

# **An Assessment of The Starflower Foundation's Education Programs**

Prepared by

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## Summary of Findings and Recommendations

The purpose of this assessment is to determine how well Starflower's programs are meeting the needs of teachers and to identify opportunities for improving Starflower's work in schools.

### FINDINGS

- Finding #1.** Teachers have an overall high level of satisfaction with Starflower's staff and programs. When asked what they would tell a colleague to expect from Starflower, teachers articulated consistently positive attributes. Of the teachers interviewed, nearly all were enthusiastic about Starflower and eager to work with them in the future.
- Finding #2.** Teachers working with Starflower said that they had a fairly good sense of what Starflower is trying to achieve in their school. When asked to describe Starflower's purpose, two-thirds of the teachers used terms that could apply to most environmental education programs: A third of the teachers who responded to this question specifically mentioned Starflower's focus on native plants.
- Finding #3.** Starflower programs are helping teachers achieve their objectives and improve student learning in a number of ways. Teachers report that Starflower's assistance has met their needs and engaged their students, providing benefits that go beyond the curriculum.
- Finding #4.** A key element of Starflower's effectiveness is the quality of its staff. The expertise of the staff, interpersonal skills, professionalism, preparation, flexibility, commitment to continual improvement.
- Finding #5.** Starflower's approach to its education programs is distinctly different from other providers in ways that are highly valued by teachers. Starflower's generosity with resources and the quality of programs compare favorably to other providers. But the most important distinction is the development of relationships between Starflower, teachers and students.
- Finding #6.** Teachers felt that they got more out of their work with Starflower when they were able to invest time and attention to integrating it into their broader teaching plans. Teachers working with Starflower for the first time looked forward to doing better planning in the future.

**Finding #7.** Obstacles and frustrations identified by teachers included time constraints, scheduling conflicts, lack of resources and the difficulty of keeping students focused.

**Finding #8.** When asked how Starflower could improve its programs, teachers consistently said that they would like ‘more’ of everything Starflower provides. *Specific* suggestions included: better communication about Starflower’s purpose, vision and decision making; more opportunities for training teachers and sharing ideas between projects and more attention to standards.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As indicated in the findings above, teachers interviewed for this assessment had overwhelmingly positive experiences with Starflower. When asked how Starflower could improve, many teachers were reluctant to be critical because they were so grateful for the support they had received. Nevertheless, a few clear themes emerged that indicate areas for potential improvement.

**Recommendation #1.** Starflower should clarify its purpose and vision for its education programs in general, and for each school specifically.

**Recommendation #2.** Starflower should de-mystify how it makes decisions about resource allocations.

**Recommendation #3.** Starflower should cross-pollinate ideas between schools, and consider opportunities to deepen the training of teachers.

**Recommendation #4.** Starflower should communicate more clearly about how its programs can help teachers meet standards.

**Recommendation #5.** Starflower should incorporate an evaluation component into its work with each school.

## **CONCLUSION**

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The Starflower Foundation is at an important juncture in its educational programs. A hallmark of its success has been talented staff; the relationships that have developed between Starflower and teachers, and the commitment to continually improve programs. Teachers have high, and growing, expectations of Starflower. Thus far, Starflower has succeeded in meeting those expectations. But as Starflower plans for the future, thoughtful consideration should be given to developing a clearer vision of success. The fact that teachers want “more of everything” is both a compliment and a warning. As demand grows, it will be critically important for Starflower to decide what it is trying to achieve and how best to allocate its resources.

## Introduction

The Starflower Foundation provides educational programs and other support to teachers working in public and private schools in the greater Seattle area. This is an assessment of Starflower's educational programs from the perspective of the teachers who work with Starflower staff.

The purpose of this assessment is to determine how well Starflower's programs are meeting the needs of teachers and to identify opportunities for improving Starflower's work in schools. It is based on a written survey completed by 26 teachers from 8 schools, and 28 related interviews. Research also included interviews with Starflower staff and a brief review of file materials. Teachers were provided with a copy of the survey and follow-up questions in advance of the interview. Nearly all of the teachers completed the survey during the interview, and responded to the questions without advance preparation. The interviews averaged 45-60 minutes in length, although a few lasted much longer. The interviews with teachers at Dearborn Park were much shorter, due to scheduling and time constraints.

This report has two sections. This first section reports what the teachers said about Starflower during the interviews. The information is organized as findings, and presented in the words of the teachers themselves. (Note that all italicized statements are comments from teachers, Some of these comments have been edited slightly for context and clarity, and therefore should not be considered direct quotes.) The findings are followed by a series of recommendations for improving Starflower's education programs in the future. The second section of this report (beginning on page 15) presents the results of the written surveys completed by the teachers, and provides additional feedback from teachers specific to each of the schools.

## FINDINGS

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**Finding #1.** Teachers have an overall high level of satisfaction with Starflower's staff and programs.

- ❖ When asked what they would tell a colleague to expect from Starflower, teachers articulated consistently positive attributes.

*Expect strong expertise and a commitment to sharing that expertise and empowering students...*

*Expect excellence, cooperation, wisdom and generosity...*

*Expect to learn something yourself as the teacher...*

*Expect people who respect kids, have a lot of knowledge and are willing to be flexible...*

*They are personable and knowledgeable, generous and supportive and totally dependable.*

*They are knowledgeable and dependable, lots of attention for kids, committed to what they are doing*

- ❖ Of the teachers interviewed, nearly all were enthusiastic about Starflower and eager to work with them in the future. A handful of teachers were “off the chart” in terms of their level of enthusiasm. Two teachers described positive experiences with Starflower, but expressed ambivalence about working with them in the future. One of these teachers talked about the pressure of teaching to tests, the other was concerned about time constraints and demands from the district. One teacher was less positive about her experience, and reported that Starflower had been inconsistent in its communication and support.

**Finding #2.** Teachers working with Starflower said that they had a fairly good sense of what Starflower is trying to achieve in their school.

- ❖ When asked to describe Starflower’s purpose, two-thirds of the teachers used terms that could apply to most environmental education program.

*To make life-long earth stewards of the students....*

*To understand nature and relationships between plants, animals and people... .*

*To help urban kids learn about nature...*

*To provide opportunities for students to appreciate our natural environment...*

*Trying to interest kids in the environment...*

- ❖ A third of the teachers who responded to this question specifically mentioned Starflower’s focus on native plants.

*To extend the knowledge of native plants in a way that is of stewardship or service to our community.*

*To make people aware of the need to restore and save the indigenous plants of Puget Sound, to teach an awareness of the ir values and their uses.*

*To aid with habitat restoration, with a focus on native plants and environmental education...*

- ❖ Several teachers commented that their understanding of Starflower’s purpose grew clearer over time.

*I thought I understood, but didn’t really.. .it made it a lot easier once I realized that they were here as a support and resource...*

**Finding #3.** Starflower programs are helping teachers achieve their objectives and improve student learning in a number of ways. Teachers report that Starflower’s assistance has met their needs and engaged their students, providing benefits that go beyond the curriculum.

- ❖ Starflower works with teachers who use a variety of teaching approaches and have diverse objectives for their students. The kinds of assistance Starflower provides fulfilled a wide range of needs.

*My objective with the kids isn ‘t to reach an end product but to understand the process, Starflower has helped me to help them become independent learners.*

*The most important thing for me is that it aligned with our science unit, I didn ‘t view it as something extra.*

*Our dream is that the kids will become the teachers, the training they are getting from Starflower is preparing them for that.*

*Part of my students’ academic grade Lc based on behavior and participation and my work with Starflower contributes to that*

*I am very proud of the book that my students wrote about restoring an urban forest... Starflower provided the activities, guidance and review.*

*I told them I wanted to relate it to my science unit and Starflower fit it into what I was doing ... we’re doing a graph of plant growth in a spreadsheet*

*I’m not sure what my objectives are, but it has helped me make school interesting and enjoyable....*

*Being a first year teacher, I don 't have any materials or time to create these kinds of things....*

- ❖ Starflower programs spark students' interest, enhance their knowledge and skills, and provide them with experiences that have long-term benefits.

*I teach in a windowless room, it's very valuable to get out in the field.-. my kids did well in the program and used their study and observation skills.*

*It is motivating for children, they feel confined in the classroom., when they get outside it breeds creativity.*

*This is encouraging life long learning skills, opportunities for emotional growth and interpersonal relationships.*

*The community service aspect is important, teaching kids that there is intrinsic value in doing something for the community, not just for yourself*

*What they are teaching stimulates interest, the kids are not overwhelmed, they keep it at their level and give information that is relevant in a context kids can understand*

*When we went to Pritchard pond (without Starflower) the kids told the naturalist about native plants ... it was very cool... they really got it.*

- ❖ Students with special needs and diverse cultural backgrounds derive particularly valuable benefits from Starflower programs.

*It puts all of the children on an equal playing field, from disabled and learning challenged to high achievers.*

*At' kids develop self-esteem when they say 'I can plant this and make it grow...' strong self-esteem helps them in all areas of their course work*

*Hands-on experience is number one for a child who has cognitive delays or physical disabilities.*

*ESL kids have an opportunity to be treated differently... it is a very d4fferent experience when they are in the field, kids look at them differently and it carries over into the classroom.*

**Finding #4.** A key element of Starflower's effectiveness is the quality of its staff

- ❖ The staff employed by Starflower have expertise as naturalists and a solid grasp of educational methodologies.

*Their expertise in the classroom and teaching methodologies was so high that I would be confident to walk away from my class.*

*Starflower 's ability to sequence lessons is extraordinary.., the guiding and facilitating students takes them deeper than I can ever imagine...I have a masters degree and they blow me away.*

*They adjusted to every level of student they worked with... they could rise up to a level, or lower it, without talking down to the students.*

*As they got to know my students they realized that they had to modt5' the curriculum, I didn't have to tell them.*

*The teachers are learning along with the kids.*

*We have had three different staff contacts over three years, and each has been consistently high.*

- ❖ Starflower staff are effective because of their interpersonal skills and ability to work well with both students and teachers.

*The people they hire are so great with children knowledgeable about the subject, respectful of different cultures...*

*Starflowers treat the kids with respect, give them skills, clear expectations of what is required...*

*We have fun, laugh a lot, have a good time... they love their work...*

*They are so good at adapting to the d4fferent age levels, they are able to adjust to the differences really well and meet the kids where they need to be met...*

- ❖ Teachers greatly appreciate the level of organization and preparation Starflower staff bring to their work.

*I knew exactly what they were going to do, how long their presentation would be, what equipment would be needed...*

*They were right there in the hall reminding me what we were going to do... they kept notes of our meetings ... 'adequately prepared' is an understatement.*

*They always talk to us beforehand and ask what we would like and then go out and get it done... if there is something we should do beforehand, they make sure we have what we need.*

*They said they would do 'x, y and z' and they did - that doesn't always happen with others...*

- ❖ Teachers work in an ever-changing environment and find Starflower's flexibility to be a tremendous asset.

*We often do things at the last minute and they're always flexible...*

*I like that there is a lot of flexibility, things change as we do it, it is a very nice relationship.*

*The people they employ are extremely flexible... we changed everything on them... they were cool with it*

- ❖ Teachers were impressed with the commitment to meeting teachers needs and continually improving their materials and support.

*We went two days in a row and on the second day the Starflower staff had changed the map to make it easier for the kids, it was one of those small things that made a difference.*

*They are always coming up with new ways to improve things, new materials for the kids.*

*Anything that I need any question that I have, any question the kids have..., they are patient and wonderful.*

*If something doesn't go right, they are always trying to improve it...*

*They were learning each time... thinking ahead to how to do it better next time.*

*They made our project 10 times better with all those little things what we wouldn't have known to expect*

**Finding #5.** Starflower's approach to its education programs is distinctly different from other providers in ways that are highly valued by teachers.

- ❖ Starflower is generous with its resources and provides support with fewer bureaucratic hurdles than other foundations and grant providers.

*It 's wonderful that there isn't all of the garbage that goes with other funding sources, they encourage us to ask for whatever we need.*

*I've worked with other nonprofits before... to not have to beg for every penny and cut every corner is the most wonderful experience... instead I say to them 'this is what I need' and they say 'here' and then give more.*

- ❖ The quality of Starflower's programs compare favorably to those offered by other providers, both in terms of the content and the structure.

*We've worked with some pretty high quality groups and the Starflowers are right up there...*

*They really follow objectives and align with curriculum; more energetic than others...*

*We 've had others visit, but this was the most complete. It was full on what I consider a really useful program...*

*This is completely different because in those other ones it is a packaged program and you fit your class into it for whatever time you're with them.*

*The Parks Department naturalist tells great stories, but they are not always accurate ... when Starflowers say something I know they know what they are talking about.*

*Starflower's willingness to let the teachers do what they do without a lot of guidelines and restrictions helps the teachers stay creative...*

- ❖ The most important distinction between Starflower and other providers has to do with the relationships that develop between Starflowers, teachers and students. Teachers who had worked with Starflower for more than one year underscored the added value of multi-year projects, and the depth of the relationship between some teachers and individual Starflower staff was quite significant

*The long term nature of this is different, the other people come and go, the long term connection you can feel.*

*Starflowers really build relationships with kids.*

*They worked with my kids all year, it is wonderful... not a quick lesson and then leave...*

*Having the same Starflower staff member come a second year was a real plus ... it has made the relationship stronger... the kids interact differently with her this year because they know her and respect what she knows...*

*It is so hard to teach by yourself, when you find someone you can team with so easily, you're thirsty for them.*

**Finding #6.** Teachers felt that they got more out of their work with Starflower when they were able to invest time and attention to integrating it into their broader teaching plans.

- ❖ When asked what advice they would give a colleague before working with Starflower, teachers' comments underscored the value of preparation and follow-up.

*Be prepared to talk about your needs and expectations...*

*Prepare yourself and your kids... brief kids on vocabulary and concepts, a little prior knowledge really helps.*

*Think through what you want from Starflower and from the kids and the goals for the project*

*They will be with you for whatever you need but you'll have to know what you need they will be proactive and will have ideas, but you should have some vision~*

*You have to be motivated to take advantage of it because it is another thing for you to incorporate and plan for.*

*Extend what you are doing in the forest back into the classroom.*

*Become an active team member, but allow the Starflower teacher the freedom to create the lessons.*

- ❖ New teachers who were working with Starflower for the first time said that they had a better understanding of what to expect and looked forward to doing better planning in the future.

*If I were teaching this again, I would change my curriculum...this year I was taking an existing program and doing what had been done before. In the future I'd like more follow-up...*

*As a new teacher...I felt the other teachers were more prepared...I would have loved to have built my lesson plans around what they were doing...after I saw them in action ...it was much easier to incorporate...*

**Finding #7.** When asked about obstacles and frustrations, teachers talked about time constraints, scheduling conflicts and lack of resources and keeping students focused.

- ❖ Timing and scheduling were viewed as obstacles that Starflower could not mitigate. As mentioned above, Starflower's flexibility was identified as a principle factor of its success.

*My schedule was a problem; they were flexible and understanding*

- ❖ Time constraints contributed to the frustration that many teachers expressed about follow-up. Quite a few teachers said that they wished they could have done more follow-up either in the field, or the classroom, but simply did not have the time. In some cases this is an issue that is beyond Starflower's ability to influence. But some felt that teachers might do more follow-up if Starflower staff provided them with more support and suggestions for follow-up activities.

*I would like to see more follow-up in the classroom, Starflower isn't offering as much and I'm not asking as much...*

- ❖ Lack of resources was an issue at some schools, particularly where the field work took place off-site. In some cases, Starflower provided extra support to cover the costs of buses, substitute teachers and porta-potties, but teachers did not consider these to be costs that Starflower would be willing to cover in the future.

*They have been generous with materials, but could do more... help with the costs of field trips... I was embarrassed to ask for money... my dream is more support, more money, without having to ask...*

*Funders don't want to fund the porta-potty and school buses... how to pay for those things is a real concern, everyone wants to pay for plants, no one wants to pay for the nitty-gritty.*

- ❖ Class management came up in a few interviews. In some cases, teachers reported that Starflower staff had excellent skills managing students, in other cases teachers felt there was room for improvement.

*It is hard to get kids to focus when they are outside... they are crazy... Starflowers need to make it clear what is expected and the consequences if they don't do it...*

*Getting the kids to focus and stay on task was a challenge, but this was not Starflower ~ problem.*

*They went beyond being naturalists, let me know which kids aren't cooperating...*

*One time we went out in the pouring rain and we shouldn't have..., the kids were more worried about ruining their notebooks than in the subject... it was a poor decision on Starflower's part.*

**Finding #8.** When asked how Starflower could improve its programs, teachers consistently said that they would like 'more' of everything Starflower provides.

- ❖ Many teachers expressed an interest in more frequent interactions. Some felt that blocks of time Starflower staff spent with their students should be longer, a few commented that they would like to see Starflower working with more teachers in their school.

*I would like them to be with us more often...*

*I would love for them to stay longer..., the kids were really into it, but they only came about four times.*

*Sometimes we were rushed, if they had 15 minutes more we might not be rushed.*

*I would like them to take our classes more and have them guest teach... we'll need them even more next year*

- ❖ Specific suggestions for improving Starflower's work with teachers included: better communication about Starflower's purpose, vision and decision making; more opportunities for training teachers and cross pollinating ideas from different projects; more attention to standards and management of students. These suggestions are addressed in the recommendations below.

## Recommendations

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As indicated in the findings above, teachers interviewed for this assessment had overwhelmingly positive experiences with Starflower. When asked what Starflower could improve, many teachers were reluctant to be critical because they were so grateful for the support they had received. Others were so pressed for time during the interviews that they were unable to think of any suggestions. Nevertheless, a few clear themes emerged that indicate areas for potential improvement.

**Recommendation #1.** Starflower should clarify its purpose and vision for its education programs in general, and for each school specifically.

The first question in the survey and interviews asked teachers if they understood what Starflower was trying to achieve at their school. Although most teachers felt that they had a clear understanding, a surprising number hesitated. Of those who were confident enough to volunteer a statement of purpose, less than half thought to mention native plants in their description. Many commented that they had never seen anything from Starflower that clearly articulated a purpose or vision.

A clearer statement of purpose and vision would help teachers understand what to expect from Starflower, and would help Starflower articulate what it expects from teachers. If it is important to Starflower for teachers to associate them specifically with native plants, a greater emphasis should be put on communicating this.

**Recommendation #2.** Starflower should de-mystify how it makes decisions about resource allocations.

There is a considerable amount of ambiguity about how Starflower decides to allocate its resources. Only a few teachers could describe the origins of their relationship with Starflower. None had a clear sense of how much support they could expect to receive from Starflower in the future, or what basis Starflower would use to decide whether or not to continue (or expand) support. This ambiguity has created problems for a few teachers, and can be expected to create more tension in the future.

Although Starflower is very responsive to a range of teachers' needs, allocation of resources will always be a sensitive issue. As discussed above, the ambiguity about how Starflower selects projects and teachers can be a source of tension. At another level, the availability of resources to successfully implement a project can also create tensions. Resource constraints on some teachers are more intense than others, and Starflower's willingness to provide porta-potties, substitute teachers and funds for buses has been enormously appreciated. Teachers have the general impression that Starflower is reluctant to provide this kind of support, but it is not clear under what circumstances Starflower would underwrite these costs.

A number of teachers commented that they were reluctant to ask for additional resources or help from Starflower because they didn't want to sound greedy or ungrateful. One teacher described the humiliation teachers feel when they ask for support and the difficulty of working in an under-funded school.

By more clearly articulating a process and rationale for decisions around resources, Starflower would help diffuse tensions and make it easier for teachers to have appropriate expectations.

**Recommendation #3.** Starflower should cross-pollinate ideas between schools, and consider opportunities to deepen the training of teachers.

During the course of this assessment, a number of teachers expressed curiosity about Starflower projects at different schools. Many were interested in learning what others were doing, and open to experimenting with techniques or activities that were working in other settings. A more deliberate effort to communicate about the overall program would benefit many. Starflower could facilitate an exchange of ideas between teachers, simply by sharing anecdotes and success stories with teachers in similar situations.

The teachers involved in Starflower projects have a wide range of experience, background and knowledge. Some teachers appreciate what Starflower is contributing, but would be unlikely to invest much more of their own time and energy into Starflower programs. Others indicated an interest in receiving more training from Starflower staff, in order to improve their own teaching, or to become coaches for other teachers. Some suggested that Starflower should offer for-credit workshops (or teacher institutes), or assist teachers with collaborations.

**Recommendation #4.** Starflower should communicate more clearly about how its programs can help teachers meet standards.

Some of the teachers involved in Starflower projects pay relatively little attention to standards, while others face enormous pressure to prepare students for tests. Although many teachers commented that Starflower's work fit their curriculum and aligned with standards, a number of others identified this as an area for improvement. Teachers suggested that Starflower identify the specific standard that is being met with each project, and help them integrate lessons more closely with NSF science kits and other curriculum.

There is a fair amount of evidence that Starflower is already paying attention to science kits and standards. Starflower's own internal "Interpretive Program Description" includes a space for 'curriculum ties EALR's this program satisfies'. The fact that this issue came up in a number of interviews indicates that

Starflower could do a better job of communicating with teachers about how these programs fit with the standards.

It should be noted that some teachers felt quite strongly that Starflower should not go down this path. Some teachers are disdainful of the NSF kits, and others reject the emphasis on testing and standards. As one teacher commented:

*“If Starflower starts catering to the standards, then they will become like us and lose their energy, creativity and passion.”*

Starflower should pay attention to these concerns, but balance them with the fact that every teacher has different needs. In schools that emphasize standards, Starflower will have greater success working with some teachers if more attention is paid to this pressure.

**Recommendation #5.** Starflower should incorporate an evaluation component into its work with each school.

As the Starflower Foundation develops a clearer set of goals and objectives for its education program, it will be important to incorporate evaluation considerations into its projects. When an organization is just beginning to develop its programs, a relatively unstructured evaluation process makes sense. But as the demand for resources increases, an integrated assessment component would enable the organization to evaluate the program more effectively. Starflower Foundation has an organizational philosophy of respecting teachers’ needs and not overburdening them with bureaucracy, which is a real strength. Nevertheless, it would be beneficial for teachers and Starflower staff alike to agree on a clear set of objectives at the beginning of each year. This would provide a stronger basis for an evaluation at the end of the year, and could help with mid-course corrections, if necessary. Starflower should not be reluctant to ask teachers to commit an hour of their time at the end of the year to evaluate their experience. In fact, this should be one of several stated expectations of each teacher from the outset.

## **Conclusion**

Starflower Foundation is at an important juncture in its educational programs. Over the past several years, it has experimented with a variety of projects in a diverse group of schools. A hallmark of its success has been talented staff, the relationships that have developed between Starflower and teachers, and the commitment to continually improve its programs. As this assessment has reported, teachers value their relationship with Starflower and are eager to continue, or expand, their work in the future. Teachers have high, and growing, expectations of Starflower. Thus far, Starflower has succeeded in

meeting those expectations. But as Starflower staff plan for the future, thoughtful consideration should be given to developing a clear vision of success.

The fact that teachers want “more of everything” from Starflower is both a compliment and a warning. As demand for Starflower support and services grows, it will be critically important to decide how Starflower wants to allocate its resources. In some schools, Starflower has worked with highly-motivated teachers and relatively privileged students; in other situations, the teachers have had less experience, fewer resources and more diverse student populations. In some schools, Starflower has had fairly brief encounters with a large number of students, in others the interactions have been more frequent and the work more intensive. Starflower may want to continue to explore all of these approaches simultaneously, or it may find it necessary to narrow its focus and target its resources. Under either scenario, Starflower will need to determine what criteria it will use to say “yes” or “no” to a project. If some criteria exists now, it is not being clearly communicated. Furthermore, it will be important for Starflower to develop an “exit strategy” for phasing-out of a particular classroom or school.

Everyone involved in the Starflower Foundation should be proud of the tremendous contributions the organization is making. This assessment cannot begin to convey the excitement, passion and gratitude expressed by teachers during these interviews. The creativity and commitment of the many people who have made these programs possible is an inspiration.

## SURVEY RESPONSES AND SCHOOL SUMMARIES

Twenty-six teachers from eight schools completed a written survey about their work with the Starflower Foundation. This section of the report begins with a compilation of all of the survey responses. Following this, school-by-school responses are presented with comments specific to each school.

| 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree<br>3 = don't know or not applicable<br>4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree                               | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5 |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|---|
| 1. I clearly understand what Starflower is trying to achieve through its work in my school.  | 52% | 44% | 4%  |     |   |
| 2. My work with Starflower met, or exceeded my expectations.   | 64% | 28% | 8%  |     |   |
| 3. I always felt adequately prepared before Starflower staff visited my class.   | 56% | 28% | 4%  | 12% |   |
| 4. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about native plants and ecosystems.   | 92% | 8%  |     |     |   |
| 5. My students' time with Starflower staff was always well used.   | 92% | 8%  |     |     |   |
| 6. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about educational methodologies.  | 72% | 24% | 4%  |     |   |
| 7. My work with Starflower has helped me achieve my teaching objectives.   | 63% | 33% | 4%  |     |   |
| 8. My work with Starflower has helped my students improve their academic achievement.  | 40% | 40% | 21% |     |   |
| 9. After my direct work with Starflower staff, I have done related follow-up activities with my students.                              | 54% | 29% | 8%  | 8%  |   |
| 10. The value my students and I get from our work with Starflower compares favorably to experiences I've had with other organizations. | 58% | 13% | 25% | 4%  |   |
| 11. I would welcome the opportunity to work with Starflower in the future.   | 92% |     | 8%  |     |   |

| <b>MADRONA WOODS</b>   |          |          |          |          |          |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>3 Survey Respondents</b>  |          |          |          |          |          |
| 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree<br>3 = don't know or not applicable<br>4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree                               | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 1. I clearly understand what Starflower is trying to achieve through its work in my school.  | √√       | √        |          |          |          |
| 2. My work with Starflower met, or exceeded my expectations.   | √<br>√√  |          |          |          |          |
| 3. I always felt adequately prepared before Starflower staff visited my class.   | √<br>√√  |          |          |          |          |
| 4. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about native plants and ecosystems.   | √<br>√√  |          |          |          |          |
| 5. My students' time with Starflower staff was always well used.   | √<br>√√  |          |          |          |          |
| 6. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about educational methodologies.  | √<br>√√  |          |          |          |          |
| 7. My work with Starflower has helped me achieve my teaching objectives.   | √√       |          |          |          |          |
| 8. My work with Starflower has helped my students improve their academic achievement.  |          | √        | √        |          |          |
| 9. After my direct work with Starflower staff, I have done related follow-up activities with my students.                              | √        | √        |          |          |          |
| 10. The value my students and I get from our work with Starflower compares favorably to experiences I've had with other organizations. | √        | √        |          |          |          |
| 11. I would welcome the opportunity to work with Starflower in the future.   | √<br>√√  |          |          |          |          |

## MADRONA WOODS

Work at Madrona Woods is one of Starflower's oldest education projects and involves teachers from two private schools and one community group. Three individuals were interviewed for this assessment: Judith Starbuck (Friends of Madrona Woods) and Kathi Petrotta (St. Therese) and Deirdre McCrary (Epiphany). This project has the advantage of a very involved community group that is active both at the site and with the students on a regular basis. The two teachers live nearby and are connected to the work beyond their classroom experience. The site is within walking distance of both schools, enabling the students to have an off-campus experience without incurring transportation costs.

### **Overall Experience**

All three people interviewed said that the experience exceeded their expectations and they hoped to continue their work with Starflower in the future. Success factors included: Starflower's ability to connect well with a variety of different of students, the relationship that has developed between Starflower and the others involved in the project, and Starflower's commitment to continual improvement. It was noted that the curriculum had improved significantly since the year before.

The survey responses indicate that the teachers here could not strongly correlate their work at the site with academic achievement. However, the interviews indicate that the curriculum was solid and fit well with teaching objectives. Deirdre commented that her school is less concerned with standards, and that the work with Starflower is "real science" and represents 3/4s of her student's lab time. She noted that the class connects this further when they study classification of animals and body systems.

### **Challenges**

The biggest difficulty has been scheduling visits to the site. Working with two different school calendars is challenging, and teachers expressed frustration about not being able to go to the site as often as they would like. Volunteers from the community group would have preferred to work with both classes on the same day so that they would have alternate Wednesdays free, but that hasn't been possible. This has been a challenge, but has not deterred the work.

### **Other comments/issues**

The conversation with Kathi and Judith underscored the value of sharing ideas between teachers. In describing some of the experiences in the woods, Judith mentioned that the 5th graders from Epiphany were paired with kindergartners during some of their visits to the woods. Deirdre had commented that the younger kids would go with older partners to do observations and discoveries, which brought out the best in both age levels. Although this was not directly a part of the work with Starflower, the older kids presented special books they had made to their kindergarten partners while they were in the woods together. When Judith described what a powerful experience this had been, Kathi was excited to think of how she could incorporate the idea into her work in the woods.

| <b>NORTHWEST MONTESSORI</b>  |     |    |   |   |   |
|--|-----|----|---|---|---|
| 1 Survey Respondent  |     |    |   |   | — |
| = strongly agree; 2 agree 3 = don't know or not applicable<br>4= disagree; 5= strongly disagree  | 1   | 2  | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. I clearly understand what Starflower is trying to achieve through its work in my school.  |     | √  |   |   |   |
| 2. My work with Starflower met, or exceeded, my expectations.  | √   |    |   |   |   |
| 3. I always felt adequately prepared before Starflower staff visited my class.   | √-  |    |   |   |   |
| 4. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about native plants and ecosystems.   | √ + |    |   |   |   |
| 5. My students' time with Starflower staff was always well used.   | √ + |    |   |   |   |
| 6. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about educational methodologies.  | √   |    |   |   |   |
| 7. My work with Starflower has helped me achieve my teaching objectives.   |     | √  |   |   |   |
| 8. My work with Starflower has helped my students improve their academic achievement.  |     | √+ |   |   |   |
| 9. After my direct work with Starflower staff, I have done related follow-up activities with my students.                              | √   |    |   |   |   |
| 10. The value my students and I get from our work with Starflower compares favorably to experiences I've had with other organizations. | √   |    |   |   |   |
| 11. I would welcome the opportunity to work with Starflower in the future.   | √   |    |   |   |   |

## NORTHWEST MONTESSORI

Starflowers' work with Northwest Montessori is connected to a restoration project with a community group at Magnuson Park. With assistance from Starflower, the students have designed and installed a butterfly garden, and done related work at the site. One teacher, Connie Blair, was interviewed for this assessment.

Montessori schools differ from more traditional schools in their educational philosophy and teaching objectives. As a teacher, Connie Blair focuses on the process of learning, rather than meeting a defined outcome. Her goal is to help her students become independent learners.

### **Overall Experience**

Starflower's work with this school has been quite successful from the perspective of the teacher involved. As a review of the written survey will show, this is a teacher who does not fit answers into boxes, without going over the lines to express additional views. The factors that have made this a success include Starflower's expertise and willingness to support "a real learning process." Connie also commented on her very good relationship with Starflower staff and the flexibility built into the project. Starflower has served as a resource to Connie in a way that has helped meet her own teaching objectives.

### **Challenges**

The only real challenge identified by Connie was the lack of time. At every point in the project there were different strands that could have been pursued. At various times she was tempted to throw out what they were doing to pursue a different strand. Time constraints prevented her from doing everything she wanted. In a follow-up email, she commented that it would have been helpful if the Starflower staff had been more willing to present ideas and options, and not hold back from making suggestions. She felt that this approach may have enabled her to make clearer decisions about what to do, and take more advantage of Starflower's expertise.

### **Other issues/comments**

Connie Blair was one of the most engaged and motivated teachers interviewed for this assessment. She was the only teacher who sent a follow-up email with more ideas after the interview took place. And she was someone who not only asked for more from Starflower, but also offered help to Starflower in return. As someone who loves to write curriculum, she offered to help Starflower if there was a need to create new curriculum, or to test something that Starflower has done. She also expressed an interest in getting more training from Starflower staff, and would like to make use of the resource library at Starflower's office if it is available.

| <b>WASHINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL</b>  |    |   |   |   |   |
|--|----|---|---|---|---|
| <b>2 Survey Respondents</b>  |    |   |   |   |   |
| 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree<br>3 = don't know or not applicable<br>4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree                               | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. I clearly understand what Starflower is trying to achieve through its work in my school.  | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 2. My work with Starflower met, or exceeded, my expectations   | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 3. I always felt adequately prepared before Starflower staff visited my class.   | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 4. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about native plants and ecosystems.   | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 5. My students' time with Starflower staff was always well used.   | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about education methodologies.  | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 7. My work with Starflower has helped me achieve my teaching objectives.   | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 8. My work with Starflower has helped by students improve their academic achievement.  | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 9. After my direct work with Starflower staff, I have done related follow-up activities with my students.                              | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 10. The value my students and I got from our work with Starflower compares favorably to experiences I've had with other organizations. | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 11. I would welcome the opportunity to work with Starflower in the future.   | √√ |   |   |   |   |

|                                 |
|---------------------------------|
| <b>WASHINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL</b> |
|---------------------------------|

This is a school with an extremely diverse population of students, from homeless to ESL, and special ed, to some of the highest achieving students in the district. Starflower works with two teachers, Stella Bass and Kathy O’Leary. Prior to their work with Starflower, these two teachers initiated an environmental education program at Washington Middle School. Starflower began working with them on a native plant garden, and now assists them with periodic field trips to Colman Park. Starflower’s work includes preparation and follow-up, as well as activities at the park. Both teachers were interviewed for this assessment.

**Overall Experience**

Both teachers were very enthusiastic about their work with Starflower and eager to do more in the future. They have very different teaching objectives and needs, yet both found that Starflower’s support helped them achieve their goals. As a science teacher, Stella puts a high value on field-based experiences and the opportunity to get out of the classroom. The students in Kathy’s class are learning and physically disabled. For them, hands-on activities are very effective in breaking down barriers and building self-esteem.

The elements that made this a successful project from the teachers’ perspective was Starflower’s ability to work effectively with a very diverse group of students and the clear expectations, planning and follow-through on Starflower’s part. Both teachers talked about the way this kind of program “levels the playing field” for kids with different abilities and backgrounds, and stressed the long-term value of the experience. And both have been able to integrate the field work back into their classrooms in ways that have tangible benefits.

**Challenges**

The biggest challenge is resources. Since this is a middle school, Stella has several different classes throughout the day. To take a group to Colman Park, she needs to get a substitute teacher to cover the classes she can’t attend, and she needs to find funding for a bus. Stella described her options for making this work: pay for it out of her pocket, take a sick day or find funding elsewhere. In contrast, Kathy’s special ed students are with her all day and she has special funding for buses and teachers aides. By collaborating on this project, the two teachers are able to leverage some of their resources, but it is a constant struggle to make it work.

**Other issues/comments**

These are two high-motivated, compassionate and resourceful teachers. They have overcome significant barriers to do this work, and seem committed to do whatever it will take to continue. Stella expressed a strong interest in having Starflower work with her class on a more regular basis. She is very discriminating about the kind of outside help she is willing to bring into her classroom, and felt that Starflower is of such a high-caliber that she would welcome them more often. Both teachers expressed an interest in exploring the possibility of expanding Starflowers’ work to other teachers in the school.

| <b>ENVIRONMENTAL AND ADVENTURE SCHOOL</b>  |         |   |   |   |   |
|--|---------|---|---|---|---|
| <b>2 Survey Respondents</b>  |         |   |   |   |   |
| 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree<br>3 = don't know or not applicable<br>4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree                               | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. I clearly understand what Starflower is trying to achieve through its work in my school.  | √√      |   |   |   |   |
| 2. My work with Starflower met, or exceeded, my expectations   | √√      |   |   |   |   |
| 3. I always felt adequately prepared before Starflower staff visited my class.   | √√      |   |   |   |   |
| 4. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about native plants and ecosystems.   | √<br>√+ |   |   |   |   |
| 5. My students' time with Starflower staff was always well used.   | √√      |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about education methodologies.  | √√      |   |   |   |   |
| 7. My work with Starflower has helped me achieve my teaching objectives.   | √√      |   |   |   |   |
| 8. My work with Starflower has helped by students improve their academic achievement.  | √√      |   |   |   |   |
| 9. After my direct work with Starflower staff, I have done related follow-up activities with my students.                              | √√      |   |   |   |   |
| 10. The value my students and I got from our work with Starflower compares favorably to experiences I've had with other organizations. | √√      |   |   |   |   |
| 11. I would welcome the opportunity to work with Starflower in the future.   | √√      |   |   |   |   |

## ENVIRONMENTAL AND ADVENTURE SCHOOL

This middle school has just finished its second year of operation, and aims to be a model for environmental education. Starflower consultant Heidi Bohan has been involved in the planning and start-up of the school. She conducted an ethnobotany project during the schools' first year of operation (funded by a grant from King County), and began work for Starflower this past year. Two teachers were interviewed for this assessment, Wayne Tannhauser and Eileen McMackin.

With a core curriculum focused on environmental education, this school offers Starflower the opportunity to work intensively with motivated and engaged teachers, parents and students. The school is structured in a way that relies on the expertise of outside consultants and resource people. Teachers describe their challenge as maintaining a continuous flow of people who have expertise in particular subjects and an ability to work with kids. Starflower's consultant teaches a weekly course on native plants, working with two groups of 12 students, in intensive nine-week blocks. Her work at the school goes beyond this class, and includes on-going consulting and support to teachers and parents.

### **Overall Experience**

Not surprisingly, the teachers involved in the project were very enthusiastic about Starflower and grateful for the support. There is a natural fit between what Starflower can offer and the school's identified needs. The study of native plants has been identified by the school as a main component of its community stewardship project, and Starflower's expertise has enabled the school to go far deeper into the subject than it could otherwise.

The strong connection between Starflower's consultant and the school is a real asset for this project and contributes to its success. Starflower's consultant is described in a way that sounds almost like "adjunct" staff with teachers, students and parents all drawing on her knowledge and assistance.

### **Challenges**

Interviewees were unable to identify any real challenges. With most of the work taking place on-site, the financial and logistic obstacles faced by other schools are not an issue here. And although the teachers are compelled to meet state and district standards, they report that the academic content is strong and that their goals are met. The only real issue that arose is the question of how much more support could be expected from Starflower. The vision of the teachers is to continue this project and possibly even see it grow. With a growing student population, it will be important to maintain the quality of the program, and find ways to reach more kids.

| <b>HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY</b>  |    |   |   |   |   |
|--|----|---|---|---|---|
| <b>2 Survey Respondents</b>  |    |   |   |   |   |
| 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree<br>3 = don't know or not applicable<br>4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree                               | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. I clearly understand what Starflower is trying to achieve through its work in my school.  | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 2. My work with Starflower met, or exceeded, my expectations   | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 3. I always felt adequately prepared before Starflower staff visited my class.   | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 4. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about native plants and ecosystems.   | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 5. My students' time with Starflower staff was always well used.   | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about education methodologies.  | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 7. My work with Starflower has helped me achieve my teaching objectives.   | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 8. My work with Starflower has helped by students improve their academic achievement.  | √  |   | √ |   |   |
| 9. After my direct work with Starflower staff, I have done related follow-up activities with my students.                              | √  |   |   | √ |   |
| 10. The value my students and I got from our work with Starflower compares favorably to experiences I've had with other organizations. | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 11. I would welcome the opportunity to work with Starflower in the future.   | √  |   | √ |   |   |

## HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY

Work at this school has focused on activities around the native plant garden at the site and field trips to nearby Genesee Park. Starflower worked with 6 teachers the year before last, and 4 teachers this past year. This assessment included interviews with three teachers, Vivian Fuller, Dave Gardner and Sally Hedges. (Note that the survey was not completed by Sally Hedges.)

### **Overall Experience**

The experience of teachers at this school was mixed. Of the three teachers interviewed, one was very enthusiastic, one was somewhat ambivalent and one was not very positive. Two of the interviews were quite brief. There were no common themes.

Vivian Fuller has done a lot with and in the Hawthorn School Garden. Last year she had two interns who she assigned the task of working with her class to create signage and explanatory booklets. A “family” garden day was attended primarily by families with children in her class. She described her work with Starflower as far exceeding her expectations. The curriculum directly correlated with her science kit and she built on the work to teach math and poetry as well. Her enthusiasm for continuing to work with Starflower could best be described as “off the charts.”

Dave Gardner had generally positive things to say about his work with Starflower, but admitted that he would occasionally forget they were coming. He couldn’t suggest any way that Starflower could improve its program, but expressed ambivalence about continuing in the future. His concern was about time constraints and pressure from the district related to the “Transformation Project” that will involve every teacher in additional work.

Sally Hedges was the only openly negative person interviewed for this assessment. She expressed confusion about Starflower’s purpose and criteria for selecting teachers to work with, and reported that her experience had been inconsistent

### **Challenges**

The difficulties of working with this school have been clear to Starflower staff for some time. The different personalities involved in the project have made the experience quite inconsistent for Starflower. The site itself is a challenge because of the size of the garden. Some of the difficulties Starflower staff have had with the teachers might have been mitigated had the teachers been able to work side-by-side with Starflower staff. Instead, their students were pulled out of the class for an experience that the teacher did not share. This undercuts much of the value that other teachers have derived from their relationships with Starflower. This kind of an obstacle can be overcome by a motivated teacher like Vivian Fuller, but was problematic for other teachers.

**Other issues/comments**

Starflower's experience at this school offers some important lessons. Although Sally Hedges' attitude was not shared by others, her criticism of Starflower reflects a theme that arose more obliquely in other interviews. She wanted to know what Starflower was hoping to achieve, how long the support would be given, how it would be evaluated, and when decisions would be made. These are not unreasonable questions, nor is she the only teacher interested in the answers.

Dave Gardner's experience points to another challenge also expressed by other teachers. If he had seen his work with Starflower as something that would actually help him meet the pressures from the district, he may have been more enthusiastic. Instead, it appeared that he saw it as something extra, rather than an integral part of his teaching objectives. According to Vivian, the district-wide Transformation Project will prompt a greater emphasis on literacy at Hawthorne. If that is the case, Starflower could develop programs with teachers that focus more attention on literacy skills.

A plan for enhancing the garden to more closely match the original design intent (accommodating a whole class) has been developed and will be implemented this fall. These changes will allow a whole class to comfortably utilize the garden for certain types of activities. With the ability for a whole class to be using the garden, teachers will be able to participate with Starflower in delivery of programs in the garden. (This should be possible in the 2001-2002 school year.)

The Hawthorn School Garden will only be suitable for certain types of fill-class activities, because of its small size. It is intended to be one part of the education experiences for a particular class, in addition to walking field trips to Genesee Park.

| <b>PATHFINDER ELEMENTARY</b>   |    |   |   |   |   |
|--|----|---|---|---|---|
| <b>2 Survey Respondents</b>  |    |   |   |   |   |
| 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree<br>3 = don't know or not applicable<br>4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree                               | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. I clearly understand what Starflower is trying to achieve through its work in my school.  | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 2. My work with Starflower met, or exceeded, my expectations   | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 3. I always felt adequately prepared before Starflower staff visited my class.   | √  |   | √ |   |   |
| 4. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about native plants and ecosystems.   | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 5. My students' time with Starflower staff was always well used.   | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about education methodologies.  | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 7. My work with Starflower has helped me achieve my teaching objectives.   | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 8. My work with Starflower has helped by students improve their academic achievement.  | √  |   |   |   |   |
| 9. After my direct work with Starflower staff, I have done related follow-up activities with my students.                              | √  | √ |   |   |   |
| 10. The value my students and I got from our work with Starflower compares favorably to experiences I've had with other organizations. | √√ |   |   |   |   |
| 11. I would welcome the opportunity to work with Starflower in the future.   | √√ |   |   |   |   |

## PATHFINDER ELEMENTARY

Starflower's work at this alternative school has involved two distinctly different projects. Consultant Heidi Bohan has worked with teacher Jill Duff on activities that focus on native plants with an emphasis on native American culture. Starflower staff have worked with two teachers, Chris Quigley and Brian Street, doing restoration work in a nearby park. All three of these teachers were interviewed for this assessment. (Note that Chris and Brian completed the survey as a single respondent.)

As an alternative school, Pathfinder attracts teachers who are independent, motivated and resourceful. Teachers collaborate across grade levels on "expeditions" and build multi-year curriculum around specific themes.

### **Overall Experience**

Although the teachers had very different experiences with Starflower, all three were extremely positive about the work and eager to expand it in the future.

Jill Duff's class focused on the theme of architecture the year before last, and rivers and streams this past year. The success of her experience was tied to the Starflower consultant's deep knowledge of the subject matter and the kinds of activities she led the students through. The lessons were taught with skill and respect for different cultures, enriching both the students and the teacher. A very strong connection developed between the teacher and Starflower, enhancing the experience for both.

Chris and Brian taught as a team, combining their two classes for monthly work parties at the park and related work in the classroom. In the three years they have worked with Starflower, they have worked with different staff each year. Despite the turn over, they have had high expectations for their work with Starflower, and felt their expectations were met across the board. They attributed the success to the quality of the staff. They particularly value Starflower staff's knowledge, flexibility and sense of humor.

The teachers had contradictory views about teaching to standards. Chris and Brian declined to respond to the survey question related to academic achievement, stating that it was not an expectation of their project. Jill, on the other hand, acknowledged the importance of meeting standards and suggested that Starflower could help teachers more if they brainstormed together about how to plug the work into the standards and collaborated on assessments.

### **Challenges**

Like several of the other schools, the challenges at Pathfinder are about resources. Work at the park requires funding for plants, tools, buses and porta-potties. Chris and Brian have gotten support from Starflower, as well as other sources for these expenses. Continuing to find the funds needed for the work is an on-going challenge. Although Jill's class was not focused as

much on activities away from the school, she expressed a desire for additional resources to pay for field trips and other expenses. In the past, some of these costs have been offset by generous parents, but the ability of parents to contribute varies from year-to-year.

**Other issues/comments**

All three teachers expressed a very strong interest in doing more work with Starflower in the future. Although Jill's role at the school will be changing next year, she is interested in finding a way to continue her relationship with Starflower and exploring the possibility of getting more training from Starflower.

Chris and Brian were very straightforward about their desire for greater involvement from Starflower in the coming year. Because of the structure of their expedition, their work with Starflower was more intense the year before last, and involved more in-class collaboration. In the coming year, they hope to work with Starflower very intensively during a 3-month period (1.5 days of contact time and .5 days of planning and communication time each week). This would be followed by a monthly work party for the rest of the year.

| <b>DEARBORN PARK ELEMENTARY</b>  |                  |             |     |         |   |
|--|------------------|-------------|-----|---------|---|
| <b>13 Survey Respondents</b>   |                  |             |     |         |   |
| 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree<br>3 = don't know or not applicable<br>4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree                               | 1                | 2           | 3   | 4       | 5 |
| 1. I clearly understand what Starflower is trying to achieve through its work in my school.  | √√√<br>√√√       | √√√<br>√√√  | √   |         |   |
| 2. My work with Starflower met, or exceeded, my expectations   | √√√<br>√√√       | √√<br>√√√   | √√  |         |   |
| 3. I always felt adequately prepared before Starflower staff visited my class.   | √√<br>√√√        | √√<br>√√√   |     | √√<br>√ |   |
| 4. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about native plants and ecosystems.   | √√√√√√<br>√√√√√√ | √           |     |         |   |
| 5. My students' time with Starflower staff was always well used.   | √√√√√√<br>√√√√√√ | √√          |     |         |   |
| 6. Starflower staff were knowledgeable about education methodologies.  | √<br>√√√√√√      | √√√<br>√√   | √   |         |   |
| 7. My work with Starflower has helped me achieve my teaching objectives.   | √√√<br>√√√       | √√√<br>√√√√ |     |         |   |
| 8. My work with Starflower has helped by students improve their academic achievement.  | √<br>√√√         | √√√<br>√√√  | √√  |         |   |
| 9. After my direct work with Starflower staff, I have done related follow-up activities with my students.                              | √√√<br>√√        | √√√<br>√√   | √√  | √       |   |
| 10. The value my students and I got from our work with Starflower compares favorably to experiences I've had with other organizations. | √√√√√√           | √√√         | √√√ | √       |   |
| 11. I would welcome the opportunity to work with Starflower in the future.   | √√√√√√<br>√√√√√√ |             | √   |         |   |

## DEARBORN PARK ELEMENTARY

The work at Dearborn Park is Starflower's most extensive education project. The school is situated adjacent to a park, providing an extensive natural area for a variety of field work. The principal has a strong background in science, and the entire school has put an emphasis on environmental education. Other organizations that partner with Dearborn Park on environmental activities include Audubon, VISTA, EarthCorps and Seattle Parks and Recreation. Starflower participation in the annual planning retreat and other staff events has fostered a strong partnership, and enabled Starflower to be more fully integrated into the school.

Starflower works with 15 of the 16 teachers at the school. Surveys and interviews were completed by 13 teachers, and the principal was interviewed.<sup>2</sup> The interviews at Dearborn Park averaged 10-15 minutes each, and were conducted in the staff lounge during 30 minute break times. For the most part, the teachers were rushed and unprepared. This affected the quality of the interviews and the data collected.

### **Overall experience**

The survey responses from the teachers at this school are quite positive overall, but not as strong as the responses from teachers at the other schools. This can be attributed, at least in part, to the survey and interview process described above. Teachers at Dearborn Park had fewer defined expectations for their work with Starflower and less clear objectives than teachers at other schools. More of the Dearborn Park teachers were in their first or second year of teaching, and several seemed somewhat overwhelmed by the demands of the public school system.

When teachers described what made their work with Starflower successful, three consistent themes emerged. The amount of preparation and planning on the part of Starflower ensured that the time with students was well used. (Although several teachers did not feel prepared for the work, they commented that this reflected their own lack of organization and had nothing to do with Starflower.) The second factor was Starflower's ability to engage the students and work effectively with a variety of individuals. And finally, the strong alignment with NSF science kits was cited by several teachers as the most important element of success.

### **Challenges**

The challenges faced at Dearborn Park correlated closely with those identified by teachers at other schools. Scheduling is always an issue, and the task of working with 13 teachers' schedules is daunting.

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<sup>2</sup> The one teacher that does not work with Starflower teaches third grade. He was interviewed for this assessment and said that he had opted work with the Audubon Society's "Finding Urban Nature" program, and that his decision had to do with scheduling, and had nothing to do with Starflower's program.

<sup>2</sup> Surveys and interviews were completed by the following teachers: Allison Fenzyl, JR. Baldwin, Joan Lassiter, Dan Rosson, Jennifer Gross, Patti Meneses, Gary Taylor, Gretchen Unseth, Yoon Yi Lee, Rick Jesus and Courtney Humphries. A survey (without an interview) was completed by Jan Hunt; an interview without a survey was conducted with Paul Titilii.

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Not surprisingly, the scheduling worked better for some teachers than others. Some teachers expressed an interest in having Starflower spend more time with their classes during each visit, others said that they would like Starflower to work with their classes more frequently. A few teachers mentioned the difficulty of keeping students focused while they were outside, while others commented that Starflower staff did a good job of managing the kids.

When asked how Starflower could improve its work at Dearborn Park, first grade teachers said they would like more frequent visits from Starflower, noting that the length of time between interactions was too long. When asked how Starflower could improve the curriculum for their specific grade level, many teachers said that the curriculum was on target and did not need to be changed. Those who offered suggestions said that Starflower should connect its work more closely with the science kits that each grade level is using. Although the close correlation between Starflower's work and the science kits was identified as a strength by several teachers, it was apparent in the interviews that not all teachers fully understood the connection. Others expressed an interest in expanding the work with Starflower to include more follow-up activities, particularly focused on reading, writing and other non-science skills.

The pressure on fourth graders to increase WASL scores made it difficult for a couple of teachers to devote much time to work with Starflower. The only teacher that was ambivalent about future work with Starflower was a fourth grade teacher. He felt that his entire focus had to be on the WASL and that Starflower activities would not help his students achieve their math, reading or problem-solving skills.

### **Other issues/comments**

A large part of the success of this project can be attributed to the commitment and vision of Evelyn Fairchild, Dearborn Park's principal. Her insights and observations about the work reflect her understanding of the obstacles and her desire to improve the program in future years.

In discussing the past year's work, her biggest disappointment related to a VISTA volunteer. Fairchild had expected to use a VISTA volunteer to work with Starflower and help teachers with follow-up activities, but the individual did not work out as planned. Next year she hopes a different volunteer can be trained by working side-by-side with Starflower staff. Ideally, this person would work with Starflower to develop follow-up activities focusing on math, reading, vocabulary and other subjects that are tied to the standards. Having this kind of support would greatly enhance the experience of the teachers and students.

Communication was another issue that came up in the interview with Evelyn Fairchild. She acknowledged some confusion among teachers about Starflower's work, the schedule, and how it relates to the standards. Time pressures on teachers prevent some from fully comprehending upcoming programs. She thought it would be good to brainstorm with Starflower staff about the best way to communicate with teachers on a regular basis, so that those who are not working directly with Starflower have a sense of how the program is going. One idea would be to have Starflower staff attend faculty meetings from time-to-time to give updates or describe the work they are doing with different classes.

Although the work with Dearborn Park is quite extensive, there are certainly opportunities to deepen the partnership. If Starflower is interested in investing more time at Dearborn, it could serve as a resource for even more activities. One idea that Eveyln Fairchild suggested was to include Starflower staff as naturalists on one or more of the school's all-day field trips.