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New Vista High School Wins National Award for Excellence in Environmental Education

School's 'Earth Task Force' Advances Innovations in Environmental Education for Students and the Community

Boulder, Colo. – Boulder's New Vista High School (NVHS) has won the 2011 Green Prize in Public Education http://neefusa.org/grants/green_prize.htm, which includes a \$10,000 award and national recognition for the school's comprehensive greening initiatives.

New Vista won the nationwide competition for incorporating the environment into the curricula across all academic disciplines and for supporting environmental learning throughout the school through its Community Adventure Program (CAP), and the work of its Earth Task Force (ETF), initiated by students dedicated to greening their school.

"The unique, replicable and innovative part of the school's greening efforts is that teachers, students and staff have worked in concert together as catalysts toward creating a sustainable school," NVHS said in its submission for the Green Prize, "The ETF and CAP are the twin engines powering NVHS towards sustainability." These initiatives have led to the installation of a variety of resource-saving mechanisms including solar panels, low-flow toilets and vending machine 'misers', and have also led to a series of creative student-led environmental projects including a Green Prom that features alternative transportation, a dress exchange and reusable utensils.

"I am incredibly proud of our community for winning this award. It would not have been possible without the hard work and amazing cooperation between teachers, students, our school and our nonprofit partner, the Cottonwood Institute," said Kirk Quitter, principal. "The interdependence that has been created through these partnerships will ensure that future teachers and students can continue the high-impact, sustainable work that has been taking place at New Vista."

Two 2011 Green Prize merit awards went to Common Ground High School in New Haven, Conn. and Waters Elementary School in Chicago, Ill.

The National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF, <http://www.neefusa.org>) awards the Green Prize in Public Education to an outstanding public school that best demonstrates success in engaging the entire school as well as the community in greening the curriculum, facilities and grounds to improve student learning and cultivate environmental responsibility. The award winners were announced during National Environmental Education Week (EE Week) <http://www.eeweek.org/>, the single largest organized environmental education event in the United States.

“NVHS is a shining example of how environmental education can not only raise awareness about environmental issues, but can lead to real change, a heightened sense of community and, as they noted in their application, ‘create a whole new class of superheroes,’” said NEEF President Diane Wood. “The collaboration between teachers and their students is truly inspiring.”

NVHS’s CAP class inspires young people to initiate positive environmental change in their schools and communities by teaching students about local environmental issues, giving them the tools and leadership skills they need to address these issues and challenging them to create a service learning project where they can apply academic skills and knowledge to tackle the environmental issue of their choice.

Teachers at NVHS express strong motivation for integrating real world applications into their curricula and are enthusiastic about how environmental learning has supported not only academic growth, but also increased personal responsibility, civic engagement and stewardship among their students. “Working with the Earth Task Force has been one of the most joyful experiences of my teaching career,” states ETF mentor and teacher, Paige Doughty. The work that the teachers and students are doing to envision and create sustainability at our school is my dream of what high-school level environmental education can be. Together we have accomplished more than I imagined possible and our collaborative work inspires, motivates, and moves me on a daily basis.”

According to their application, “Environmental changes at NVHS have come from students’ own motivation to green their school and community. Because the environmental initiatives at NVHS are fun, creative and accessible to a wide audience, they have spread like wildfire to classes, assemblies, hallway discussions, facilities, lunches and curriculum.”

This year NVHS is the recipient of bond funds for school building updates. To implement the updates, NVHS has formed a Design Team of teachers, administrators and students. Both a staff and student member of the ETF sit on this committee as voices for sustainability. They have insured that solar tubes, efficient windows and an entrance vestibule will be part of the renovations that will save money and cut energy use.

Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) Sustainability Coordinator Ghita Carroll collaborates with the ETF and regularly visits the school to check in. She is taking the momentum of NVHS’s successes and spreading it to the rest of the district by supporting other school environmental clubs to be school-wide catalysts for change.

The National Environmental Education Foundation, with major support from the NEA Foundation <http://www.neafoundation.org/> and in partnership with EarthEcho International <http://www.earthecho.org/>, recognizes and celebrates outstanding K-12 public schools that have successfully taken on the challenge of becoming green schools through the Green Prize in Public Education.

The Green Prize in Public Education awards \$10,000 to a K-12 public school that has most successfully implemented an innovative, sustainable and replicable school-wide greening effort that has involved and benefitted students, teachers, educators, maintenance staff, parents and the local community. Ultimately, a green school increases students' environmental literacy, and empowers and inspires them to be more socially and environmentally responsible.

Two merit awards of \$5,000 each are also given to schools that demonstrate this kind of success.

For more information about the Green Prize in Public Education, visit http://neefusa.org/grants/green_prize.htm.

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