

Ashburnham teacher speaks at Colorado science summit

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The Long Term Ecological Research Network invited a local teacher to join its ranks at its annual All Scientists Meeting in Estes Park, Colo., in September.

Kate Bennett, fifth-grade teacher at the John R. Briggs Elementary School in Ashburnham, attended this prestigious gathering of prominent ecologists and climate scientists from all over the world. Bennett was member of a contingent of scientists and education staff from the Harvard Forest in Petersham, which is a part of the LTER network.

Bennett and her fifth-graders have participated in the Harvard Forest LTER Schoolyard Program for eight years. This program offers students and their teachers the opportunity to participate in research projects under the guidance of Harvard Forest scientists involving current science issues such as climate change, invasive species, and vernal pools.

For four days, Bennett attended workshops on a variety of current topics that ranged from climate change to the new Common Core science standards due to be released shortly.

Bennett was invited to speak at two of the sessions -- one on teaching phenology (the science of the timing of cyclical events in nature, such as color change and leaf drop) and at the K-12 education session. She also presented the Harvard Forest Schoolyard program at a poster session.

"Participating in a conference like this is really energizing. Attending workshops and hearing speakers on the cutting edge of scientific research is valuable to me as an educator on many levels. Our students deserve science curriculum that is current and authentic. And I can't help but bring the enthusiasm I got at the conference back to my students."

Bennett blogged with her students each day, keeping them up to date on her activities and posting pictures of many native populations of deer, elk and other Colorado wildlife. The students responded to questions highlighting some of the differences between Massachusetts and Colorado.

"The opportunity to show a national gathering of scientists some of the work our children at John R. Briggs Elementary are accomplishing in their classroom through the LTER program set us apart and says a lot about how current scientific research can be integrated into our existing curriculum."

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