

NEWSLETTER

Summer/Fall 2001

A School Wide Partnership

By Sheela Shankar

The goal of Estuary Action Challenge is to ensure that our environmental education programs have a significant and long term impact on the school learning environment. This includes the school culture and curriculum. To achieve this goal, we work closely with teams of teachers and school principals, we involve parents and the wider community. We work with teachers to integrate our curricula into their grade level curriculum and make sure that we are teaching the latest science standards. EAC creek programs have become highlights of a school's persona. This is very apparent at Stege School in Richmond, where we are working with all twenty-three classes in the school on a Baxter Creek Action program.

Stege Elementary School is located in the flat lands of the City of Richmond. Baxter Creek, which starts in the Richmond hills and travels underground for most of its way, comes out of an underground culvert at the north end of the park right across the street from the school. The creek is exposed on its entire route through the park, and lazily winds its way downstream before ducking back into a culvert and making its final descent to the bay.

One hundred per cent of the students at Stege are helped out with free or reduced school lunch and less than one per cent of the children's families attended college. These socio-economic factors have not stopped the school in the pursuit of excellence and Stege is recognized for having increased its standards of student achievement steadily over the past few years.



*Stege students investigate wildflower seeds.
Photograph courtesy of Foglifter Media.*

Stege teachers and students had their first taste of working with EAC in early March, when 4 kindergarten classes planted California wildflowers along a bank of Baxter Creek. The eager 4 and 5-year old scientists learned about seeds and plant life cycles. They each received a cup of wildflower seeds, which they investigated with curious eyes and careful hands. Students

were able to make a connection from the tiny seeds to a field of wildflowers. They talked about the importance of these flowers, and what the creek bank might look like a few months down the line. Once they had cleared the creek area of weeds the kindergartners partnered up and carefully spread the seed mixture along the ground. The last step was to water the seeds to help them adjust to their new home. The young Stege School environmentalists walked proudly back to school with dirty hands and great big smiles.

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ESTUARY ACTION CHALLENGE collaborates with teachers to inspire environmental consciousness in children and cultivate a love of learning. We are committed to education through action and to a healthy environment for all communities.

ESTUARY ACTION CHALLENGE PROGRAMS

Our programs focus on urban creek restoration, reducing urban runoff pollution, addressing issues of pollution and environmental justice and teaching safe bay food consumption practices. We provide the opportunity for teachers to learn alongside their students in our unique professional development model. Field trips and classroom presentations integrate learning around the theme of the San Francisco Bay Estuary. Programs are designed for kindergarten through sixth grade classes. Call (510) 985-1602 for information and application, or visit our web site at www.earthisland.org/eac.



EAC Staff, left to right, Shefali, Sheela, Jocelyn, Mandi and Brenda.

Project Development Director, Brenda Salgado, joined EAC in July 2001. Brenda has an MS degree from the University of California at Davis. For the past seven years she has worked with conservation and science education organizations in California and in Belize, Central America. She is excited to join the EAC team.

Program Director, Shefali Shah, continues in her second year with EAC. Shefali just began studying for her teaching credential part time at New College in San Francisco. She is looking forward to building on her work in EAC schools this year.

Jocelyn Manuel has left EAC after three years working with us, as a classroom teacher, Program Coordinator and Education Director. Jocelyn will go back to classroom teaching in the Catholic School she attended as a child. Jocelyn married her fiancé Rodney Pierre Antoine on August 11th, and we all enjoyed celebrating their special day together.

Executive Director/Founder, Mandi Billinge, is celebrating nine years working with Estuary Action Challenge. She is also enjoying motherhood, with her two-year-old daughter Sukai.

Staff News

Program Director, Sheela Shankar, joined EAC in January 2001. Sheela has a degree in Environmental Science from the University Of Oregon and has been teaching environmental education for the past three years. She enjoys adventures, the outdoors, children and animals and is looking forward to the next great school year with EAC.

ESTUARY ACTION CHALLENGE STAFF

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Shefali Shah, Program Director
Newsletter Editor: Mandi Billinge

Sheela Shankar, Program Director
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www.earthisland.org/eac

Our First Annual Event

Letter from the Executive Director

The first annual Estuary Action Challenge event was a wonderful success, thanks to so many of you, who attended and showed your support in numerous ways.

Our event took place in the beautiful conference space kindly donated by the Center For Ecoliteracy. EAC staff filled the room with our student's colorful and informative posters and dynamic creek murals. Many of our children attended the event, to show off and describe their work. They were full of pride and excitement at having their work recognized by the many adults in the room.

Feel Good Foods set out a wonderful organic, vegetarian spread and everyone enjoyed eating and socializing. We showed a new video of Estuary Action Challenge, created by Michael Garrages and Foglifter Media. The video really captures the curiosity, excitement and empowerment that our environmental action projects inspire in our students. The final version will be released later this year.



Verde student speaker Jose Contreras and EAC's Jocelyn Manuel at our special event

One of our teachers, Cheryl Colon from Ford School in Richmond, spoke about her experience continuing to teach our program the year after her EAC training. Cheryl has had a great deal of success taking her students out of the classroom, into the living laboratory of their local environment, and using the curricula, equipment and supplies provided by EAC. Cheryl said, "Thanks to Estuary Action Challenge, my students are now environmentalists; they care more about all living things because they understand the balance of nature and how pollution affects us all. I learned that teaching through real life experiences is not really very hard, especially when I reap the reward of instilling a life long love of science and environmentalism."



EAC students demonstrate safe bay fish cooking techniques at our special event

Two EAC students, from Verde School in North Richmond, spoke to our guests about their experience interviewing council member John Marquez, about concerns for pollution in their neighborhood that affects the air we breath and the food we eat from the Bay. Student speaker Jose Contreras described how one of his classmates had asked Mr. Marquez if he lived in a clean or dirty neighborhood! Jose also commented that he liked the fact that the politician was Latino, and that he felt happy that a local leader had listened to his questions. Student speaker Shirelle Hopson said that she felt good about interviewing a politician and sharing what she had learned with others.

Students from Cesar Chavez School in Richmond proudly demonstrated how to safely cook bay fish to a group of guests who gathered around to watch, listen and learn.

Education Director, Jocelyn Manuel, presented awards to six EAC teachers for excellence in environmental education. The teachers recognized were: Cheryl Colon from Ford School in Richmond, Janice Lillard from Glen View School in Oakland, Bryan Brandow and Andre Brunetti from Cesar Chavez School in Richmond, Carol Bennet-Simmons from John Muir School in Berkeley and Pam Auxter from Dover School in San Pablo. It was a pleasure to recognize the work of these dedicated and creative teachers.

The atmosphere throughout our event was one of warmth and encouragement. We all really enjoyed celebrating with you.

Very best wishes from,

Mandi Billinge

Executive Director

Politicians In Our Schools

By Shefali Shah

One of the highlights of this past school year with Estuary Action Challenge was seeing our fourth grade students step up to the microphone in their school auditorium and speak to Richmond Mayor Rosemary Corbin about pollution and environmental justice issues in their city. In the small town of Richmond, where mostly people of color live, there are 365 pollution emitting facilities. Almost every school is within a one-mile radius of one of these factories. In addition to the toxins released every day into the local environment, there are sometimes more dramatic incidents that make the news. For example, last April there was an accident at a plastics recycling plant that spewed sulfur dioxide into the air; residents were advised to stay indoors, to avoid breathing in the harmful chemicals.

Students working with Estuary Action Challenge learn that they have an equal right to live in a clean and healthy environment. They learn that they have the right to clean air, water and food and that there are ways that they can speak up about their rights and let their voices be heard. We teach our students about the impact of writing letters, how the political system works and the importance of voting. Our students become inspired to write letters and they even invite politicians to their schools to ask them what is being done about pollution problems in their neighborhoods.

In April at Caesar Chavez School in Richmond, Mayor Rosemary Corbin met with 130 fourth grade students to answer their questions on environmental justice and pollution in the City Of Richmond. The children were extremely excited and very well prepared. They had worked in groups to plan and research their questions. School Principal, Marco Gonzales, welcomed the Mayor to the school and the students stepped up to the microphone to ask the Mayor about refinery pollution in



Cesar Chavez Teachers Andre Brunetti and Bryan Brandow, principal Marco Gonzales, students and EAC's Shefali Shah with Mayor Corbin.

their neighborhoods, the use of pesticides and herbicides by the city, street sweeping, oil spills, the lack of bike lanes on city streets and many other important questions.

"Pesticides cause health problems and destroy the environment. How will you reduce the amount of pesticides used by the City Of Richmond?"

Arturo Madrid, Araceli Vasquez and Pedro Macias

"In the US we burn 250,000,000 gallons of oil per day. This causes a lot of air pollution that leads to health problems. We could burn less oil by not using cars. I don't use my bicycle to go to the library because I don't feel safe riding my bike on Richmond streets. When are you going to make bike lanes in the streets of Richmond?" Carlos Antonio and Joanna Foyardo

"We know that every day the factories and refineries put toxic chemicals in the air that harm the environment and people's health. How do you know how much pollution they are putting in the air?"

Dariela Ceja, Jorge Palafox, Yulianna C., Jose R.

their families. After the interview, John Marquez took a walk with the students to their local creek and saw the deteriorating condition of the habitat. He then spoke about options for improving the creek's condition. Days later, a city crew came out to the creek to clean it up.

The politician visits gave us a chance to really see the potential and commitment of children to affect change in their own lives and their communities. In Estuary Action Challenge, our students are inspired with social and environmental consciousness, which cultivates in them a love of self, community and the Earth. ♦

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Second-graders at Stege had a wonderful opportunity to connect with their natural creek environment by raising California tree frogs. In late March, four 2nd grade classes received aquariums outfitted for frog habitats, and anxiously awaited the delivery of 30 tree frog tadpoles. When the timing was right, tadpoles were collected from a nearby site and immediately put into the four aquariums. The students were ecstatic to meet their tree frog tadpoles and over the next few weeks became caretakers, feeding the tadpoles twice daily and cleaning out the tank once a week. In exchange, the students were able to study these creatures and witness the amazing metamorphosis of tadpole to full adult frog. Students were so grateful for this experience that they celebrated their frog friends with poetry, paintings, and frog-letters. The adult frogs were then released into Baxter Creek to start a new life and frog-community.

that was safe to pick up, they eagerly collected it and put it into our garbage bags. All in all, these environmentalists collected 7 garbage bags full of various types of pollution. They were so inspired by the work they did that they made beautiful posters to teach others in their community what they had learned about keeping their creek clean. These posters were put on display at the Baxter Creek Earth Day Fair, where fair-goers delighted in their artwork and the message they sent.

"I am thrilled that our school is working with Estuary Action Challenge. This is the hook we need to get our children working in the local community and environment beyond the school borders."
GINNY GREEN, Principal, Stege School, Richmond



Stege School Teachers Holly Ruff and Lola Sims at the Baxter Creek Fair with students and EAC's Sheila Shankar.

Fourth and fifth grade classes took direct action in their neighborhood when they carried out a Community Creek Clean-Up. Students learned about their local watershed, the storm drain system and different types of urban run-off pollution that end up in our creeks and the bay. They were ready to hit the streets to see what types of pollution were getting washed down the storm drains and channeled into Baxter Creek. Armed with clipboards, tally sheets, and garbage bags, the kids turned into surveyors, searching for signs of oil spills and soda cans with a sharp eye. Whenever they saw garbage

Immediately after Stege's spring break, EAC started a series of lessons at Baxter Creek. EAC instructors taught lessons to each class at the creek, designed for their particular grade level. With the weather getting warmer and school soon coming to an end, students and teachers were thrilled at the opportunity to be outdoors and do exciting hands-on science lessons and art projects. Lessons involved studying creek-side flowers and plants, learning about food webs and life cycles, making bird's nests and leaf rubbings, and collecting and studying aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates.

Through learning more about their natural environment and becoming more aware of their role in our natural world, Stege students have become caring stewards of Baxter Creek. When we, as teachers, see these young people feeling empowered from the knowledge they have acquired, standing proud because of the positive change they are making in their neighborhood, and taking an active role in their right for a clean, healthy environment, we know we are doing our job. With a strong partnership like the one between EAC and Stege's faculty and students, we can only look forward to the future. ♦

Students' Creek Poems

Estuary Action Challenge works with all twelve classes at John Muir School in Berkeley on a School Wide Creek Action program, for Harwood Creek, which flows through the school grounds. The school principal, Nancy D. Waters, all the teachers, children and many parents are very involved with the creek program. In the 2000 - 2001 school year, we worked together to create a school wide vision and plan for the creek program in the next one to five years. John Muir students built a pond habitat, planted a butterfly garden and continued their creek studies and restoration projects. Every student in the school wrote a poem about their creek. The following poems, and more, were read at a school creek assembly. ♦

Creek Song
By the students of Room 4

Water skeeters swimming
Water bubbling
Leaves dancing
Squirrels jumping
Sunlight reflecting
Water falling
Wind blowing
Stones splashing circles
Water rings ripple

Murky Waters
By Dylan Kennaue

The creek is as beautiful as a dove;
flowing, rushing, shifting water
shimmering in the sun;
even though the world's polluted it;
the peaceful chirping of birds filling the air;
worms living on the damp, vegetated banks;
rocks sunk deep into murky, muddy water;
miniature waterfalls crashing
as they fall.
even though there are few fish,
it is still home to many;
this lovely creek of ours.

Piece Of Sunlight

I'm a piece of sunlight
raining Harwood Creek when
singing at every time

Harwood Creek's glaciers
cool and everyday
going through tunnels and streams to the bay

I make it where
I make it where
I fade away in the cold blistering winter

Feeling the wind & every move
crawling insects & rain
and seeing every sunlight's spark within

Hearing the songs of wild birds and water
past the cool bubble of the sudden shadows
flowing freely and ever shall I fade I

- Stephanie Phomvongsa

Magic
Up ahead,
in a meadows
there lays
a magical creek,
I see the careful turns,
the happy twists,
and the arguing forks,
All this is magic to my eyes,
I hear its charming tune,
it's Mozart to my ears,
When I turn to leaves
I see the meadow is casting spells,
so I decide to wait until it stops,
It never stops,
so I stay at the creek of magic

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By Mickey Brydson-Jack

A Simple Wish
by Andrew Khampasout

A tree next to the creek
Why do children play next to me?
Children laughing,
Children playing around me,
I want to be a boy,
But I'm a tree.

I imagine I'm a boy.
I feel cold because it's winter.
I'm like a poor child.
I wonder will I be cut down?
I cry leaves,
Because I'm a tree.

Why do they play next to me?
They're trying to save me.
I'm a good tree.
I want to make my wish come true.
It's true,
I am a boy next to the creek.



In Their Own Words

Comments from teachers and students who participated in Estuary Action Challenge programs in the 2000-2001 school year.

"The poor people are the ones who live near factories and refineries like Chevron. The houses are cheaper because the air is more polluted and they are closer to the pollution."
Jesus Ponce and Jose Paredes, age 10, Cesar Chavez School, Richmond

"People use pesticides on their garden. When it rains the chemicals wash off and they go into the gutter, which leads to the storm drain. The chemicals flow into the creek and then into the bay. The animals from the bay get poisoned and we can get sick if we eat too many of them."
Mario Esquivel, Age 10, Cesar Chavez School, Richmond

"The creek is like my teacher. I love the creek!"
Megan Thomas, Age 8, John Muir School, Berkeley

"The EAC program was an amazing hands-on journey in our local environment. Student achievement evidently increased due to this program. Having the lessons modeled for me by Ms. Manuel gave me the skills necessary to continue this program myself."
Drew Elliot Smith, Teacher, Highland School, Oakland

"The EAC program is a real model of how hands on learning should be taught. Our creek side tree planting project was the absolute best!"
Charles Wilson, Teacher, Sequoia School, Oakland

"This was a really great and comprehensive urban creek program. It motivated my students who usually do not participate in school to learn and achieve."
Silvia Cordero, Teacher, Melrose School, Oakland

"The EAC program was excellent. The field trip was superb. Interviewing fisher people was a great, real-life learning activity that had a purpose for the students. I liked the letter writing campaign and having the mayor to speak at our school. My students made excellent informational posters and the fish cooking demonstration was a huge success."
Bryan Brandow, Teacher, Cesar Chavez School, Richmond

"I really appreciate your work with the faculty to develop the vision and plan for the creek program. You involved everyone and drew out their ideas to build the future of this project."
Nancy D. Waters, Principal, John Muir School, Berkeley



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Earth Island Institute/EAC

and mail to:

Estuary Action Challenge, 1771 Alcatraz Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94703

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