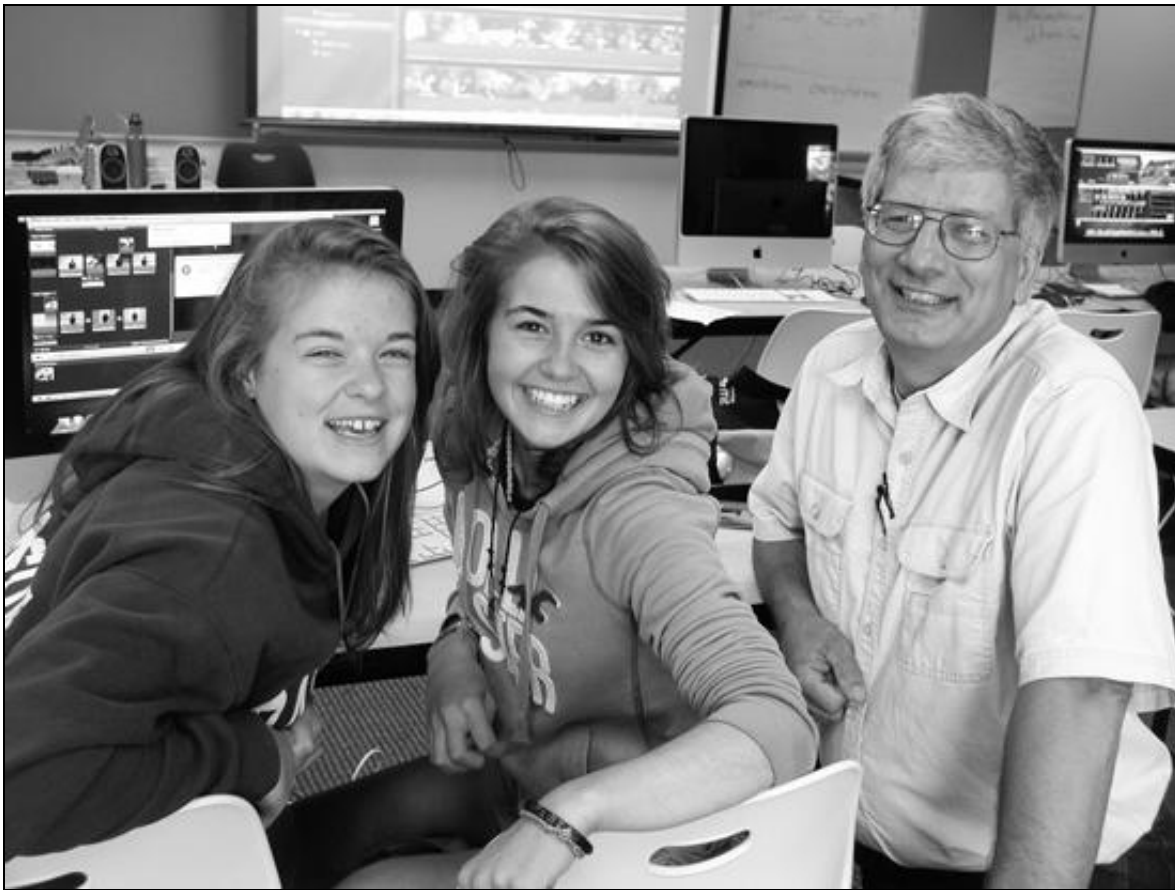


# THE WORKING WATERFRONT

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Article

## Students Consider Energy Future

by Kate Hynd



Students and teachers from Washington Academy work together at the Energy for ME summer institute to come up with projects for the school year. Photo: Ruth Kermish-Allen

Four students and two teachers clutched the sides of a white sheet with three small, numbered holes. One student sat on the floor and peered up through the bottom of the sheet to make sure numbered wiffle balls fell through their corresponding holes and into the waiting cardboard box below. As each ball plunked into the box, the team let out a cheer.

Finishing the challenge before the five other middle schools participating in this brand-new five-day Summer Institute, the students and teachers of Pemetic School let out victorious shouts and enthusiastic high-fives. This five-day camp is located at the Schoodic Education and Research Center in Winter Harbor and is hosted by the Island Institute; it is called Energy for ME.

As the game wound down, Island Institute Education Director Ruth Kermish-Allen asked all the students participating in the camp, “What made you successful?”

One of the students from Pemetic School, Tayloranne McVicar, raised her hand and said, “My whole group communicated a lot. We didn’t get mad, and we strategized if it didn’t work.”

Students often make observations that reach beyond their experience, and this insight is no exception. Communication, patience and new strategies led to the creation of Energy for ME.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) provided the Island Institute with a \$1.2 million education grant earlier this year for the Energy for ME project, building on an earlier NSF funded project, CREST.

CREST stands for Community for Rural Education, Stewardship, and Technology, and it developed Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) skills through GIS, Web and ethnography training.

After CREST, the Island Institute’s first NSF-funded education program, wrapped up in 2010, Kermish-Allen set out to develop another education program based on what she had learned. “We asked teachers what content areas they wanted to focus on and which aspects of the CREST program worked well. With energy prices on the rise, energy was the perfect focus.”

On Maine’s islands, high energy costs eat up scarce resources for schools, community buildings and individual homes. Public awareness of energy usage is often a first step toward launching energy efficiency programs.

At the Energy for ME Summer Institute, students and teachers are gaining skills by working with Maine Energy Education Program (MEEP) instructors data literacy skills, geographic information system (GIS) and ethnography educators. The skills they learn will help them develop projects in their communities to lower energy costs. Progress will be monitored by analyzing electricity usage in four buildings in each of their communities using eMonitors.

eMonitors are electricity monitors that analyze a building’s electricity use by circuit. The data is updated every minute, and students can log on to a website to observe energy usage.

Rachel Thompson, the Island Institute’s education programs associate, explained that when students and teachers from the 10 schools involved in the Energy for ME Summer Institute return home, eMonitors will be installed in the school, a community building and two homes.

Bonnie Burne, a science teacher at Pemetic School, said her students are already excited. “My students came up to me today and told me, ‘We figured out our project. We know what we want to do.’ Their project idea is not coming from me.”

The students’ excitement was palpable as they leaned forward and shared their ideas with each other. Tayloranne McVicar, explained the idea she developed with her teammates. “We took a class on light meters and learned how to measure the light in a room... We found a lot of light is wasted. Peter and I came up with an idea for our science project... We thought we could see if we could get dimmers in our school because we don’t need to have lights on high levels all the time. It was our idea,” she said proudly as she looked at Peter Jacobson.

Jacobson chimed in saying, “If we cut down the light used, we’d save energy and help other places.” A third classmate, Emma Forthofer joined the conversation and said, “If enough kids are interested and take a stand, then the adults would have to pay attention.” She then began, “If we’ve done the research,” which was followed by McVicar saying, “and if we have proof,” and was completed by Jacobson saying, “we would be convincing.” Forthofer wrapped up the the conversation by saying, “The classes made me think how we could save our community.”

*Kate Hynd is a resident of Thomaston and a participant in The Working Waterfront's Student Journalism Program and a CREST student alumni.*