

It's Phenomenal!

Students explore the causes of climate change

By KAREN MACLAUGHLIN
PHOTOS COURTESY OF
RONALD BYE

California School for the Deaf (CSD) held an extended school year program that focused on the effects of fire, flood, drought and climate change in the Golden State. CSD has been

development and the highest quality education for all children." Instruction is provided for students from ages two to 22. Some come from as far away as Eureka, Redding, Lake Tahoe and Fresno to participate in the school's residential program which is available Monday through Friday in the summer.



in existence since 1860 and located in Fremont since 1980. The website says it is a "comprehensive Deaf-centered school that emphasizes American Sign Language and English, social justice, Deafhood, equity, respect, an early start in language

Ron Bye, the school's student information manager, coordinated the three-week program titled "Environmental Phenomenon." Each class chose to focus on a theme based on the many natural disruptions seen this past year—such as fire,



drought, lightning, deforestation and climate change. Pre-K and Kindergarten students made a movie showing why and how to recycle, complete with green screen technology and a large paper reptile. Second graders studied the effects of changing weather by monitoring the water temperature in their classroom turtle's tank. They also solved two problems with one solution by repurposing plastic bottles to use as succulent planters. Although not directly related to changes in weather, it is worth noting that the same students also effectively cooked s'mores in a solar oven that they made from a pizza box lined with aluminum foil.

A favorite day for the elementary students was the boots-on-the-ground cleanup at Lake Elizabeth in late July. Each student was given a plastic bag and gloves to get the job done, and they packed up over eight pounds of trash in under two hours. They also made a 3D map of California to identify areas where drought and fire threatened the population and environment, and resurrected recycled materials by using them to make animal collages, puppets and even a few broadswords.

Rachel Baer, a ranger at Yellowstone National Park who

also happens to be the hearing daughter of deaf parents, used her bilingual skills during a Zoom session with fifth graders to explain her work at Geyser Basin. She also held a Q&A session with the students to discuss plant and animal life and their relationship to preserving the earth. The session with Ranger Baer was included in a movie the class produced, which used animation to take the viewer from outer space right down into the Fremont classroom to look at flowers and bees under a microscope.

Middle school students went on field trips to Coyote Hills, Quarry Lakes, Henry Cowell State Park, Natural Bridges and Big Basin State Park. They came back and painted what they saw or, as Bye put it, "what they wanted it to look like to save the earth." He added that the high school students took a more theoretical approach to the project by asking "What if?" "What if we took these empty cans and put pencils in them?" "What if we planted more trees?" "What if we saved electricity by turning off lights and computers when they are not being used?"

This summer CSD hosted the Bay Area Black Deaf Advocates (BABDA) at a week-long

summer camp for four deaf children and nine hearing children of deaf adults. They learned about self-advocacy, respecting one another, responsibility, and communication skills. "They are going through repression themselves," said Bye. "So we are providing a place for them to use this school to host that type of camp."

Bye explained that CSD places great emphasis on the value of becoming fluent in both ASL and English because language acquisition for deaf children is accelerated by learning to sign early. As one educator put it, "If we want our children to become better readers and writers, they need to learn, analyze and use ASL so they will be able to learn English vocabulary, grammar and rules." In addition to equipping students to meet or exceed state academic standards, Bye noted, providing good role models helps students cope with the challenges of life in general. More than half of the school's teachers and administrators are deaf adults. "We do have very good role models for our deaf children to look up to," he said. It helps the students to feel like "We can do this!"

To find out more about the mission and work of CSD, visit csdcgls.com.