

Nature becomes classroom for ZCES students

By Jenay Aiksnoras

More than 180 Zephyr Cove Elementary students stepped outside the classroom and into nature to learn more about Lake Tahoe.

During the field trips students participated in hands-on activities that taught them about a variety of topics including native and invasive animals, the food web, water cycle, photosynthesis, and how to protect Lake Tahoe.

“I liked how we learned about food chains, bugs, and water. Once you learn about science you can start your own experiments,” said Colin Pilcher, a second-grade student.

The field trips are part of a greater effort by the South Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition to educate local students in the Tahoe basin. STEEC is made up of local organizations and agencies aimed at inspiring the next generation of community leaders and scientists. Participating agencies include the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, United States Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, Tahoe Institute for Natural Sciences, and Lake Tahoe Humane Society.

Zephyr Cove Elementary has begun to focus on **place-based learning** with a goal of teaching students about their home environment.

During their field trips the students visited the shores of Zephyr Cove. The primary grades studied water molecules, lake food chains and insects. The students were enthusiastic and engaged in learning about the environment. Third- and fourth-graders participated in bird watching and learned about invasive species and adaptations.

"It was fun, we got to play games and saw a duck with its little babies," said fourth-grader Armani Nweke.

In fifth grade, the students learned about how animal waste can pollute the lake. They also spent time looking at "crawdads" or crayfish.

Anna Silverman said, "We had to make different gases like H₂O and we learned about molecular bonds."

Jenay Aiksnoras is a counselor at Zephyr Cove Elementary School.