

THE BEACON HILL TIMES

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Students learn and volunteer

By Allison Moore

THE ADVENT SCHOOL HAS PARTNERED with the Esplanade Association to sponsor a section of the park, improving the area and incorporating outdoor activities into its science curriculum.

"Students will be using the park as an outdoor learning lab," said Patrice Todisco, executive director of TEA.

While many local schools and universities send volunteers to the park, this program is different because of the Advent School's long-term commitment to the project. "This is a yearlong, intense, sustained program," she said. "The kids are in the park every week. It's not just about maintenance, it's about them learning about the park."

"They'll be learning all aspects of what it means to be an urban park," said Jen Roy, coordinator

of TEA volunteer and community enrichment programs. "There's a commitment to having all grades work on the area, learning about native and invasive species, watching how the park changes seasonally."

While program specifics are still under discussion, said Jaime Bard, Advent School director of admission and community outreach, the collaboration will certainly be incorporated into lessons during the upcoming school year. "There are endless opportunities for us to use the space to learn about everything from plants and animals to sustainability, for firsthand experience," she said. Students will work on a piece of land between the Arthur Fieldler Footbridge and the Hatch Shell.

The project has gotten a slow start because administrators have been focusing on finishing the

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school's new earth lab, a room where students can do more hands-on activities, including recycling, creating model green homes, and learning about helping the Earth. "Our science curriculum is theme-based and hands-on," said Bard. "Environmental sustainability is a huge part of our school's mission."

Now that the school is ready to start using the Esplanade, she said, teachers are jumping at the chance to incorporate outdoor learning into their lessons. "Many of them say, 'I already teach this, why not move it out there?'"

"It goes somewhat beyond science," said Nancy Harris Frohlich, head of school. "We're in a situation where we're looking to educate children, make them active participants in the world in which they live. They'll see what's possible for them to do on a local level and, as they grow older, they'll envision the world as a place that needs each one of us."

The partnership is part of a pilot program that will help establish how private organizations can work with TEA. A steering committee at the school, made up of parents, faculty and administration, will straighten out all aspects of the program and create a model that others can use to collaborate with TEA in the future. "We're taking a long-term perspective," said Bard. "We're trying to figure out who does what, who pays for what. We're getting all the questions answered. Our end goal is a document we can share with other organizations so, collectively, our park will look outstanding and healthy."

"The partnership makes sense between our community and our children," she said. "It has educational purposes, and we're also giving back to the space, making it look gorgeous." ■