

Leave No Child Inside: APS's Valley Cluster Funded to Move Kids Outdoors Thanks to Outdoor Classroom Program

This past spring, the State Parks Division held an event down at the Rio Grande Nature Center (a state park) to herald the second year of the statewide Outdoor Classroom Program. And the proof of the program's appeal was in the pudding - or actually, in the Bosque - as scores of elementary and high school students descended on the Nature Center from as far away as Ramah Navajo and as close as Georgia O'Keefe Elementary, in the Heights. The idea behind the program is to get children outside, in nature, where they can learn science, geography first hand, and fall in love with nature. In today's world lots of kids stay inside, playing video games, looking up their friends on Myspace-with occasional trips to the mall. That's a far cry from my own childhood, where there was ample time to play outdoors, at the woods at the end of the street. Now, in much of the country, there are no woods at the end of the street. But, thank goodness, there's the Rio Grande Bosque, and, further afield, the mountains, the desert and everything that makes New Mexico, well, New Mexico. I thought the Outdoor Classroom program was a perfect fit for kids here in the North Valley where ten years ago I attended an alarming focus group for middle schoolers at Garfield Middle School. And it wasn't just the pizza and soda, with which the facilitators got the kids to participate, that was alarming. Many of these kids never went to the bosque and seldom played out side. Meanwhile, the rate of obesity and diabetes continues to go up among this group. That's why I was delighted in March when my appropriation for at least one outdoor learning experience for every 5th grader in the APS's Valley Cluster went through, and the overall program received \$500,000 for school districts around the state. **Yippee! Leave No Child Inside!**

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