

Grasses in the Classes

By Erin Schirel

Approximately 120 students were involved in a project called "Grasses in the Classes" which is sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF). The CBF provided our classroom with all of the equipment necessary for this project including the wild celery seeds. Students grew two tubs of wild celery grasses, over 50 plants each. The grasses were transplanted in June into a Tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. The twenty students who monitored the grasses daily attended the transplantation field trip to Piney Run Park.

Meet a recognized community need: The Chesapeake Bay aquatic grasses have declined rapidly, especially in the 70's and 80's. By starting grasses indoors, the survival rates increases and the population rebounds.

Achieve curricular objectives: The "Grasses in the Classes" project fits very nicely into our seventh grade unit called "Chesapeake Choices and Challenges." The unit highlights the impacts, positive and negative, that people have on ecosystems. Aquatic plants and animals are discussed throughout the unit.

Reflect through the service-learning experience: Student logged results of the experiment between tubs on data sheets. These results were posted on the web site: www.dnr.state.md.us/bay/sav . Students noted comments on algae growth and any other changes. Reflection questions were kept in their extension journals.

Develop student responsibility: Students were responsible for maintaining the water levels in each tub, measuring grass height, testing water quality (Ph, nitrate), and bringing in water from home. They used homeroom, after school and second dismissal time to complete duties.

Establish community partnerships: Partnerships were established with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Chesapeake Bay Trust. The CBF provided all needed equipment including soil, grass seeds, tubs and water testing kits. The Chesapeake Bay Trust paid for the bus to the transplantation site. The CBF also provided training and curriculum for the teacher.

Plan ahead for service-learning: Students gained background knowledge on sea grasses, water quality, and the Chesapeake Bay. Students voted on an experiment - which tested the difference of plant growth in two separate temperature regulated tubs.

Equip students with knowledge and skills needed for service: Students read background information on wild celery grasses from various sources including internet, books, and videos. A discussion of water quality and sea grasses was held on more than one occasion.