

ZCES students learn from their surroundings

By Kathryn Reed

With Lake Tahoe – the land and water – being a continual scientific discovery, students at Zephyr Cove Elementary School are stepping outside to learn.

Each grade level is being taught something unique about Tahoe as part of the science curriculum. It's called "place based learning" – something Principal Nancy Cauley and the teachers came up with at the beginning of the year and expect to put into full effect in the 2015-16 school year.

Tahoe Institute for Natural Science is helping to facilitate classes with the regular teachers as well as bringing in grade appropriate instruction. All of this will meet the state science standards.

"The Tahoe Institute for Natural Science is excited to work with Zephyr Cove Elementary School to help with their new focus on the natural environment of the Lake Tahoe Basin," Kirk Hardie, TNS co-executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Teachers frequently comment that we provide their classes with their favorite guest programs. Two programs we are currently working on are geology and plant identification."

Instruction at each level will focus on:

- Kindergarten – feathers, animals that fly
- First – fur, as in animals with fur
- Second – fins, the fish
- Third – forest

- Fourth – water, the lake, streams and rivers
- Fifth – geology
- Sixth – green energy.

“We feel with TINS they will provide quality, hands-on experiential programs with all six different aspects,” Cauley told *Lake Tahoe News*. “They will teach the children how special these resources are, and to care (for) and cultivate the ecosystem of Tahoe so future generations can enjoy it just as much.”

Cauley said staff started discussing what makes ZCES so special. Location is significant. It is surrounded by forest, with a stream out back. Lake Tahoe is walking distance from the school. The small size is another attribute.

Students don’t have to get on a bus to experience what most kids their age would have to. They can walk outside and be immersed in nature. And that then becomes the classroom.

But there are other nearby places that offer learning experiences. Zephyr Cove students went to Taylor Creek last fall to see the kokanee salmon spawning. Third-graders will be going to Spooner Lake for a hike.

“TINS has been working with area schools since 2010 to improve their science education and nature experience opportunities through hands-on, place-based programs that meet both Nevada and California state science education standards,” Hardie said.

Talking to students about invasive species will be incorporated into water issues.

“This could take off in a lot of different ways. It’s in an embryonic stage,” Cauley said of this new science program.