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Environmental partners with POBS to bring students, staff together



POBS is a nonprofit experiential education organization that serves people of all ages and backgrounds through active learning expeditions that inspire character development, self-discovery and service—both in and out of the classroom.

The best form of education comes through experience, challenge and discovery. Jessica Naugle McAtamney, principal at Lankenau Environmental Science Magnet High School, understands this best. When Jessica came to the district in 2002, at W.B. Saul High School, she was tasked with facilitating Philadelphia Outward Bound School (POBS) school trips. A former AG teacher, Jessica moved to Lankenau Environmental and has now been involved with POBS for 20 years. She's been on over a dozen trips herself, getting to see the wonders of experiential learning firsthand.

According to McAtamney, "This is some of the best programming the Philadelphia School District has. It has morphed over the years, but an important constant remains

the same: self-growth. Learning doesn't have four walls, and quality POBS programming enables students to get out of their comfort zone."

The goal of POBS expeditions and Insight Day programs is to create bonds, build trust and enable stronger connections between all who participate. The POBS programming implemented with Lankenau touches all high school students and pushes each of them to step out of their comfort zone and the digital world in which they now live.

"We are making a shift to social emotional learning, and this is exactly what POBS does. This is one of the many mechanisms through which you can build capacity with people. When we offer carrots to kids, good things happen," said McAtamney.

Allowing students to demonstrate their strengths and abilities in places beyond the traditional classroom also enables them to reach a potential that they may not have otherwise been aware of. Students benefit from this experience in a number of ways.

"Students get to view one another in a different light and serve in a leadership capacity. They wouldn't have this kind of opportunity in a brick-and-mortar classroom. The loudest, strongest and most verbal students in the classroom setting may be different on an aerial course. It enables different strengths to be present. Some of the quieter classroom kids scramble to the top of the pole, earning credit with others, who then view them differently. Students are challenged in differing ways, and overcoming challenges enables growth," continued McAtamney.

At the beginning of the last school year, McAtamney had all the teachers at Lankenau Science Magnet participate in POBS programs at the Discovery Center. What is beneficial for students is often beneficial for those who work directly with students. This shared adventure brought the staff closer together, allowing everyone—from student teachers to directors—to show off different strengths and, most importantly, grow and shine together. Such an experience enabled staff to better relate to their students, who participate in these same adventures.

The partnership even extended into Roxborough, when Lankenau Environmental invited POBS in for an on-site program. Students were truly excited to be there, and they asked the staff when they would be able to participate in another POBS adventure. Only a few months later, those students got the opportunity to participate in a more typical POBS program at the Wigard Avenue location. This included some "get to know you" games and other activities, such as climbing the "Goal Pole."

"The programming here offers students the opportunity to connect outside of school walls and interact in a different space, and to see themselves in a different light," said Geo Meneses, Center-Based Program Coordinator with POBS. "It also gets them

engaged with the city's park system. Since our Wigard location is a part of Wissahickon Park, instructors may take the students on a hike down to the creek.”

One of the chaperones for this particular POBS outing was Sherley Olopherne, GSA Advisor and special education teacher in the math department. Olopherne said, “These activities are great for our students. It builds teamwork. It builds community. The kids have fun while they are being challenged. They also support each other, which is, of course, one of the goals of this program. We’re excited do this more often!”

POBS is a nonprofit experiential education organization that serves people of all ages and backgrounds through active learning expeditions that inspire character development, self-discovery and service—both in and out of the classroom.

For almost 30 years, POBS has delivered challenging outdoor learning programs that embrace Outward Bound’s mission of changing lives through challenge and discovery. Every Outward Bound program is built around a progression that delivers powerful life lessons by encouraging participants to safely and confidently step outside their comfort zone while traveling through spectacular natural environments. These landscapes, in tandem with Outward Bound’s internationally recognized curriculum, teach not only the hard, technical skills necessary to thrive in the outdoors but also the relevant skills necessary for life.