Let Us Now Praise Teachers

Field Notes from the DD...

By Robert F. Sommer
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“A teacher affects eternity.”
—Henry Adams

My column this quarter is dedicated to teachers—especially teachers in Kansas, where draconian cuts to school funding have only been exceeded in harshness by the lack of respect the Kansas Governor and his conservative acolytes in the Legislature consistently show toward teachers.

So, yes, let us now praise teachers. They do so much more than teach (when they’re not being forced to spend time testing, that is).

With your continuing support, the Kansas Sierra Club has taken a mighty step in support of teachers. For the past three years, we have awarded grants to Kansas teachers engaged in educating students about the climate crisis. Cumulatively we’ve supported teachers’ efforts with nearly $12,000 in grants. Considering how many challenges teachers face, it’s even more astounding to see how much energy and creativity they bring to their classrooms.

Also impressive is the range of projects they have undertaken, from art to science, from the classroom to the outdoors, from Kansas all the way to Washington, D.C.

Take, for example, Sterling High School science teacher Dan Whisler. In 2013, the Kansas Chapter supported an equipment purchase for Dan’s students to participate in the statewide KidWind Project. His students not only won the Kansas competition, but they were selected to go to Washington for the national competition, for which we also provided support. And now here’s the result, in Dan’s own words:

With all of the support you have helped provide for our projects I wanted to share this exciting news with you. Taryn Gillespie, one of the students you helped send to Washington, D.C., last spring for the National KidWind Challenge, is getting ready to graduate next week, but her school year won’t quite be over yet. She and I will soon be headed to Washington again! Taryn submitted a project application in the National Energy Education Development (NEED) Project Youth Awards Program describing our energy-related work with our KidWind and SHS Chevy Volt Projects. Her application was selected not just as the state of Kansas winner, but also for national recognition as the National Outstanding Energy Engineering and Design Project. The support you and everyone else in the Sierra Club provided played a big role in helping to make this happen! Thank you!

And how about 2014 recipient Doug Moles of Shawnee Mission West High School, whose students are building an urban vegetable garden.

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garden. He described their progress in a recent email:

_In the last 2 months we've made some impressive progress. We were granted a 30’ x 30’ plot for our urban garden here at Shawnee Mission West. I had my neighbor (a 78 year old farmer named Jim) plow up the space. Then we spent a weekend working 80 bags of compost into the soil. We have eight 3’ x 30’ beds, with 1’ wide paths between in which we’ve laid down a straw layer for walking, watering, weeding. I ordered seeds, and 2 weeks ago we planted spring lettuce, kale, carrots, turnips, radishes, peas, onions and potatoes…._

_I encourage you to come on by and see the progress! I can’t thank you enough for the generous grant we were awarded. The kids have made the most of what they were given._

So now a drum-roll for the 2015-16 academic year recipients of Kansas Sierra Club Environmental Grants for Kansas Primary and Secondary Teachers:

- **Tracy Collins**, an art teacher at Clearwater Middle School, for her project entitled “Reduce Your Footprint”
- **Eryn Norton Moland**, a science teacher at Perry-Lecompton High School. Her project is called “Energy, Engineering, and You!”
- **Maggie Schmerge**, who teaches first and second grades at St. John School in Lawrence, for her project: “Making the Connections: Natural Resources, Renewable Energy, and Climate Change”

**Here’s the full roster of past grant recipients:**

2013:

- Nicki Burnett, Baldwin City School, Baldwin School District
- Joanna Farmer, Metro Meridian High School, Wichita School District
- Misty Lambeth, Countryside Elementary School, Olathe School District
- Scott Schwartz, Hope Street Academy, Topeka School District
- Leslie Sheldon, Rolling Ridge Elementary, Olathe School District
- Blake Smith, Maize South High School, Maize School District
- Dan Whisler, Sterling High School, Sterling School District

2014:

- Kristan Langton, Mill Creek Middle School, Desoto School District
- Doug Moles, Shawnee Mission West High School, Shawnee Mission School District
- Candace Stewart, Frontier Trail Middle School, Olathe School District

The 2015 Education Grants Subcommittee included Elaine Giessel, Dave Kirkbride, Craig Wolfe, and Bob Sommer (Chair).

If you needed to feel good about something today, feel good about this. We’re supporting some great teachers doing some great work—and to paraphrase Henry Adams, there’s no telling how far it will go.