

# Water Education Starts Early

With the San Juan – Chama Drinking Water Project coming online, it's more critical than ever that we understand the importance – and the scarcity – of our water resources. Promoting that understanding every year is the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Children's Water Festival. This event, sponsored by the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority, took place at the Convention Center on October 27 – 28. It provided effective education about water to 1,040 fourth graders from the metro area. Students participated in fun learning activities dealing with how water works and why it is so important to our desert environment. In a fun, informative, and interactive way, students learned about water issues such as:

- The Web of Life
- Watershed/Water Quality
- Water Conservation
- Water and our Society
- Water Cycle
- General Hydrology

Not only does the Water Festival seek to help students understand water issues, but also informs children that water is an essential and limited resource. The Water Festival gets children to learn how they can make a difference just by making a few changes in their daily water routine. For instance, students learned to turn off the water while brushing their teeth, shorten their shower time, water the lawn only when it needs it, and keep sprinklers on their lawns (not sidewalks, driveway, or gutters). They even learned why they should install a toilet that uses less water when flushing. The Water Festival encourages parents, teachers, and most importantly children to become informed about water. You can learn more by visiting [www.waterfestnm.com](http://www.waterfestnm.com).



*Mike Sanchez and Jessica Sapunar-Jursich from the [NM Museum of Natural History](#) had to grow water invertebrates all fall so students at their presentation, "Meet Water Bugs Up Close," would be able to view live bugs with magnifying lenses in spite of the cold October weather.*

## 2008 Water Festival's Happy Faces



*Raising his hand with a smile on his face, this student was participating in the Rio Grande Bosque Water Cycle activity presented by the [Rio Grande Nature Center](#).*

As soon as the kids walked in, they all had smiles on their faces. Each school participated in five activities, and the students kept their smiles throughout the entire day. Kids commented that this was a fun fieldtrip and that they learned so much. Sarah, a student from Dennis Chavez Elementary School, said "I learned about water flow and that in 2009 we will be drinking Rio Grande River water." Another student named Luis exclaimed, "I had the most fun playing the game where we were saving water for the planet to survive."

This year's water festival was very educational and enjoyable to all of the 4<sup>th</sup> graders there. As always, more than twice as many teachers wanted their students to attend than there was room for.

Each year the festival organizers have to choose which schools will attend based upon applications and attendance from current and previous years. The event is open to 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers from public, private, and home schools. Applications are accepted online beginning each March and closing in mid-August, [www.waterfestnm.com](http://www.waterfestnm.com).



*Students made aquifer models in an activity taught by Lynn Kronowit and Mariah Wrage from the [City of Rio Rancho](#) and Lynn Kronowit from [CH2M HILL-OMI](#).*

### Parents and Teachers Getting Involved



*Teachers and parents were also interested and learned about water during the festival.*



Parents and teachers had the same opinions about the Children's Water Festival. Both said, "Hands-on activities really help students learn." For example, in the photos below, the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program ([BEMP](#)) gave students, teachers, and parents the opportunity to actually measure precipitation, groundwater from a well, and leaf litter fall.

Teachers really enjoyed being involved with the students while they were learning. A teacher from Dennis Chavez Elementary School said, "I think this Water Festival shows how important water ecology is. It also makes them aware of our water waste." One parent said, "The activities were very enjoyable and educational for the kids – and the adults learn too!"

This year's 10<sup>th</sup> annual Children's Water Festival, sponsored by the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority was a great experience for children and adults!

## Presenters and Volunteers Donated Over 1000 Hours of Time

Altogether there were 22 different activities and at least 50 adult volunteers who took off work for one or two days to present information about water to students. Presenters came from all over the state, from organizations as diverse as the [Rio Grande Nature Center](#), the [National Weather Service](#), [Bernalillo County Office of Environmental Health](#), [City of Albuquerque Biopark](#), and [Sandia Labs](#) – just to name a few!

Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority employees presented two activities each day. Katherine Yuhas, Water Conservation Officer, presented an activity entitled, “The Long Haul.” Students carried gallons of water to help them understand just how much water we use in every day tasks like doing a load of laundry or watering our lawns.



*A popular hands-on activity was “The Life of a Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout Game,” presented by Chantel Cook from [New Mexico Game and Fish Department](#).*



*Ben Zimmerman ([Pollution Prevention](#)), Alex Salazar and Alex Lovato ([Reclamation Facility-Pretreatment](#)) put nasty chemicals and dog poop on trial. Students voted to keep them out of our River.*

Another activity, “Water Olympics,” was presented jointly by students from School on Wheels Alternative High School and [Albuquerque Academy](#). The student-presenters really enjoyed being role models to the fourth graders and teaching them about water’s properties. While teaching, the student- presenters learned about their own abilities to work as a team.



*Mike Quintana and Omar Escarcega, from School on Wheels, present “The Water Olympics” activity where fourth graders learn about water’s chemical characteristics of adhesion and cohesion.*



*Otto the Otter aides 4<sup>th</sup> graders in crossing the road to Civic Plaza (it's really Ed Kandl, a hydrologist with the [US Bureau of Reclamation](#) in disguise!).*

Altogether, the festival presented 23 activities, requiring more than 50 volunteer presenters to make the festival a success. In addition, Nora Romero coordinated nearly 100 volunteers, over 50 each day, to help out this year! Some volunteers helped keep presenters stay on time and aided school groups moving from one activity to the next. Other volunteers evaluated the presentations to help give feedback about clarity and interest. Most presenters came prepared with their own volunteers but if they needed a little more help “Otto the Otter” and the “Water Wizard” were there to lend a hand. Organizers and presenters are already thinking about next years’ festival and making plans so it will be even better than this year’s festival – and the Water Authority is making plans to help them succeed.



*Ruben Archuleta, [City of Rio Rancho's Water Conservation Tech](#), greeted students as he demonstrated the whimsical powers of water!*

### **Festival Planning Takes All Year**

To have this much fun and make it educational takes a lot of work! Katie Babuska runs the show. She is the Festival Director so she manages the festival team. Katie believes the water festival is a good investment in the future of this community. “I want the children to fall in love with where they live. I want them to keep loving to live here. This is a very efficient way for us to deliver education and it’s free to them!” She feels that we need to inform students about things they can do at home or school to conserve water and improve water quality. The lesson is even more important now that we are drinking water from the Rio Grande.



*Katie Babuska is interviewed by School on Wheels students.*



*Michelle Watson is interviewed by School on Wheels students.*

Michelle Watson, Festival Manager, says, “Schools often go to the same places year after year for their field trips. This event is different in that the kids get to see many different organizations in one place. The Water Festival teaches kids about water which they may not get in any other field trips or in their regular curriculum.” She makes sure the presenters are coordinated with the teachers, takes care of the event logistics, and implements evaluations of the presentations after the festival.



*School on Wheels students and their teacher would like to personally thank Sharon Sivinski (ABC-WUA), Katie Babuska and Michelle Watson (festival director and organizer), and Karen Temple-Bemish (Albuquerque Academy) for their incredible support, guidance, and help during this year's water festival.*

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*Estevan Ramirez, Horacio Ortiz, Gabi Flores, Mike Quintana, Sabrina Ochs-Bane, Ashly Nichols, Omar Escarcega (back row), Ortensia Laurence, teacher Vince Case, Jasmin Espinosa, and Estevan Sedillo (front row), all of School on Wheels - Main Campus, celebrate another year of presenting, reporting, and photographing at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Children's Water Festival.*