

Cape Flattery School District

New Gear Makes Outdoor Learning Possible Year-Round in Cape Flattery School District

Cape Flattery School District is one of the most remote in Washington State, located at the northwest tip of the Olympic Peninsula in Neah Bay. Bordered by the Pacific Ocean and the Strait of San Juan de Fuca and home to the Makah Tribe, the district contains a wealth of both natural and cultural resources. It also receives around 100 inches of rain each year, making it a challenge for students and teachers to access those resources. Thanks to Environmental Literacy funding, getting Neah Bay Secondary School students outdoors regardless of weather just got easier.

“Trying to schedule field trips can be tricky because we’re on the coast and there is so

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much rain and weather,” says Principal Lucy Dafoe. “but with the right gear, we can get our high school students outside year-round, whether it’s for digging clams, working fish or meeting with elders from the community.” Environmental Literacy funds will cover rain gear, rain boots and rubberized gloves as well as classroom sets of fillet knives for processing fish and other tools.

One important goal is to integrate core subjects with cultural arts through interactions with Makah Tribal members and elders. Those lessons will serve as opportunities for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as students transition out of the pandemic and will include introductions to traditional skills such as weaving baskets, identifying seasonal plants, storytelling and the Makah language. Neah Bay Secondary has several staff members who can provide a cultural orientation to marine and forest ecosystems.

Funding will also cover visits with science professionals within the Makah Tribe who bring relevance to lessons on ecology and marine science. “The Tribe has biologists, foresters and people involved with fisheries,” says Dafoe. “We live right off Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary, and we have some of the best coastline in the country. The grant created more avenues for us to engage with nature and with the tribal resources and community. It opens the door with a forum for people to come to us and for students to get out to visit them.”

Without Environmental Literacy funds, Dafoe would have had to seek other potential grants. “I would have been looking for a way to get outside because we haven’t been tapping into the resources available to us,” she says. “I was already looking for a way.”

The timing of the funding means the school has been able to purchase gear and create a foundation for the 2022-23 school year. “This helps us launch and start strong in September, but it also gives us time to get ready for October through June,” says Dafoe. “It’s organized and we have time to plan who is going where and when. It gives us a chance to think strategically and purchase everything we need.”