

(Intranet Content for Alliance College-Ready School)

Burton Tech visits Yosemite

In January, the scholars of Alliance Judy Ivie Burton Technology Academy (“Burton Tech”) visited Yosemite National Park to participate in Nature Bridge, a hands-on outdoor environmental science program. The trip—supported by a Gear Up Grant [link] and a Nature Bridge scholarship—proved to be a time of great discovery and bonding between students.

Nature Bridge and Yosemite staff helped prepare the group for Yosemite weather and snow since many of them did not yet own cold-weather gear. Through the Gear Up Grant and a community clothing drive, the group soon had everything they needed, including sleeping bags, boots, warm clothes, and more.

The real excitement began when the Burton students arrived at Half Dome Village in Yosemite and stood back to admire the majestic beauty surrounding them—the peaks rising out of the valleys, the snow and meadows, the granite cliffs—things few of them had ever seen or experienced in person. Excitement and snowball fights ensued and continued for the duration of their stay.

Great connections were made in Yosemite, such as one student (with learning disabilities and other classroom challenges) who, during lunch on the trail, spoke with emotion about how thankful he was for his classmates, and for the people who made the trip possible. The experience moved him, and he had gained the confidence speak openly to his peers.

Another great connection was made with two students in the group who were English Language Learners (ELL) and spoke only Spanish; they were often separated from their regular classroom to receive English instruction so didn’t know their classmates well. In Yosemite they performed a team-building exercise together, with 13 students linking hands to form a “human knot,” untangling and reforming the knot without releasing hands. Despite the language differences, they supported and guided each other to success. Each day, the ELL students became more engaged and confident. On the last day, one of the students spoke to an ELL student in Spanish, telling him he’d enjoyed getting to know him. The student responded by hugging him and saying, “Thank you, brother.”

Students were also challenged to put their faces in the icy cold Tuolumne River as part of another team-building exercise. Though several of the boys took the challenge on with enthusiasm, some of the girls were hesitant. But after teachers took the challenge themselves and offered encouragement, the girls soon joined in, too.

The Nature Bridge trip to Yosemite was an incredibly valuable educational experience; it created lasting memories, strengthened friendships, made new connections, and taught students about themselves. Many reflected on it with new pride in facing their fears—with one student saying that already she felt prepared to take on even more new challenges.