

Another View

Education and the Land Trust

by Mike Little,
IHT Executive Director

Environmental education has been an important element of Island Heritage Trust's public outreach since its beginning. One of our very first projects was a series of programs in the elementary school. That commitment has lasted until today—with each of the Deer Isle-Stonington Elementary School grades visiting one of the island preserves twice a year with IHT staff or volunteers to learn about the natural history of the place they live.

IHT is about to take its school programs to a whole new level, working with high school's Marine Studies Pathway. The Board and staff of IHT are excited by Principal Todd West's vision of how secondary education should be delivered. "Project based" learning that tackles real world issues and problems facing our community. Not teaching algebra as an abstract that might have relevance some day, some way—but investigating an issue and bringing in algebra to clarify or describe that problem so that it can be addressed. What an exciting, revolutionary way to deliver high school education! Indeed, it is not so much the school delivering the education as the students identifying issues and discovering the tools (i.e. school offerings) that will help, if not solve, at least define the problems.

What does this have to do with IHT? Potentially a great deal. First, there are a number of environ-

mental issues that IHT would love to address, but does not have the resources necessary. Active, inquisitive high school students can be a big part of those resources. Second, "Project-based learning" is at the heart of environmental education—something IHT has been doing for years. This is what we do, only on a much bigger scale. Third, IHT can supply field support to the teachers and students carrying out these investigations/projects, promoting science in our community to address environmental issues.

The Marine Studies Pathway is up and running. Beginning with next semester it will be fully integrated into the curriculum. Partnering with Penobscot East Resource Center (PERC), the high school has launched the Downeast Skippers Program for future fishermen, but that is only part of the program. The school classes are looking at science and math through a marine lens. If you have a chance to attend one of Principal West's presentations on this innovative approach to learning—I urge you to do so!

IHT has been interested in the paradox and problem associated with Southeast Harbor. Once a very productive fishery, it is now almost barren. The obvious detrimental practices have been discontinued for some time—but the

estuary has not recovered. Here is a long term study that can possibly lead to restoration efforts. A real world problem that needs a solution, or at least an investigation. A perfect match for the Marine Studies Pathway.

The IHT Board of Trustees believes strongly in this effort by Principal West to reinvigorate the high school—after all, our schools are the beating heart of our communities. IHT is working very hard to secure the necessary resources to support an Environmental Educator who would work directly with the Marine Studies Pathway. A "capstone" grant has been offered by the Bessemer Trust, and a \$6,000 pledge has been offered by an anonymous donor—if IHT can find the last \$4,000 needed for a barebones start before December 15. This would give IHT the funds to bring a part-time educator on board, and make IHT a full player in this tremendous effort at redesigning education.

However IHT fares is less important than the success of this high school project. The future of our students and therefore the future of our community hangs in the balance. IHT and PERC are committed to working together with the high school on the Marine Studies Pathway. What an exciting prospect!

Through My Eyes

The memories remain