

CECEXPLORER

The latest news and updates from Chain Exploration Center



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Environmental Day, Past and Present, May 23

My Story | by MaryKaye Ristow

Environmental Day has been around for so long that teachers at Chain Elementary/CEC can't remember when it wasn't a part of the last weeks of the school year. The first few Environmental Days were spent with the whole Chain O'Lakes Elementary School at Hartman Creek State Park. Teachers planned outdoor lessons utilizing the natural areas around Allen Lake.

A couple of years later it was moved to the Chain School where it has remained. The nature trails, storybook walk, rolling fields, woodlands and the pier on the lake proved to be the perfect setting for a day outdoors where students learn about their natural world.

Planning for Environmental Day begins in late April or early May. (It takes many hands to plan this one-day.) Teachers select their outdoor lessons and offer suggestions of community members that may be interested in participating in the day.

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Continued, Environmental Day...

We have had help from Smokey the Bear, foresters, UW-Extension naturalists, beekeepers, retired teachers, retired principals, DNR wardens, camp counselors, and even a story-telling school board member. The district food service creates and serves an environmentally friendly lunch on trays that do not produce waste. The custodial staff drags picnic tables to the courtyard for lunch. High school students design and make a special button for students. Our librarian aide takes pictures and with the help of district tech experts, create a slideshow featuring activities throughout the day.

This year we add a new change, the CEC students are the presenters. Students contact a "Live Source", which is a local expert in the field of their environmental or agriculture topic. Pairs of students apply their knowledge of their topic as they create interactive activities for the Chain Elementary K-2 students. I can't think of a better way to have students become passionate about the environment and the wonder of nature.



CEC Students re-potting their seedlings.

PLTW

By: CEC Students, Molly Martens and Savannah Floistad

PLTW stands for Project Lead The Way. It is a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) program. We studied the module on energy. We covered standards in science, technology, math and used the engineering process. We designed and created vehicles with a restraint system. We used an egg as a passenger and tested rolling it down a ramp and crashing it into a wall.

Our next activity was to see how energy is converted from one form to another. We explored energy in hand warmers, glow sticks, a student-made generator that produced red and green light. We worked with a partner to research and present a form of energy such as: Solar, biomass, nuclear, coal, oil, hydroelectric, wind and geothermal.

We interviewed some of our students about their feelings about PLTW. One of our students, Emma, said this, "I feel like the teams are getting along well and get the projects done well."

Another one of our students, Scarlet said, "It is entertaining and fun and when the pieces aren't together. It is hard, but when the pieces are together it is fun." One of our other students Kaleigha said, "Well it's a whole new unit of science that helps us work together as a team." Another student Justin said, "I think that it is challenging and hard and fun!" Anna M. said, "I think that it is fun and hard." Ellie said, "I think that Project Lead the Way is a very interactive and exciting project because you get to pick your course and you get to kind of lead your own learning in your own creative way. It is a very new and improved way of learning science. I absolutely love it!"

Mindfulness

By Rhonda Hare, CEC Administrator and CEO

What is mindfulness? It is a popular buzzword in current circles and you have seen it on the daily schedule at the CEC. Definitions of mindfulness can vary, so let's look at how mindfulness is taught and used at the CEC.

After lunch recess, students gather as a whole school group in the Great Room. Often the lights are low and students are led by peers through mindful deep breathing exercises.

During this time they practice keeping their bodies still and minds peaceful. Then a peer asks mindful questions to direct thoughts such as:

1. What are some good ways to show respect to your parents?
2. Think about the last time a friend made you laugh. Who wants to share?
3. Remember a time you had a test and you were really worried. What helped you? What words can you say to yourself?
4. Some people say hardship makes you stronger. What do you think of this?
5. In the next moment listen to all the sounds in the room. How many can you hear?

The placement of Mindfulness time immediately after lunch recess and before Project time was deliberate. It is a time to refocus after the excitement and physical exertion of recess, and get ready for project work. It is a method we teach to help students manage stress productively.

At the CEC it is also a community strengthening time. It is a time the whole school comes together for culture building.

During morning meeting and other times when this is done, there is an agenda and business protocol is followed.

During mindfulness, students and teachers can relax and share their feelings. Volunteers share their thoughts on topics ranging from respect to favorite memories. No one is forced to share, and everyone affirms those who do.

By scheduling time for it each day, a caring community is built.

Why have we chosen to include mindfulness in the CEC day?

A growing body of evidence is showing benefits for students not only in the area of social and emotional health, but also in compassion, attention, and academic stamina. Through mindfulness, we learn to bring greater curiosity to whatever it is we experience. Curiosity is part of the project process and the mission of our school, and it helps the students in other parts of their lives. For a compilation of research, see more at the Mindful Schools website.

Our Advisors have seen this practice work in visits to other charter schools, which prompted them to complete weeklong training series on Mindfulness in Schools, and incorporate it into our day. Come to visit us and check it out!



A glimpse at daily Mindfulness time.



Students working with PLTW curriculum.

CEC Takes Over Chain Elementary!

By: John Zeamer

When the Chain School went to the Children's Museum, the CEC took over the Chain building! We talked a little louder in the halls.

We used the conference room to write essays. We read outside in the nature trail. We even cleaned the school up by picking up litter, raking leaves, and transplanting the plants for a fundraiser. We had so much fun because at the end of the "CEC Takeover Day" we got Little Caesars Pizza, in the teacher's lounge, sponsored by the PTG. We also got to sit outside and eat the pizza in the courtyard.

Lastly, we got to open a box with toys in it. It was a surprise from Mrs. Hare. The box marked the end of the Forward testing. There was things like a fidget spinners, slime, puzzles, beads and candy.

In conclusion, CEC Takeover day was fun and we helped the school by picking litter up, raking leaves, and transplanting the plants for our fundraiser. We also can not forget that we had pizza at the end. We had so much fun!

Second Annual U-Rah-Rah

Consider donating any items that could be Upcycled, Recycled, or Reused to the 2nd annual U- Rah-Rah CEC Yard Sale! The sale is set for Saturday, June 8, in the Chain gym between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. All proceeds fund supplies for student project work. Bring items to the gym stage anytime now through June 8. Don't forget to mark your calendar!

Please no clothing or crafts.

Items that sold most last year: books and furniture

Upcoming Events

- **Environmental Day:** May 23
- **Governance Council:** May 23, 5:30 p.m. in the Community Room at the CEC
- **Fundraising Committee:** June 4, 6:00 p.m. in the Community Room at the CEC
- **PTG:** June 6, 7:30 a.m. in the Community Room at the CEC
- **U-Rah-Rah:** June 8, 10:00 a.m. - 2 p.m. in the gym and garage of the CEC
- **Golf Outing:** June 29 at Hidden Waters Golf Course



Students harvesting lettuce from the tower garden.

