The importance of place is clear upon entering the Vinalhaven School. A massive wall of hand cut granite reflects connections to quarrying that provided granite for buildings and monuments on the mainland. Above, a fleet of model lobster boats floats facing into the wind. The K-12 school’s circular layout echoes the nature of living twelve miles off the Maine coast. The school’s wings are aptly named the Elementary, Middle, and High School Islands. The Vinalhaven School has a tradition of connecting learning and local resources. The Island institute works to sustain the unique island communities of Maine. Antioch New England Institute focuses on Place-Based Education (PBE) as a way of sustaining local vitality. A four-year partnership through the Community-based School Environmental Education (CO-SEED) project brings these partners together to support and enhance each group’s goals. The partners understand that PBE strengthens student achievement, sustains community vitality while supporting environmental quality.

The Vinalhaven School’s award winning Vinalhaven Island Viking Adventure (VIVA) promises to be an engaging and challenging learning experience. Students apply core academic skills as they sail and study along the eastern seaboard from Maine to Florida. The Island Institute’s CREST Project provides Vinalhaven with state of the art learning technology using the internet, satellite mapping, and other digital technologies to learn from the environment.

The CO-SEED Project supports place-based grants ranging from community gardens to coastal studies and after school enrichment activities. The Vinalhaven Land Trust, providing grants, fieldtrips, and after school activities is another resource supporting PBE. The presence of a place-based educator is supported through a partnership between the CO-SEED project and the Island Institute. The project is led and managed by the CO-SEED Team, made up of school and community members as well as Vinalhaven students.

“Place-based education strengthens student achievement, builds community vitality and supports environmental quality…”

*Historical Society Director Sue Radley christens Freya*
The Vinalhaven CO-SEED team started work in July 2005. A key aspect of the CO-SEED Team is the full inclusion of student participation. Their contributions show how the CO-SEED project is about including all members of the community. The first project was to help plan the opening day teacher workshop on goal setting.

Participants were asked to share information about the geography, culture, traditions, history, and people of Vinalhaven. Everyone got a better appreciation of the richness of the natural and human resources around them. The event ended with a barbeque provided by CO-SEED and the Community Nutrition Committee. Team co-chairs Sue Dempster and Kathy Warren noted that CO-SEED provided lots of opportunities for building school and community connections.

**Vinalhaven Student Stone Cutters Connect With Community**

What does one do with historic granite blocks wisely salvaged during the construction of the new Vinalhaven school? Tristan Jackson, teacher of Integrated Vocational Technology used them to teach math, local history, world economics, and community service. Applying concepts such as volume, measurement, and estimation, students calculated the weight of granite. They built a garden bed with the recycled stone. They learned the connection between math skills and getting a job done.

The students found working with granite could contribute to the economic diversity of Vinalhaven. The town asked them to replace some undersized stone barriers along a road. Money earned as a result will be put towards a class project.

Tristan notes "The students are excited about the granite projects and are always eager to get to work."

We talk about global economics and they recognize that Vinalhaven has a comparative advantage in producing granite as well as lobsters. They also recognize that they are performing a service for the community. Their enthusiasm and their appreciation of a world beyond where they are today demonstrates the power of place-based education."

**Working with Granite for VHS Gardens**
The CO-SEED partnership has contributed to many place-based education projects in the Vinalhaven school and community. Place-based learning uses the local community and the environment to teach important curriculum skills and content. The goals of the program encourage teachers and students to get together with community members and organizations and use the community as a classroom. Principal Mike Felton describes CO-SEED as all about making learning real for students. From fencing class to VIVA, from the steel drum band to Beauty and the Beast, CO-SEED supports programs that engage not only students, but also the larger island community. Here are just some of the many place-based activities supported by the CO-SEED program:

**The School Weather Station** – The purchase of a weather station for students & community members to use will also enhance the science and math curriculum for all grades.

**MS Dory Project** – CO-SEED funded the purchase of materials used in designing & building scale-model dories by students. This is an ongoing part of the middle school math program. According to middle school teacher Pat Paquet, this hands on project uses geometry skills while connecting students with their island culture.

**The Fencing Club and Jeet Kune Do** – These new school/community after-school activities are part of a plan to provide more opportunities for student involvement. Community members have expressed an interest in fencing and martial arts and are welcome to join in. Teachers Jud Raven and Tristan Jackson hope these clubs will help bring teachers, students and community members together.

![The Vinalhaven School Fencing Club](image)

**The School Garden Project** – The buying of tools & supplies to support the Student Garden Club and continuing efforts to maintain and expand the Vinalhaven School gardens was the purpose of this CO-SEED grant. The Vinalhaven Garden Club, Summer Junior Garden Club, The Vinalhaven Land Trust, and local gardeners came together to support this project.

"CO-SEED supports programs that engage not only students, but also the larger island community."

- VHS Principal, Mike Felton
Meet Nicole, CO-SEED’s Place-Based Education Coordinator

Nicole Ouellette, who moved to Vinalhaven in August 2006, has been helping teachers at Vinalhaven School with some of their place-based education projects this past year. She has helped mainly with science, CO-SEED, and community projects but is looking forward this year to helping more in the elementary grades and other subjects. Nicole serves as a liaison between the school and the community and wants interested community members get involved in the school. Nicole has helped with the curriculum board in the lobby of the school, volunteer coordination with Margaret Qualey, and an after school activities calendar.

For more information or to get involved with CO-SEED contact Nicole Ouellette.

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CO-SEED Student Voices Create Boston Connections

Other developments as a direct result of CO-SEED’s presence and funding on Vinalhaven have been a significant increase in the involvement of students in conversations about the climate and culture of the school.

In fact one of the comments made at a recent CO-SEED meeting by an adult community member praised the students on the CO-SEED team for their consistency in attending and participating in the meetings. Another example of student buy-in to the project was a very successful student exchange visit from another CO-SEED school in Boston, the Dearborn School. Vinalhaven students and Dearborn students made a connection during the summer institute and maintained communication beyond the summer and into the school year. The Vinalhaven students suggested to the CO-SEED team that they host their Dearborn peers on the Island. Through extensive planning by the students and the Vinalhaven CO-SEED team the Boston students were transported by bus and ferry to the island. By all reports it was a great success, with reports that both visitors and hosts learned a great deal from what turned out to be a significant cross cultural experience.