

Skowhegan Area Middle School – Program Description

Urbanicity: Rural

Location: Skowhegan Area Middle School,
Somerset Grist Mill

Grades: 6-8

Eligible for free & reduced-price lunch: 61%

Demographics: Caucasian

Community Partners: Somerset Grist
Mill

Hours of Operation: Monday –
Thursday, 2:30 – 4:30 p.m.

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Site Overview

Skowhegan is a poor rural area in Maine. With the exception of a New Balance shoe factory, it has little local manufacturing. Skowhegan has some of the richest natural resources in the country. It is home to thriving outdoor recreation businesses, providing equipment for activities such as skiing, snowboarding and kayaking. Skowhegan's agricultural history is also strong. While many family farms closed in the 1950's, farms are now starting to come back run by young people with college educations who farm organic food, tapping into the local "slow food" movement. Restaurants, as a selling point, serve produce grown locally.

Maine used to be called the "breadbasket of the east" because of its grain production. The resurgence of the farms spurred a Skowhegan resident to open up an operational grist mill. To do so, the resident purchased and renovated an old county jail. One part of the building is devoted to the mill itself which is grinding wheat from local farms, and the flour is distributed all over Maine. In addition to the grist mill, the location holds a weekly farmer's market in the parking lot, and rents, for very little money, space to local businesses and artisans. Space at the grist mill is also rented to the 21st CCLC TechSpot, a community technology center staffed by youth from the Skowhegan 21st CCLC program.

Implementation of Practices

Community Partnerships

The 21st CCLC program at Skowhegan has made great use of local resources to enhance their CTE program, in particular the use of technology along with community partnerships. For example, an operating grist mill was recently opened in an old jail in the downtown area. The owner of the mill made inexpensive space available to local artisans and businesses, and currently houses a knit shop and pottery studio. The 21st CCLC was able to get a low-rent space in the mill, which they call the "TechSpot." It was renovated by staff

and students from the high school and furnished with donated computers by a local computer shop. It is also wired for the internet.

Authentic Career-Related Learning Opportunities

TechSpot is a student-run community computing center which is based in a room in the Grist Mill. Students in the 21st CCLC helped to renovate and wire TechSpot to prepare it for use. Students come to Tech Spot in the afternoons and evenings, and volunteer their time to help community members learn about various aspects of the computer and the internet. For example, they help community members learn how to find videos on YouTube, how to conduct computer searches, how to read books on the computer and set up a Twitter account. Many of the community members who visit TechSpot are seniors who are not comfortable with technology, or who cannot afford the technology. There is always an adult volunteer present to oversee the program. Students and volunteers participate in a preliminary training over the summer in preparation for the program provided by the Technology Integrationist (an in-school teacher from the middle school), and they also participate in an in-service training later in the school year.

In addition to TechSpot, the 21st CCLC has been able to secure, through other funding, sport and recreational equipment, particularly a ropes course and several kayaks. They have loaned this equipment to the school, which is literally on the bank of a river heavily used for recreational kayaking. The school also resides on several acres of woods on which the ropes course has been installed. This has enhanced the 21st CCLC's relationship with the school, which sees them as a vital and useful resource. In addition, they have been able to link the recreational and sports work they do in the afterschool program with the recreational industry – for example, many middle school students go on to take a course on the recreational industry offered at the vocational high school.

Authentic Career-Related Learning Opportunities

- Students attend Techspot which is off-site in community
- Students help local residents become comfortable with technology
- There is always an adult volunteer who is present to supervise
- All youth receive in-service training from the school's technology Integrationist.