

[Buckland-Shelburne Elementary teachers honored for nature education](#)

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SHELBURNE — Fourth-grade teachers at Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School Jackie Fuller and Lisa Kuerzal have been recognized for their emphasis on nature education with Mass Audubon’s Conservation Teacher of the Year Award.

The two teachers won this award, which is sponsored by the New England Farm and Garden Association, for bringing nature education to their classrooms through a partnership with Mass Audubon’s Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary in Easthampton, where the students studied energy systems while participating in nature journaling.

They worked with environmental educator Dorri Jones last school year to bring the classroom outside in the springtime and they plan to hold the same program again with the students this year.

“This important award acknowledges your commitment and contribution to connecting students to their local environment,” Kris Scopinich, Mass Audubon’s senior director of education and engagement, wrote in a letter addressing the teachers. “Your example of finding innovative ways to connect students to nature and its conservation is a key component of ensuring that the nature of Massachusetts continues to be valued and protected long into the future.”

Jackie Fuller

It is Fuller’s 12th year as a teacher and her third year working at Buckland-Shelburne Elementary. She started her career at a charter school born out of the Outward Bound program in California. Buckland-Shelburne Elementary recently adopted the same curriculum that was used at the charter school, bringing experiential learning directly to children of Buckland and Shelburne.

“Anytime we can provide an experience, they retain that experience and what is surrounding it far more than if they are sitting at a desk working on a worksheet,” she said.

Fuller said her teaching style revolves around creating activities that demonstrate the concepts and learning goals put forth by the state, thus cementing that learning in the students’ minds.

“Having a new connection between the school and an organization doing great work for the environment is awesome,” Fuller said of the partnership with Mass Audubon.

Fuller noted education has begun incorporating more screens and electronic devices into learning. She hopes through her lessons she can teach students how to use technology as a tool while still teaching them how to experience the world without it.

“I want to help students become digitally literate and help them stay connected to this place in a way that does not involve screens,” she said.

Lisa Kuerzal

Kuerzal’s main goal as a teacher is to inspire her students to love science.

“We need to be working really hard instilling the love of the planet, getting kids interested in science to be able to enjoy what is around them and understand it,” she said.

Kuerzal began teaching in the late 1990s. She left after several years and returned to full-time teaching in western Massachusetts in 2016. This is her eighth year working with the Mohawk Trail Regional School District.

She said she is fortunate to teach in rural western Massachusetts where she has access to nature all around her to use as a teaching tool.

The school has had an increased focus on reading and reading intervention in recent years, Kuerzal noted, but she hopes to be able to incorporate more science into her lessons.

“I hope to get more science back in the classroom. Having the Audubon program is phenomenal to be able to weave into the curriculum,” she said.

An example of the hands-on science learning taking place in Buckland-Shelburne Elementary’s fourth grade classrooms is an activity where students make “beaks” out of different utensils symbolizing different types of birds. They then put their beaks to the test by trying to pick up different foods, learning about the advantages of the different designs.

“When you get bodies and minds engaged,” Kuerzal said, “that is the time you can actually ... cement learning.”

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