

## Science Teachers Collaborate on Innovative “Solar System Walk”

Distance learning has made hands-on classroom projects a distant dream. But that doesn't mean that students can't still learn in person. Case in point: Wood Middle School science teachers Elise Stewart and Eric Robbins have created unique “solar system walks” on both the Wood and Lincoln campuses to help students (and community members!) learn more about our universe.

This school year, Stewart and Robbins are both teaching at both Lincoln and Wood schools. This allows for cross site collaboration that would have been difficult in years past. “This term I'm teaching Wood students and Ms. Stewart is teaching at Lincoln, then we'll switch” Robbins says, “It's a great opportunity to work with science teachers at both sites and get creative with our projects.”

The walk includes signs that replicate the size and relative difference of planets in our solar system. As such, the Wood solar system extends all the way to the corner of Encinal and Grand, and the Lincoln solar system extends from the edge of the grass field, up Fernside Avenue, to Thompson Avenue. The total length of both systems is approximately one kilometer (or a little over a half mile).

“We included Pluto in our walk because it is so far out there and it's crazy to think something that far away could be orbiting a star we can't even see from it,” says Ms. Stewart. “If we were standing on the dwarf planet Pluto and looking back towards our sun, it would appear to be slightly brighter than the stars around it.” If you are standing at Pluto in the scaled solar system, you will have trouble seeing even the Neptune sign with your naked eye.

As a team, the teachers' goals for students in this Planetary Science unit are to understand more about our own planet and the planets in our “neighborhood.”

“We hope students will gain a greater understanding of the sheer size of the solar system. The pandemic has kept a lot of our students inside and this project will help them get outside, to teach and to share their knowledge with family and the community.” says Mr. Robbins.

Working with models is an important part of science and NGSS standards that the team didn't want them to miss out on just because there is a need to teach remotely.

For students who can't visit the solar walk, the teachers also created [a video](#). The video shows the distance between the planet stations and includes fun facts about the planets. For instance, Venus is hotter than Mercury, even though Mercury is closer to the sun!

Stewart and Robbins are excited about the enthusiasm of the students and the community at large for this project. "We hope it will inspire students, families and community members to learn more about what is beyond our planet." Stewart says.