

Cascade School District

Cascade School District Uses ESSER Funds to Create Accessible Outdoor Classroom

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Cascade School District Superintendent Dr. Tracey Beckendorf-Edou began searching for funding. Her goal: to create the district's first outdoor classroom at Peshastin Dryden Elementary School, conveniently located next to a river. Just one year previously, the district had modified its strategic plan to include the outdoors as one of its core values. Now, the need to get

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY



Environmental Literacy Project

students outside was more pressing than ever.

By the time ESSER grants became available for activities that promote environmental literacy, the district was ready. “Even with a short turn-around time, we jumped at the opportunity,” says Dr. Beckendorf-Edou. “We have a primary school right next to the Wenatchee River in a riparian zone with beautiful trees and grasses. It will be perfect for an outdoor classroom, and we can make it accessible to all students.” Eight percent of the district’s students have special needs of various forms.

Grant funding covers Transforma-desks and Playcraft logs and stump steps which help to link the outdoor classroom to the natural environment at Peshastin Dryden Elementary School, a transitional K- grade 2 primary school. The desks can be configured into group seats and picnic tables and include hooks for backpacks, so students don’t have to worry about setting their school supplies on snowy or wet ground.

Already the district staff has attended initial training with PEI, and they incorporate at least one field-based learning experience per grade level, but having the outdoor classroom available will make integrated, field-based education more accessible for both teachers and students. Further training will occur this fall to build on the success they’ve already achieved.

While this may be the district’s first outdoor classroom, it won’t be the last, according to Beckendorf-Edou. The goal is to have one on every campus. “What’s neat about this one is that we can try it out and learn from it so that we’ll know what we need to improve,” she explains. “It will be a great example as we continue to create outdoor classrooms in our other schools.”