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# California Water Service Announces 2023 Cal Water H2O Challenge Winners

## First Through Fifth Places Awarded in Annual Classroom Competition, Heidi Ballard's Fifth-Grade Class at Bonita Street STEAM Academy Wins Grand Prize

SAN JOSE, Calif., April 17, 2023 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE)—California Water Service (Cal Water) has announced that classes from Bonita Street STEAM Academy (Carson, Calif.), Sierra View Elementary (Chico, Calif.), and Little Chico Creek Elementary (Chico, Calif.) won the top five spots in the ninth annual Cal Water H<sub>2</sub>O Challenge classroom competition, with Heidi Ballard's fifth-grade class at Bonita Street STEAM Academy taking the 2023 grand prize. Ballard's class was honored at a surprise schoolwide assembly on Friday, April 14, 2023.

The Cal Water H<sub>2</sub>O Challenge ([challenge.calwater.com](https://challenge.calwater.com)) is a collaboration among Cal Water, the WestEd K-12 Alliance, and DoGoodery. This free, project-based competition invites fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade classrooms in Cal Water service areas to develop and implement solutions for local water issues. This year's competition proposed a new theme focused on sustained drought conditions in California. Although the state experienced a significant amount of rain over the past few months, the climate continues to get hotter and drier long-term and the need for water conservation solutions is more important than ever, according to Cal Water. Participating classrooms were encouraged to keep the theme in mind while exploring local water issues.

Ballard's class project, D.R.I.P. (Drought Intelligence Repair Plan), was inspired by articles and segments about the drought in news cycles. The students measured water waste from automatic sinks in bathrooms and hoses as they were used on campus. They shared their findings with the school administration and then embarked on a campaign to educate their peers and community about water conservation. The class produced a presentation, video public service announcement, and native plant seed balls to share with their community, along with posters, bookmarks, and comic books to share with other students. The project is ongoing, as the students continue to work to enact water-saving changes in school facilities.

"Through the learning my students engaged in, the activities they accomplished, the scientific data they collected, and the results they analyzed, it is clear that there was an increase in the amount of people who are more thoughtful and more educated about California water issues and are taking action to do their part to make a difference," Ballard reflected on the impact of her students' project.

Ballard's class won a \$3,500 classroom grant, a STEM-based field trip, pizza party, and gift cards and prize packs for the teacher and each student.

Emily Akimoto's fifth-graders at Sierra View Elementary took home the second-place prize—which includes a class pizza party, \$2,500 classroom grant, and student prize packs—for

their project, "'Water' Ways to Collect Trash?" Students designed a prototype device to remove trash from creeks.

The third-place prize, including a \$2,000 classroom grant, pizza party, and student prize packs, went to Christine Gaytan's fifth-graders at Bonita Street STEAM Academy for their project, "C.A.T. Crew 2.0 Waving Goodbye to Plastic Pollution!" The students educated their peers on the importance of recycling and using reusable water bottles to reduce plastic waste in the ocean.

Fifth-graders in Whitney Toste's class at Sierra View Elementary won fourth-place for their project, "Operation Drainage." The class, which earned a \$1,000 classroom grant, pizza party, and student prize packs, experimented with different materials for better drainage into aquifers and shared their findings with companies responsible for local building development projects.

Fifth place was awarded to Kristen Thomas's fifth-grade students at Little Chico Creek Elementary. Their project, "Every Drop Matters!," included educating their school about the importance of native species and habitats in water conservation. The class also planted native landscaping and trees in the riparian zone of Little Chico Creek. The class won a \$500 classroom grant, pizza party, and prize packs for each student.

"I'd like to congratulate our grand-prize winner, Ms. Ballard and her students, on their inspirational project to save water both as individuals and as a school campus. It is also a privilege to recognize all of this year's winning classes and a joy to see the creative projects from each participating class in the 2023 Cal Water H<sub>2</sub>O Challenge." said Martin A.

Kropelnicki, Cal Water President and Chief Executive Officer. "These students—our future leaders—have all demonstrated a thorough understanding of water issues in their communities and impressed us with their ability to solve challenges and engage others in wise water use."

## **About California Water Service**

California Water Service provides high-quality, reliable water utility services to about 2 million people statewide through 494,500 service connections. What sets Cal Water apart is its commitment to enhancing the quality of life for its customers and communities. Guided daily by their promise to provide quality, service, and value, the utility's employees lead the way in working to protect the planet, care for people, and operate with the utmost integrity. Integral to Cal Water's strategy is investing responsibly in infrastructure, sustainability initiatives, and community well-being. The utility has been named one of "America's Most Responsible Companies" and "America's Most Trustworthy Companies" by *Newsweek* and a Great Place to Work®. More information is available at [www.calwater.com](http://www.calwater.com).

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