Education

Indiana Teacher Wins IYS Teacher Travel Grant

As part of the celebration of the International Year of Soils (IYS), SSSA sponsored a travel grant award for K-12 teachers. One award of $1,500 was offered to a teacher to attend the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) National Conference in Chicago, IL 12–15 March.

Congratulations to Amy Densborn, a teacher at Lewis Cass Junior and Senior High School in Walton, IN on her selection as our travel grant recipient. Densborn participated in the SSSA-developed workshop “Getting Your Hands ‘Dirty’ in a STEM Classroom” with SSSA Past President David Lindbo, member Julie Howe, SSSA K-12 committee member and New Jersey science teacher Missy Holzer, and staff member Emily Fuger. The group demonstrated activities that can be used in the K-12 classroom. SSSA had a booth in the NSTA exhibit hall and talked with teachers about soils-related activities that they can bring into their classrooms.

A teacher for eight years, Densborn teaches biology, earth science, and AP environmental science. “Soil science is embedded throughout the science classes I teach,” she says. “Without soil, nothing would exist—it’s the foundation for everything.”

“Dig in the dirt—get your hands in it, explore, be tactile; see and feel,” Densborn advises. “It helps students get excited and understand. We can talk about the horizon of soil, but if you take them out and show them, it has that meaning and application.”

“The school where I teach is very rural and surrounded by corn and bean fields. This stimulated me to think of ways to bring more soil studies into my class. I am trying to design most of my lessons around soil in the classes I teach. I have discussed calculations of mass, volume, and density using soil as my examples.”

However, Densborn maintains studying soil isn’t just for rural Indiana students. “This is a global concern, not just Cass County, Indiana. We talk about the Great Dust Bowl and (the movie) Interstellar—what has happened in the past and what can happen in the future if we don’t practice soil conservation.”

She also notes that “My earth science students also study soil profiles as well as soil characteristics: texture, color, and fertility. We also study soil liquefaction and the role it plays in the outcome of structural failure during earthquakes.”

Densborn advises girls in particular to get involved in science. “If you’re excited about something, you’re going to be fine. That’s what paves the way for you.” She is also an Indiana Master Naturalist, a member of the Environmental Education Association of Indiana, an Indiana Go FishIN instructor, and a member of the Hoosier Association of Science Teachers, Inc.

Densborn can be reached at densborna@sescschools.net.

doi:10.2134/csa2015-60-5-17