

PEAK program tops Hancock board meeting

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HANCOCK - The Hancock Public Schools Board of Education members received a look into one of Hancock Central High School's interdisciplinary courses during their regular meeting Monday.



Board members walked from their meeting room to the classroom of science and math teacher Brian Rajdl to hear about the Partnership for Environment and Academics in the Keweenaw, or PEAK, program for juniors and seniors, which combines environmental science with English. The program began during the 2008-09 school year.

A brief slide presentation on some of the class projects was shown. Projects include the building of bird feeders, the construction of portable folding wooden chairs, and the efforts of students to monitor and establish baseline data for Swedetown Creek and Boston Pond.

Rajdl said at the start of each course, students work together.

"We tackle a bunch of stuff as a group," he said.

Eventually, students take on projects as individuals or in small groups, Rajdl said.

Rajdl said the intent of the class is to get students to understand the interconnectivity of human actions and how they affect the environment, so it includes a section on cooking and choosing food which has the least environmental impact.

Students also use tandem bicycles, skis and snowshoes to get to as many of their field projects as possible, Rajdl said.

Rajdl said funding for the class comes from grants from the National Science Foundation and the Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative. So far, \$39,500 in grants have been received.

The PEAK program partners with local government entities, such as the Department of Natural Resources to do studies at Boston Pond, and the Center for Water and Society at Michigan Technological University. Other partners include the Gratiot Lake Conservancy, Isle Royale Institute, Keweenaw Land Trust, Ottawa National Forest, Hancock Rotary and the Keweenaw Nordic Ski Club.

"The bar is really high," he said. "We're doing work for other people."

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