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Chico Fifth-Graders Win 2017 Cal Water H2O Challenge Grand Prize

Sierra View Elementary students tested and confirmed safety of their school's drinking water in winning entry

CHICO, CA -- (Marketwired) -- 04/05/17 -- Emily Akimoto's fifth-grade class learned they won the 2017 California Water Service (Cal Water) H₂O Challenge grand prize today for testing the safety of their school's drinking water. The Chico-based Sierra View Elementary students adopted the project due to recent issues in Flint, Mich., and concerns about the safety of drinking water nationwide. Results showed that the school's drinking water was safe for consumption, and students will share their findings at a school district meeting later this year. The grand prize includes a \$3,500 grant for the classroom and a tent-camping trip to the Santa Monica Mountains in conjunction with the NatureBridge environmental science education program.

To determine the safety of their drinking water, students first researched the what, why, and how of water contamination. Then, they collected water samples and worked with local laboratories to conduct the testing. Upon receiving the results, the students shared the good news with their fellow students and were featured on a local news station.

The test results themselves were coupled with the positive impacts on learning. Akimoto said: "My students gained so many benefits from this challenge. They understand water now, including the water cycle, water safety, and water contamination. They understand the scientific method and how to apply science in real life. I watched them learn to love learning. I watched their passion for science grow and blossom. I watched them get excited when they were assigned research or writing. It was incredible."

The Cal Water H₂O Challenge (challenge.calwater.com) is a collaboration between Cal Water and the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE). It is open annually to students and teachers in grades 4-6 in schools served by Cal Water.

"We are inspired by the level of creativity, commitment, and innovation all participating schools, teachers, and students showed in the 2017 Challenge, and I am especially proud of our winning class here at Sierra View," said Martin A. Kropelnicki, Cal Water President and CEO. "This is a critical time for water supply management and conservation, and we are encouraged when future generations engage in water issues and apply their learnings to real-world situations. The Challenge is creating a foundation for clean, high-quality, and reliable water, and it is part of our purpose to improve the quality of life in the communities we serve."

The Challenge also furthers NAAEE's National Project for Excellence in Environmental Education goals, per Christiane Maertens, NAAEE's deputy director. "This competition is teaching kids how to be hands-on advocates for resources their communities value the most," she said.

NAAEE's partnership with Cal Water is expanding water conservation efforts throughout the state and building educational programs into school curriculum. "Most importantly, students are learning the basics of science through environmental education," Maertens explained. "These projects give students the opportunity to integrate the learning principles of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) and NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards) in solving problems that directly affect our schools and neighborhoods."

Other winners for the Cal Water H2O Challenge are:

2nd place: Sixth-grade students and their teacher Rachel Lenix from Downtown Elementary in Bakersfield, Calif., taught fellow students that cutting down on food waste contributes to water conservation. This class won a \$2,500 classroom grant, pizza party, and Cal Water prize pack for each student in the class.

3rd place: Fourth-grade students and their teacher Pete Pembroke from Parkview Elementary in Chico, Calif., created green-screen public service announcements to explain water concepts, conservation, and pollution. These winners received a \$2,000 classroom grant plus a Cal Water prize pack for each class student.

4th place: Fifth-grade students and their teacher Jennipher Dace at Murdock Elementary School in Willows, Calif., explored whether recent rainfall ended the drought. The class received a \$1,000 grant and a Cal Water prize pack for each student in the class.

About Cal Water

California Water Service serves about 2 million people through 480,300 service connections in California. The company, which has provided water service in the state since 1926, was ranked "Highest in Customer Satisfaction Among Water Utilities in the West" in 2016 by J.D. Power in its inaugural Water Utility Residential Customer Satisfaction Study. Additional information may be obtained online at www.calwater.com.

About NAAEE

The North American Association for Environmental Education is a membership organization dedicated to accelerating environmental literacy and civic engagement through education. NAAEE supports a network of more than 20,000 members working in environmental education in more than 30 countries through direct membership and 54 regional affiliate organizations. For more information, visit www.naaee.net.