

MASON COUNTY

Summit brings together 230 students, teachers



Chimacum Middle School student Cameron Johnson, 12, looks for birds at a station at the West Sound GreenSTEM Summit, June 4 at the Salmon Center in Belfair. Two hundred and thirty students from five schools participated in the summit, where students shared yearlong environmental projects.

By Arla Shephard Bull, Mason County Life

Posted: June 17, 2016

From converting a courtyard at school into a sustainable garden to planting trees along Chimacum Creek and measuring the creek's water quality, more than 200 elementary and middle school students shared the ways they care about their environment at the West Sound GreenSTEM Summit.

The annual event at the Salmon Center in Belfair brought together teachers and students from five schools — Belfair and Sand Hill

Elementary Schools from Belfair, Clear Creek Elementary from Silverdale, Chimacum Middle School in Chimacum and Bremerton's West Hills STEM Academy.

Students learned about different aspects of their ecosystem at 19 stations around the center, sponsored by organizations such as the Washington Department of Health and Mason County Public Works, before sharing the yearlong environmental projects their classes have worked on.

"It's awesome," said Cali DuPont, 10, a fourth-grade student from Sand Hill Elementary. "We get to talk to these amazing people about salmon and the environment and we get to create stuff."

Clear Creek Elementary teacher Barb Bromley's group of fourth-grade students shared their class project converting a courtyard into a sustainable garden.

"This event is a golden opportunity for students who care about the Earth to share about what they do all school year to protect the Earth," she said. "Getting kids outdoors gets them more connected to nature. My students have learned patience and so much about what hard work is."

The Salmon Center partnered with the Community Foundation of South Puget Sound, the Squaxin Island Tribe and the Pacific Education Institute to present the event.

All the participating teachers went through workshops provided by the Pacific Education Institute to learn the resources and tools needed to teach up-to-standard environmental science curriculum in their classrooms.

"We're always looking for more teachers and more classrooms to add to our summit," said Michelle Myers, a project manager at the Salmon Center. "Through those workshops we have created quite a network of teachers."

Belfair Elementary teacher Carla Fontenot leads the STEM program at her school, where she teaches all of the students throughout the day.

"I love environmental science, it's kind of a passion of mine," she said. "It's good to help kids become aware of the impact they have on the Earth because they go back and share that with their parents and grandparents."

Fontenot's fourth-grade students shared their year-long project maintaining an organic garden.

"These kids live in such an amazing area and they have so much here that I think a lot of them are not aware of," she said. "Being at events like these raises their wonder for the world."

Next year, Fontenot wants to work with her students to bring back Belfair Elementary's compositing program, which ended this year due to lack of funding.

Sand Hill Elementary students started an after-school environmental club this year and are working to develop a trails system, while students from West Hills STEM Academy, with teacher Karen Lippy, shared their project involving a community garden and trails system.

Chimacum Middle School students researched salmon in Chimacum Creek and measured water quality, including dissolved oxygen levels, pH, turbidity, temperature and flow rate.

"We started this year off doing fish trapping in our neighborhood creek," said sixth-grade science teacher Al Gonzalez. "We work with the North Olympic Salmon Coalition. They take our kids tree planting and they learn about water pollution."

Gonzalez has brought his students to the summit every year since its early beginnings at Twanoh State Park under the purview of the Hood Canal ECO Net, a partnership of professionals and organizations that work collaboratively to protect and enhance Puget Sound.

The Salmon Center, which works with ECO Net partners to present the various stations at the GreenSTEM Summit, took over hosting the summit in 2010.

"I come every year because I want my students to see other kids from other schools caring about their environment," Gonzalez said. "Sharing is key. It's at the top of what we want to do."

Find this article at:

<http://www.kitsapsun.com/news/local/mason/summit-brings-together-230-students-teachers-350a6063-85fb-7bb8-e053-0100007fa57a-383450911.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.