

King Middle School To Join In Sign Unveiling

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Students and teachers from King Middle School will join leaders from Portland Parks, Maine Audubon, and others to unveil a new interpretive sign about an ongoing, collaborative, environmental stewardship project in Deering Oaks park. A short ceremony will take place on Wednesday, November 17, at 8:30 a.m. near the Deering Street entrance to the park. It will include remarks from various partners about the “living laboratory” project and its importance, as well as a ribbon cutting to present the site to the community.

The school and several partners adopted an area in Deering Oaks in 2019 to restore and study wildlife habitat. In partnership with Maine Audubon, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and others, students and teachers at King Middle School have adopted this site to practice and promote environmental stewardship. In particular, they are restoring habitat for birds and other wildlife by restoring a native forest understory to replace acres of lawn, which is relatively devoid of direct benefits to Maine wildlife.

As the new sign explains, “for King students and for the city, this site is a ‘living laboratory.’ Students research what plants grow well, what animals are benefitting, how the site changes, and how it compares to other sites. What they learn can then be shared and used with other communities.”

While the pandemic and remote learning slowed direct collaboration last year, Portland Parks has continued to maintain the site as a “no mow” area, except for paths that meander through the area, by various sign posts with QR codes – digital links to videos about native plant restoration that were made by King Middle School students and which can be viewed by visitors with smart devices.

King Principal Caitlin LeClair said the unveiling of the sign represents a sort of return to normalcy for students and teachers there. “As an expeditionary learning school, King has focused our teaching around community collaboration, learning in public, and engaging students in hands-on fieldwork for decades. The COVID pandemic has certainly impacted these approaches over the past two school years. The unveiling of the sign is a great reminder for our students and faculty that

our work continues and matters for the neighborhoods and communities around us,” LeClair said.

The school has also partnered with the Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative to add a new Climate Change Observatory picture post at the site. Visitors can use the mount on top of the post to take a picture, and then can submit the photo to what will become a time-lapse view of the site over time.

Maine Audubon works to conserve Maine’s wildlife and wildlife habitat by engaging people in education, conservation, and action.

The **Portland Public Schools** is Maine’s largest school district, with approximately 6,500 students, and is also the most diverse. About one-third of the district’s students come from homes where languages other than English are spoken—a total of more than 60 languages. 52 percent of the district’s students are white and 48 percent are students of color. Approximately half of PPS students qualify for free or reduced-price school meals.

Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative works collectively in Maine to create mutually beneficial relationships with the earth, communities, and people through the conservation movement.