

Wahkiakum School District

Wahkiakum District Garden Gets a Boost From Environmental Literacy Funding

Wahkiakum School District includes two gardens, a greenhouse and just under 100 acres of forest. The greenhouse contains two essential pieces of equipment: a heating unit and vents used to control temperature. What it hasn't had was an efficient mechanism to control them. To change the settings, a staff member would have to periodically climb up a ladder with a screwdriver and adjust an old secondhand thermostat. It was not uncommon for the greenhouse plants to die in the interim.

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY



ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PROJECT

In a similar vein, the irrigation system for the district's apple and blueberry orchards, pumpkin patch and 32 raised garden beds relied on one volunteer with hoses and a few attachments. "She would take a full day to water, and when she was gone, we lost crops," says Superintendent Brent Freeman.

Wahkiakum is using Environmental Literacy funds to address both issues and to restore a garden shed to safely store tools and equipment, a new climate controller to efficiently control the temperature and water efficient irrigation system. The result is less energy consumption, stabilized temperature extremes and greatly improved water efficiency.

Without Environmental Literacy funds, the situation would have remained unchanged indefinitely, according to Freeman. "Our entire staff is paid below the state average," he explains. "We are a poor district in a poor county. If I had extra money, that would have gone toward staff wages or vehicles. This funding allows us to move this important project forward in a way that wouldn't have been possible otherwise."

The district is in the process of building a learning garden complex on a two-acre plot on school grounds, which includes the orchards, pumpkin patch, blueberries and garden beds. Plans are in place to expand a section for a native plant garden to support the Since Time Immemorial curriculum. Aside from the greenhouse, the plot also featured a 40-year-old garden shed that had become overgrown and was in disrepair. After investigating different options, the staff learned that they could restore it for two-thirds of the cost it would take to buy a new one. Environmental Literacy funds are covering the renovation costs.

"Now we can purchase garden supplies that won't be stolen because we have a shed we can lock up," says Freeman. "It will contain everything from worm beds and composters to shovels, rakes, hoes and wheelbarrows. Our goal is to expand our hands-on learning practices to all students, and this greatly expands teaching time and ensures the security of equipment."

"We started thinking about our assets and liabilities as a district," Freeman explains. "We have a food security problem in our county. If we could grow enough food to sustain some programs, we could make a difference." The garden has now grown to 60,000 square feet and with the new buildings and equipment in place, the district plans to pilot culinary arts and food preparation classes.