

// NON-PROFIT SPOTLIGHT //

Homework Assignment: Explore. Engage. Enjoy.

How one local non-profit immerses kids in the great outdoors to create tomorrow's policy leaders.

With names like “Captain Zero & Doctor Food Waste,” “Rocky Mountain Melodrama” and “Freezemaster is Coming,” classes offered by the Keystone Science School may make you want to revisit junior high biology all over again.

The residential field science school hosts students with a passion for environmental science and exploring nature—students bunk in dorms, and a typical day includes plenty of time in the field, lots of hiking, and, in winter, hours spent on snowshoes and cross-country skis as they complete hands-on study of the environment. Though playful course titles may sound like “science lite,” the curriculum at Keystone Science School is rock-solid. Students study topics such as snow metamorphosis, forest ecology, watershed management and geomorphology in various camp and school programs. Staff emphasizes the development of critical inquiry skills, and the science curricula align with K–12 Colorado Science Standards.

A new, semester-long program called “Education in Action” guides students through the process of becoming real players in environmental policy issues in their region. Kids research diverse stakeholder's views of controversial topics, and then share their discoveries with leaders in their hometowns. In the process, they learn what it means to be an informed, engaged citizen; an educational goal that's another hallmark of the Keystone Science School's programs. “Our hope,” says Robyn Brewer, the school's marketing and communications

director, “is that the next generation of leaders will head into adulthood better prepared to address big issues—whether they be personal or societal—with thoughtful, creative approaches and respect for multiple perspectives.”

That hope connects the Keystone Science School to the mission its parent organization: The Keystone Center. Founded by Robert W Craig in 1975, the Center has evolved into a nationally respected independent public policy mediation and education center focused on energy, environmental health and public health issues. Craig's belief was that explosive public policy issues could be solved when hard facts, a skilled, neutral, mediating party, and a desire to work towards consensus-built solutions guided the dialogues of diverse stakeholders and leaders. At the Keystone Science School, the goal is to inspire young people who might become those future policy leaders—by giving them opportunities to grow the critical social and intellectual tools they'll need to do so.

In order to ensure that opportunity is available to all young people, the Keystone Science School raises approximately \$125,000 annually to support children who otherwise could not afford to take part in its programs; donations are definitely welcomed. “Every child deserves meaningful educational experiences,” says the school's director, Ellen Reid. “It's important to us to help make that possible for as many kids as we can.” – KATE LAPIDES



Campers from KSS' Discovery Camp program on a Challenge Hike, a success-driven activity organized according to each child's age and ability.