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## Groundswell: Connecting People, Places, and Education

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# Groundswell: Connecting People, Places, and Education

By Michael Posthumus, GVSU Staff

Groundswell is a place-based education program that focuses on developing expert teachers who utilize high quality service learning experiences to teach watershed and environmental stewardship concepts using a community-centric model. In addition, the program provides grants for participating teachers to help fund meaningful service learning activities designed with student input.

This past spring, Groundswell secured total funding of \$230,000 to continue serving teachers and students in Kent County area schools for two additional years. After winning a continuation grant through the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative, the Wege Foundation, the Frey Foundation, and the Baldwin Foundation, the network of community partners and schools had reason to celebrate the work they began three years ago and the work they will continue over the next 24 months.

One major contributor to Groundswell's success is the network of partners that are committed to Groundswell's mission. In fact, a trend continues to emerge throughout Groundswell's work: community partners are critical for designing and offering robust educational experiences for today's young people. As school budgets are pinched during times of economic uncertainty and funds for special programs are cut, educators must utilize the wealth of community resources, knowledge, and expertise available within their own locality to supplement what has been lost.

Groundswell has always committed to maintaining strong relationships with dedicated professionals and community organizations so we can enhance professional development for teachers and create real-world learning experiences for

students. In fact, we see this as one of the most important components of the Groundswell program. Everyone benefits when community members and students work together to learn about their homes, environment, and develop a stronger "sense of place" together.

In our first two years, we have seen how the Groundswell system of building and maintaining a network of supporters to help sustain a special program can work. Now the challenge is determining if the system be a model schools could use to enhance the depth and quality of educational experiences they offer to all students. In the next two years, Groundswell will further its work in uniting the community to provide powerful educational experiences in our schools.

