

# GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

12 Littleville Road Huntington, MA 01050

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## **School turtles teach lessons in pet ownership**

**Huntington** – Four or five years ago, two students who were heading off to college/military were given an ultimatum by their parents: find a home for your pet turtles. The turtles, native to the Mississippi Valley, had been raised in captivity, were not native to the area, and would not survive if released to the wild. Former science teacher Cindy Jensen accepted the turtles for the science lab at Gateway Regional High School (the alternative was euthanizing them). Where they thrived and grew. And grew. And GREW!

Originally the size of a quarter when purchased from the pet store by these students, the turtles have now reached their full grown size of 8 – 9 inches in width. As turtles need to have about 10 gallons of water for each inch of shell, this meant they had completely outgrown their 50 gallon tank. The turtles were crowded if both wanted to be in the water at the same time, and they were even starting to find it difficult to turn around in the tank.

Science teachers Dan Shea and Abigail Janneke applied to the Gateway Education Foundation for help in securing a new tank for the animals. The tanks are not cheap: a 155 gallon tank was a substantial investment of over \$1000, plus money for a basking platform and materials for the high school's wood shop to build a new base to support the tank.

"The presence of live animals in the biology laboratory is invaluable," the teachers wrote in their application for funding. "Students learn a great deal from books, but there is no substitute for hands-on learning. Having two turtles within the classroom leads to excitement amongst students that cannot be accomplished by any other means."

The Foundation granted the funding, but with a stipulation: use the turtles to instruct students about the lifelong needs and investments required of pet store animals. For example, 95% of pet store turtles die within their first year, but those that survive can live to be 30 – 40 years old.

On Monday, March 27, "Lucky" and "Pedro" were moved into their new, spacious tank. Film footage of the move may be viewed on the home page of the Gateway Education Foundation's website ([www.GatewayEducationFoundation.org](http://www.GatewayEducationFoundation.org)).

It turns out that one of the most valuable (and expensive) lessons regarding pet ownership is to understand the life span, needs and costs over time of owning a pet.

Over the past 5 years, the Gateway Education Foundation has funded 61 projects totaling \$37,500. Please consider supporting the Foundation with your tax deductible donation on Valley Gives Day, May 2, 2017. Or mail a check or money order to the Foundation at 12 Littleville Rd., Huntington, MA 01050. ###



*Photo (left): One of the two science department turtles exploring its new habitat, thanks to \$1200 in funding from the Gateway Education Foundation.*