

Menlo-Atherton High School *Behavior Change or Climate Change*

A group of 16 Menlo-Atherton High School students, from Atherton, CA, created “Behavior Change or Climate Change”, a curriculum used to educate students about harmful greenhouse gas emissions, lasting five weeks.

The program consisted of four 50 minute presentations taught to freshmen by fellow upperclassmen on topics like energy efficiency, food, transportation and the subsequent effects on the climate. In the past three years, 16 classes received presentations, reaching over 500 students. “Behavior Change or Climate Change” features a teaching style dubbed “edutainment”, a concept that integrates fun videos and hands-on activities, like clothes line activities and meter-reading games, into learning concepts to boost retention and create excitement.

To help the students prepare for the presentations, Principal Matthew Zito allows the students to meet before school during zero period once a week. Students also meet with teachers to schedule teaching times—a tough task due to conflicts with testing and field trips.

Surveys were given before and after the program was taught to monitor behavior change. Students showed a 20 percent change in behavior, like limiting time spent showering, reducing hot water usage, using clothes lines, and turning down thermostats at home and in the family refrigerator.



Project Highlights

Community Support:

- Funding provided by the PTA and school administration to buy Behavior Change Kits
- Teacher participation to allow class time to teach program

Behavior Change Kits:

- Kits are distributed to students who show interest in climate change
- Cost \$5, but funding is provided from PTA
Includes: power strips, tire gauges, shower coaches, sticker reminders, bumper stickers, and reusable water bottles
- Encourages students and families to reduce energy and transportation use

Achievements:

- Noticeable increase in students biking to school after presentation as well as use of reusable water bottles
- Students were invited to present the success to the Climate Change Conference in Sacramento and Washington D.C.
- Surveys reported behavior change in energy and water conservation

Challenges:

- Scheduling with teachers around standardized and AP testing, finals, projects and field trips
- Student teachers had to miss class in order to deliver the presentation



The Students gather to accept the Climate Generation award for the work done on the “Behavior Change or Climate Change” school curriculum.

CLIMATE GENERATION PROGRAM

Why get involved with a program like “Behavior Change”?

The students who founded the program care about the planet and its future. The motto of the team explains the motivation to reach out to the community and fellow students, “We learn; we act; we teach; we disseminate (information); we will change the world”. Founders students Emily Gran and Julia Sommer are “determined to make a difference in climate change.”

What accomplishments has the student team had?

In addition to educating the students and community in Atherton and Menlo Park and visiting climate change conferences, head of the Menlo-Atherton Environmental Club Chloe Songer was also chosen as a representative of the United States at the UNICEF 2009 Children’s Climate Change Forum in Copenhagen, Denmark to discuss and develop a policy platform that was presented to international leaders regarding climate change.

What were the lesson plans like?

One of the lessons entailed a presentation from Shreya Indukuri, a Sophomore at Harker School. Indukuri is the co-founder of SmartPowerEd, an online system that connects schools with web-based energy tracking systems to cut carbon footprints and save money on energy bills. Buildings contribute to 40 percent of greenhouse gas emissions— 25 percent of energy use is due to heating and cooling while 50 percent is attributed to lights. By educating the schools and students, wasteful actions like unnecessary lighting or running the air conditioner when no one is present, can be minimized resulting in reduced carbon emissions. Along with special speakers, interactive learning opportunities are offered like demonstrations about carbon combustion and emissions, as well as fun games to reduce the feeling of being ‘talked at’.



The Behavior Change or Climate Change campaign strives to inform the student body and community of Atherton, this poster advertises one of the main issues affecting greenhouse gas emissions-- inefficient transportation using non-renewable resources.



Fun presentations are a core part of the Behavior Change curriculum to keep students interested in learning about greenhouse gases. Events promoting Earth Day and Earth Hour also engaged the student body at the school.

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