

Clackamas High program is turning heads

High school's sustainability program featured in new book

BY ANTHONY ROBERTS

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Clackamas High School continues to turn heads with its innovative sustainability initiatives.

The latest recognition comes for a new book, "Smart by Nature: School for sustainability," released by the California-based Center for Ecoliteracy.

"They came up a couple of times and followed me around and looked at the facility itself and the program we run," said science teacher Rod Schroufe, who teaches the school's Sustainable Systems class. "I think that they liked the idea that there's kind of an environmental leadership program that is constantly looking at and improving and educating others about both sustainability in the workplace and sustainability at home."

Schroufe and his students have grown accustomed to the recognition. In addition to attention from the local media (Students get set for Harvest, Clackamas Review, Oct. 7) they've been featured in *Edutopia*, an academic journal founded by filmmaker George Lucas, and PBS's "News Hour with Jim Lehr."

"We looked for success stories. We identified schools that were creatively incorporating sustainability into their food systems, buildings and campus, experience of community, and teaching and learning," said Lisa Bennett, Communications Director of the Center for Ecoliteracy at the David Brower Center, which developed the book. "I followed (Schroufe) for several days and saw how enthusiastically and respectfully students engaged with him. He struck me as a teacher's teacher, and someone who has a great deal to share about schooling for sustainability."

"Smart by Nature" takes a look at about 20 schools or districts engaged in different sustainability initiatives across the country. A middle school in Maine grows vegetables at 10 degrees below zero while a New York school runs its own wastewater treatment plant. Many of the schools featured are environmentally themed academies that have popped up in recent years. Not Clackamas. Students and teachers there fund the sustainability program by collecting the school's recyclables and applying for grants. Schroufe said he told building administrators the program would not cost the district a dime. He kept his promise.

The program at Clackamas is multi-faceted. The original recycling program is still underway, and the "Smart by Nature" piece follows students as they root through recycling bins and separate cans from bottles. There is also a community garden and a public service aspect. The school works with the Oregon-based nonprofit SOLV on environmental cleanups and tree planting excursions. But one of the program's most vital pieces is also one of its most basic: it gets students out into nature.

That's a piece lacking from many of their lives, Schroufe said, noting that the population boom in the Clackamas area has made it a more urban setting, where kids are exposed to video game's, computer screens and manicured lawns — not spiders.

"It's hard at first, but pretty soon curiosity overcomes them and they kind of revert to the way they were when they were kids," Schroufe said of students in his class. "There's an adjustment period of just taking three weeks and working through some of the barriers for those kids, and it makes all the difference in the world ... eventually, they want to go outside."



Rob Schroufe, third from right, with students from his Sustainable Systems class at Clackamas High School.

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