Interview with Michael Stein-Ross, 6th Grade Science Teacher, St. Francis of Assisi School

1) What inspired you to create the rain garden?

I wanted to do something a bit more interesting with my students. I wanted to engage them in something that would have a lasting impact, to empower them to see themselves as catalysts for positive change.

2) Did it change the school environment for the better? What about the neighborhood?

Yes. Other classes use the rain garden space as a way to quickly access nature. Sometimes in Catholic schools there is disconnect between the school and the parish. We consciously made an effort to use this project to help bridge that gap. Students were able to interact with parishioners and parishioners were able to help in a school project. The neighborhood is prettier now and that corner of the school grounds has a greater "curb appeal." During the design process we consulted adjacent neighbors to receive their input and thankfully they were supportive.

3) What did your students learn about storm water/environmental management? Did any adults learn from this project?

Anyone walking by who takes the time to read the interpretive sign can learn something from this project. The students learned so much about water management.

4) What was the best part of the rain garden project for you?

The best part is that the kids now know they have the power to regenerate the Earth.

5) Were there any challenges along the way?

When you start a really positive project and give people fair warning, and invite people to join in, wonderful things happen. One of the biggest surprises with the project was in how many community members came out of the woodwork to help out. People love positivity. We made the project enticing and they came. And therefore there weren't many challenges.

6) How involved was the neighborhood or City in the project?

The City of Burien awarded us a $5,000 neighborhood grant. The students wrote the grant and it was chosen. Without that money the project would not have happened. So the city played an integral role in that way. Some students also presented at a city meeting to share the successes of the project.

7) What is your advice for someone in Burien wanting to install a rain garden?

Get the Rain Garden Handbook for Western Washington and follow the steps. This is where we bought our plants. Communicate with your neighbors. Seek help from the City.