

Inspired Students Inspire A Community

When students at Mira Loma High School in Sacramento, California return to school at the end of this month, they will have more to look forward to than homework. They will have the opportunity to experience science hands on: they can participate in the Arcade Creek Project.

Designed as a facet of Mira Loma's participation in the International Baccalaureate Program (one of sixty schools nationwide with such distinction), five instructors created the student run project to meet the discipline requirements for science and chemistry. Students in the program are required to spend a minimum of forty hours per school year in the field counting birds and fish, mapping bends in the creek, calculating the slopes of riverbanks, analyzing water samples, and generally enjoying the great outdoors—that is as long as your idea of a good time in the great outdoors involves wearing waders and carrying a clipboard.

The Arcade Creek Project consists of eleven individual studies that take place in randomly selected sites along the creek which is located just north of the campus in a suburban area of Sacramento County. The studies measure and map the physical dimensions of the creek, determine the degree of erosion along the banks, analyze the water quality, and count species of animals to gauge the health of the creek. Students also remove trash and non-native plants from the creek. They plan to begin reintroducing native plants soon. This active observation of the local land feature has fostered a deep affection for the little creek, an affection that has even moved the students to political activism. When another community group tried to purchase some of the land near the creek to build a parking lot, the students organized a letter writing campaign to put a stop to the development. So far the campaign can be considered a success; the plans for the parking lot have been put on permanent hold.

Another branch project encourages students to reach out to their community by participating in Creek Week and the Sacramento Urban Creek Council to help their community recognize the importance of the creek and the role it plays in the health of the ecosystem and community overall. Students in the outreach program visit local elementary and middle schools to raise awareness of the need to protect the environment and have even developed class material for local elementary school students. Their textbook? The Lorax, by Dr. Seuss.

In 2004, the project was awarded the Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award for Children's Environmental Education by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Now entering its sixth year, the Arcade Creek Project hopes to continue to inspire the students of Mira Loma's IB Program and the residents of their community to protect their local environment.

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About the Author

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