

What's new at Kensington Elementary School?

There is a lot to be excited about at KES! Students have been busy exploring and protecting our local habitats, designing biomes, building a rain garden and educating the Kensington residents about some of the groundwater issues we face in town. *Learning* is about *doing* at Kensington Elementary School these days!

About a year ago, the teachers began to shift their educational practices as we move towards a Competency Based system of education at KES as required by state law by the 2017-2018 school year. **So what is Competency Based Education?** Competency Based Education or CBE is a system of academic instruction, assessment and reporting that focuses on students' ability to demonstrate and apply their knowledge across content areas. Competency Based Learning is personalized as it allows students to progress at their own pace once they have shown mastery of skills. Because CBE emphasizes personalization, including educational experiences outside the school setting, it is an opportunity for families to contribute to the progress and content of their students' educations, and to collaborate with teachers. The Kensington CBE Committee includes teachers, parents and community members working together to shape the future of CBE at KES.

Teachers, staff, and parents at KES have spent considerable time this past school year researching CBE, working with SAU 16's Competency Education Consultant, Rose Colby, and visiting a few notable schools across New Hampshire to learn from other professionals who have already started this competency shift. This past spring, KES launched Project-Based Learning which is another means for students to achieve competency. These projects, some of which were mentioned earlier, incorporated opportunities for students to develop self-management skills, collaborate with one another, and investigate real world problems. The work at school was engaging and meaningful and students were eager to share their new knowledge with others.

When asked what was the most important thing learned from their PBL, one fifth grader reflected "that even though you may think you can't (as a kid), you can make a difference in your local environment and you can impact a lot of stuff by doing so." Another student, who is typically quiet when working in groups, went on to say that "the most important thing that I learned during this project is that you should always share your thoughts with your group and always communicate." One common realization that was mentioned by more than one group was that "in order to succeed, you must work as a team." Yes, students learn content from their Project-Based Learning--they can tell you all about our local ecosystem and surrounding environment, they can share how to use Google Earth to locate longitude and latitudes of vernal pools behind our school, they can craft a persuasive email to town officials, local businesses, and Department heads at UNH--but most importantly, these students are leaving KES with skills they can apply anywhere they go, within any project they are given. These "Soft Skills" of Communication, Collaboration, Problem-Solving, Adaptability and Teamwork give them the confidence that they can and will make a difference in the world around them.

We are enthused about the changes we have already made and for the changes still to come. Teachers at KES have always believed in meeting students' individual needs and with our small class sizes, we have been fortunate to be able to know each of our students so well.

The benefits of a Competency Based Education system are exciting for everyone - the possibilities for learning are endless! If you'd like to learn more about the Competency Education movement, please feel free to visit www.competencyworks.org for more information.