

Old Town students display river project

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Ruth Hallsworth, left, holds a poster as Sally Gilbert, second from left, Cheryl Daigle, third from left, and Hannah Webber, right, tape posters to the new Old Town information kiosk in Riverfront Park. (Bangor Daily News/Kevin Bennett)
River Watershed Education Program.

OLD TOWN, Maine - As they gathered Thursday afternoon in the city's Riverfront Park, a group of Old Town Elementary School fifth-grade students unveiled the results of a project for which they studied the body of water that flowed just a few dozen yards away.

Fifty-five students from three elementary classes showed off posters they created for a new information kiosk in the park. The youngsters did the research, writing and design of the posters through a pilot project called the Penobscot

"We put so much work and effort into it," student Gabe Bamford said. "It's just so awesome to see it, and people all over town are going to see it, too. It's sort of like we put everything we learned onto three different posters."

The one wrinkle in the unveiling? The posters were too big for the new kiosk built by the city; but that can be fixed.

Thursday was the students' chance to show off their work to city and school administrators, officials from some of the local organizations that helped with the research, and plenty of proud parents.

"I'm so impressed with the work you guys did," city manager Peggy Daigle said. "It's beautiful."

Beth Bisson of the Maine Sea Grant College Program, which is based at the University of Maine, helped coordinate the project with the Senator George J. Mitchell Center for Environmental and Watershed Research at the University of Maine, and the Penobscot River Restoration Trust.

It was funded with a \$7,500 grant from the U.S. Geological Survey-Maine Water Resources Research Institute Grants Program.

Teachers Kristy St. Peter, Sandy Daniel and Cathy Lucas developed the curriculum last summer. Each teacher had her students focus on a different facet of the project — dam

removal and restoration, the Penobscot River watershed and Penobscot River history.

The students designed the posters, using photos of their field trips and drawings of fish and birds that live in and along the river.

To gather information, the students took field trips to local fish hatcheries, museums and salmon-fishing clubs. They also heard from guest speakers about the history and biology of the river. Some students also took oral histories from residents and others who make their living on the Penobscot.

OTES principal Jeanna Tuell helped with the project by serving as a mock interviewee for the oral history piece of the project.

Lauren Tibbits, Bamford's classmate, said she learned a lot about the river.

"I didn't know that much about salmon," she said. "They keep the scent of where they were born in their brain, so they go there to spawn."

The program could be tweaked for other major Maine watersheds to be used in other schools, Bisson said.

jbloch@bangordailynews.net

990-8287

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