

# Final Report      921706

## RiverScape Mural Open House, Celebration and Completion Report-

Invited guests attended the RiverScape Mural Project Open House and Celebration on May 22. Besides the whole student body and teachers, invited guests included Mayor Katz, school board member Mark Abrams, PPS district Science and Social Studies Curriculum coordinators, City Planning and Metro councilors, Headwaters to Oceans and environmental groups as well as many parents and neighborhood guests attended. The gym was packed! The Celebration was in the gym from 2:50-3:40pm. The Open House with tours of the mural by students continued until 7:30 right through the Portfolio Night where parents came to see their student's work. Many teachers and the school administration commented that the Portfolio night was much better attended as was the soccer summer signup due to concurrent scheduling.

The artist in residence and I estimated the finish date June 15<sup>th</sup>, but due to school closures for Radon testing during June we delayed the completion to the fall. We will need a few weeks painting then sealing during a school break to complete the mural. We were going to be able to finish with some long-long days, but with the closure and previous engagements of Wendy and faculty, we decided to postpone painting the last panels in the fall.

This will be good news for the incoming 6<sup>th</sup> grade. During their visits as 5<sup>th</sup> graders, they and their parents expressed real regret that they couldn't continue painting. Well now they can. We will incorporate the painting and H<sub>2</sub>O trips into their studies of watersheds in much the same way we did for the last two classes of sixth graders. Ownership of the mural will be extended another year. This has been a real asset to reducing graffiti on the halls. There has been hardly any since the mural began. Students respect their work and appreciate having the art on the walls.

Jere Fitterman  
12 July, 2001

# Gregory Heights M S Riverscape Mural

Grant Summary By Jere Fitterman

921706

## Grant description

This project is for biology and geography field studies of the urban Willamette River, incorporating math and language arts, to be translated in a mural painted on the halls of Gregory Heights. This mural will depict the River from the Willamette Falls in Oregon City to the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers at Kelley Point Park near Sauvie Island. An artist will direct the mural painting. Teachers will direct student research of sections of the shoreline. Students will work in groups and go down to their section of the river for field studies. An AmeriCorps independent placement volunteer will help plan the project, coordinate and supervise field study trips. Parent Teacher Association will help with painting, equipment supply and maintenance, and chaperoning field study trips to the river.

## Grant progress

One Americorp member has coordinated 368 students who have gone on 14 H2O a trips, painted 200 feet of mural under the direction of one artist in 6 months with 49 volunteers. We have 440 feet to go.

## Challenges and solutions

An early challenge for the project was gathering the people. We have been fortunate beyond expectations with our Artist-In-Residence, Wendy Dunder. She was featured in the RACC Arts Education Resource Directory as a mural artist who had worked with K-12 students. Her success with the Tualatin Skateboard Park Mural and a personal interview at Art-In-The-Park was all the recommendation I needed. When she took a trip to France in May, all I heard was, "When is Wendy coming back?" Now that she is back I hear, "It is so wonderful having this mural here. It goes up so fast. It changes every time I walk by!"

Finding the right project coordinator was as important as finding the artist because everybody has to work with this person, teachers, students, volunteers, staff, and visitors since I'm in the classroom when all the other grades are participating. Her artistic sense and friendly, but commanding tone with the students has only surpassed Brittin's organizational skills. We are exceedingly grateful and appreciative. She has coordinated and supervised all 10 field trips, organized all the classes working on the mural, and all the supplies for the mural. She also ran the first in 15 years "Run-for-the-Arts" campaign that raised over \$3000.

Our two biggest challenges have been teacher and volunteer support. Teachers have not embraced the full scope of the possibilities for use of the mural as anticipated in the proposal. But their response to the project has indicated that they see great possibilities for using the mural and river in their future curriculum. The Metro Urban development curriculum and my geography field study data collecting will be available for teachers during this summer and next year. Also, this year our faculty mural committee focused on organization. Next year it will focus on curriculum.

Parent Teacher Association has helped with painting, suggestions for equipment supply and maintenance, and chaperoning field study trips to the river. But the level of help has not been sufficient to allow more than 6 students working with the artist at a time. This could be increased to 10-15 with more adult supervision. We will feature the mural through guided tours in our 6<sup>th</sup> summer parent meeting, fall open house and as an ongoing drop-in attraction. We will continue to seek publicity as a way of attracting volunteers outside of our school community.

Student research of sections of the shoreline has not happened, yet. The mural has created a presence in the building that will stimulate much more study. Students developed and presented guided tours for visitors to the April 25 Open House. We had an impressive list of local community leaders and activists. They we in turn impressed with our work and presentation. With future funding students will work in groups and go down to a section of the river for field studies.

## Next steps

We have several other grants being considered, as well as Run-for-the-Arts and Chinook Book campaigns planned for 2000-2001. Brittin's AmeriCorps time will end in November. But if we have funds she wants to come back in the winter and spring and see the job done. Wendy will continue to paint with us through June 2001.

**"Everybody loves working on the mural, because it's fun to pass it and say to your friends, 'I did that part.' It is a great feeling," 6<sup>th</sup> grade student, Jalah Reid.**

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Jere Fitterman, science teacher at Gregory Heights Middle School, works with students on a riverscape through the halls of the school.

## Community goes 'back to school'

From opening time capsules to offering student-led tours, Schools across the district pulled out all the stops to plan events for Back-to-School Week April 24-30.

Back-to-School Week was a statewide event coordinated by Statewide Organization for Schools, a group of business and community leaders organized to foster more support for public schools. Even though participation was voluntary, more than two-thirds of Portland schools organized some activities.

Politicians and other dignitaries participated in several events. Portland Mayor Vera Katz went to Beach School, while Commissioner Jim Francesconi was at Buckman. Sen. Mark Hatfield and state Superintendent Stan Bunn toured Jefferson, while Congressman Earl Blumenauer was at Bridger Elementary and Roosevelt High.

Perhaps the most fun was at schools where "regular folks" showed up. Rose City Park had retired staff, alumni and neighbors attend for the opening of a time

capsule that was buried in 1978. At many elementary schools, children wrote and distributed invitations to neighbors and business people.

At Gregory Heights Middle School, community members and river advocates were invited to join students in painting a mural of the Willamette River through the halls of the school. The project shows how schools can combine lessons in art and science, as students learn about the challenges of managing an urban watershed.

Sadly, some schools organized events and extended several invitations, but got little or no attendance. Organizers predict future years will be more successful, however, as the event becomes more well-known.

"I know that Back-to-School week required precious time and energy," said Debbie Goldberg Menashe, school board chair. "The entire board joins me to say thank everyone for these extra efforts beyond the extraordinary work all of you devote to our kids, every single day."

## Ballots in the mail

Ballots are in the mail for the May 16 primary election. Included on this ballot is Measure 26-2, a five-year levy that will allow Portland Public Schools to:

- replace outdated textbooks;
- hire 170 teachers to reduce class size and begin to restore arts and music programs;
- support summer school and other programs for struggling students.

All schools will receive some additional staffing, based on enrollment. That means the smallest schools may get a half of an FTE, while the largest high schools may get 4 or 5 additional teachers.

Ballots are due back May 16. Measure 26-2 would raise about \$78 million over five years. It would cost 75 cents per \$1,000 assessed value, or about \$8 a month for a typical Portland home.

However people choose to vote, it's important that they return their ballots. That's because Measure 26-2 is subject to the "double majority." Even if Measure 26-2 gets a majority of yes votes, it will not pass unless 50 percent of all registered voters mail back their ballots.

Additional information is available in the Voter's Pamphlet. Fact sheets also are available in all PPS schools and offices.

## Plan nears completion

After a year of work and community input, the strategic plan is nearly complete. Below, we've included the schedule leading up to board adoption.

On May 17, the seven action teams will present their final recommendations to the strategic plan core team. The core team will meet that evening and all the next day to determine which recommendations to include in their final draft of the plan.

Superintendent Ben Canada, who is a member of the core team, will present the plan, including any additional administrative recommendations, to the school board on June 5. The plan will be available for additional public review for two weeks.

The school board will hold a special session on June 19 to take public comment and discuss the plan. Final adoption of the plan by the school board is scheduled for June 26.