



# Berkshire Bank BEST Schools program

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Across the Berkshires, high school and college students have been studying diverse aspects of environmental issues, from science to public policy and forming “green teams” to challenge themselves to reduce their environmental impacts and energy costs. Now with funding from the Berkshire Bank Foundation, an exciting new initiative has also been launched at the elementary and middle school level. Teachers are developing energizing new programs to better prepare their students in the technology, mathematics and science disciplines; students are becoming inspired to become environmental stewards; and schools are becoming model environmental resources for their community. The Berkshire Bank BEST (Berkshire Environmental School Teams) program is coordinated by the Center for Ecological Technology (CET) with the support of Berkshire Bank.

The three Berkshire Bank BEST schools - Conte Middle School in North Adams, Lanesborough Elementary School, and Undermountain Elementary School in Sheffield - have become “learning laboratories” where students are actively engaged in learning through their Science & Technology curriculum about local, real-world environmental issues and solutions. Three additional schools will be added each year as the network of Berkshire Bank BEST schools grows.

CET is working with teams of school superintendents, principals, teachers and staff from each school to provide professional development and tailor an environmental program to meet their specific needs and interests.

At Conte Middle School, sixth grade students are focusing on home and school energy conservation. Students surveyed energy use in their home, identified opportunities for conservation and illustrated their recommendations on posters. The seventh grade science students learned about forms and sources of energy, including solar energy technologies, culminating with building solar ovens to use as demonstrations at events throughout the county. Their research has led them to establish a venture to raise money for Solar Ovens International, which donates solar ovens to 3rd world communities. Eighth grade students are studying renewable energy, and actively building model wind turbines. They plan to visit the Searsburg, Vermont wind energy facility this spring.

The Lanesborough Elementary School sixth grade is also exploring energy, specifically looking at the ways their school uses energy, the sources of that energy and costs for heating and cooling the building. Students brainstormed ways to save money and energy and are currently conducting research for a presentation to their school administration. They were recently treated to a guest presentation by Tyler Fairbank, CEO of EOS Ventures, who discussed the process of installing the Zephyr wind generator at Jiminy Peak and highlighted the benefits and barriers to installing wind turbines in the northeast. The fifth grade classes are looking into what the school throws away, and how much of that can be recycled. Starting with paper, they have laid the groundwork for a sustainable recycling program by partnering with the Lanesborough Council on Aging, which manages the town transfer station.

Students at Undermountain Elementary

School in Sheffield are also focusing on recycling and waste reduction. The fourth grade classes are revitalizing the school's



paper recycling effort by renewing education about the program and researching the expansion to include plastic bottles and metal cans.

This year of immersion in environmental issues will culminate with a Youth Environmental Summit (YES!) on June 5 at the Lee Middle and High School. Through posters, power point presentations and hands-on workshops, students from all three BEST schools will join students from schools throughout Berkshire County and showcase what they have learned through integrating environmental education into a place-based, real world application. The Summit is coordinated by CET and the Flying Cloud Institute.

For more information about the Berkshire Bank BEST program, contact Cynthia Grippaldi at CET, 413-445-4556 x 25 or [cynthiag@cetonline.org](mailto:cynthiag@cetonline.org)

## Berkshire Junior Solar Sprint

Gentlemen and ladies, start your engines! Your solar-powered engines, that is. The 2008 Berkshire Junior Solar Sprint (JSS) is scheduled for Saturday, May 31 at Reid Middle School in Pittsfield. This is the 9th year that CET has coordinated this event, which is supported this year by Berkshire Gas and Western Massachusetts Electric Company (WMECO), the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association (NESEA) and several local businesses.

The Berkshire JSS is part of a national program that offers 5th through 8th grade students the opportunity to design, construct and test the performance of a model solar electric vehicle. Winning teams will be recognized for craftsmanship, technical merit, innovation and performance, and will be eligible to participate in the Northeast Regional Competition in June at the Science Museum in Springfield.

For more information about the Berkshire Junior Solar Sprint, visit [www.cetonline.org](http://www.cetonline.org) or contact Cynthia Grippaldi at CET, 413-445-4556 x 25 or [cynthiag@cetonline.org](mailto:cynthiag@cetonline.org)

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