were experiencing, we noted average grades declining, failures increasing, academic growth decreasing, disengagement increasing, and a large increase in social/emotional issues. Disengagement was rampant. Students simply stopped engaging with staff and other students.

With a desire to right the ship, a grant was written to purchase bagged chairs, magnetic clipboards, markers, and easels to bring classes outside. Shockingly, several students needed assistance on how to get the chair from the bag as they had never had the opportunity to use one. Students, many who had struggled with traditional forms of instruction and assessment, showed improved behavior when outside and greater interest in the lesson. Students began asking to go outside explaining they felt less stressed, more creative, and able to complete more work. When finals rolled around, freshmen scored better on the hands-on unit taught outdoors versus the other three units taught inside. It was at this time, we clearly understood the need to move to an outdoor performance-based instructional approach that incorporated experiential learning.

The plan: EVERY freshman will spend 75% of their earth science class outdoors to reverse the negative trends by:

- providing a real-world context for earth science
- making learning more engaging
- exposing students to new opportunities and experiences in an outdoor setting
- eliminating the socio-economic barriers
- eliminating barriers for those with disabilities
- implementing a challenging, meaningful, performance-based education

Contact

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