



Liz Meldrum, kindergarten teacher at the Mossyrock Elementary school, holds a display check for \$3,000, awarded to her class for winning the TransAlta kinder scholarship competition Monday morning.

A kindergarten student explores a basket of treats which was part of the award given to the class that won TransAlta's kinder scholarship competition at the Mossyrock Elementary school Monday morning.



Chris Geier / cgeier@chronline.com

Students in Liz Meldrum's kindergarten class at the Mossyrock Elementary school hold certificates that commemorate the class's victory in TransAlta's kinder scholarship competition.

Students

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Kaech arrived along with about a dozen other parents and grandparents to learn their kids had each earned a \$2,500 scholarship from their project in TransAlta's eco-challenge.

"I don't have any doubt that every one of you will do some form of higher education," Meldrum told her kindergartners with tears streaming down her face.

Representatives of TransAlta, the Canadian power company with a coal-fired power plant near Centralia, chose the top 10 green projects from 42 participating classrooms and randomly drew Mossyrock from the top 10 for the grand prize.

TransAlta representatives said the contest demonstrates the company's commitment to transitioning to cleaner energy by 2025, the date by which the rural Centralia utility must give up coal as a power source.

The Mossyrock students were chosen out of about 900 kindergartners to receive the \$2,500 upon graduation in 2025. "This is a defining moment where they realize they have money for their dreams," Meldrum said. "They already have part of their goal obtained."

Meldrum's 19 kindergartners planted 65 Douglas fir trees in the rain at Ike Kinswa State Park near Mayfield Lake

to learn about the environment and animal habitats.

"They were digging right in there and planting," said Randy Torrey, principal at Mossyrock Elementary. "This is probably the first money that's been established for them so it's a great award."

The students then sent "tree-grams" or letters to the other elementary students to involve them in the green project.

"The kindergartners' focus was the animals because they live in the trees," Meldrum said.

The kids sent 144 trees home with other students so they could plant them using a tree planting guide written and illustrated by the kindergartners.

"It went from the classroom to home. We made habitats for everything," said Angie Shipp, who has a 6-year-old in the class. "This is a nice head start."

SHIPP AND KAECH, like many parents in Mossyrock, said they had not yet set aside money for college.

"So it's a great opportunity for for a rural community to have the chance to go ahead with further education," Kaech said. "It gives them hope knowing they can accomplish their dream."

TransAlta also presented Meldrum with a \$3,000 check for her class and the school to spend on educational supplies and projects. Each of the top 10 classrooms will receive \$1,000 for the school and \$500 for the class. All participating classrooms will

earn a reward party sponsored by TransAlta and passes to the Southwest Washington Fair. TransAlta will have a booth at the fair with poster boards from each project on display.

"We hear a lot of doom and gloom about the upcoming generation," said Michael Wagar, a contest judge and external communications advisor at TransAlta. "If these 900 kids are any indication of our future, we're in great hands."

TransAlta's future, however, remains unclear as on-peak power prices have plunged 75 percent in the Pacific Northwest this year.

"Prices are at a historic low," Wagar said about news reports detailing the electricity market. "We're heading into some interesting energy trends."

In addition to lower power prices, the Centralia utility is facing difficulty contracting power, which has contributed to some \$36 million less in operational funds in the first quarter, according to the Bloomberg news service.

Plummeting utility prices, increased maintenance costs and the bill for shutting down coal operations contributed to TransAlta Corporation's bonds performing the poorest when compared with their peers this quarter.

The Calgary-based corporation reported first-quarter earnings of 20 cents a share, down 14 cents from last year, according to Bloomberg.

WINNING CLASSROOMS AND PRIZES

Grand Prize: Liz Meldrum's morning kindergarten class at Mossyrock Elementary School

Award:

- \$2,500 scholarship for each student
- \$2,000 for the school
- \$1,000 for the the winning classroom
- Party for students, a \$200 retail value

OTHER TOP 10 FINALISTS

Pe Ell, Adna, Boistfort, Napavine, Evaline, White Pass/Randle, Toledo, Centralia Edison, and Winlock

Runner-up Award:

- \$1,000 for the school
- \$500 for the the winning classroom
- Party for students (\$200 retail value)

THE OTHER TOP 10 PROJECTS SUMMARIES, ACCORDING TO TRANSALTA JUDGES:

- Pe Ell started a recycling effort that had the kids collecting old cell phones, spent printer cartridges and other electronic items, selling them to a recycler, and then using the money to buy a dogwood tree that was planted on school grounds.
- Adna used recyclable materials such as soda bottles combined with worms to create compost.
- Boistfort kindergartners put on a spirited presentation about recycling.
- Napavine helped spruce up a community park with flowers.
- Evaline built a mini-greenhouse out of recycled plastic bottles.
- White Pass-Randle grew flowers and plants that are favorites of butterflies and put them in a flower bed on school grounds, and are currently raising five caterpillars in the classroom that will then be set free in the garden.
- Edison Elementary in Centralia grew plants and built a raised garden bed on school grounds, as well as planted trees to create shade outside their classroom to help cool the room and keep energy costs down.
- Toledo created a worm bin, and their hand-puppet presentation won't soon be forgotten, and naming their individual worms was quite endearing.
- Winlock started a lunchroom recycling program and even presented it to the school board.

Wagar said these trends will not affect the company's transition to cleaner energy. TransAlta will shut down one coal-fired boiler by 2020 and the second by 2025.

"We're well-positioned to run and be a profitable company," he said.

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ALL PARTICIPANTS:

- Party for students (\$200 retail value)
- Participating Schools and Teachers:

- Adna**
Tiffany Metzenberg
- Boistfort**
Rosie Vroman
- Cascade (Chehalis)**
Shelley Meller
Scott Norberg
Emma Reynolds

- Deb Lince
Bill Blair
Merisa Wilson
Emma Reynolds
- Centralia Christian School**
Connie Taylor
Linda Johnson
- Edison (Centralia)**
Sandy Johnson
Christy Cothren
- Evaline**
Annie Robinson

- Fords Prairie (Centralia)**
Allyson Myhre
Darla Wasson
Donna Dodson
Sarah Althausen
- Jefferson Lincoln (Centralia)**
Wendy Nederlander
- Morton**
Kip Henderson
- Napavine**
Trelani Pibel
Sarah Bruneau

- Onalaska**
Pat Patrino
Steve Coyner
- Pe Ell**
Candace Merrill
- Lewis County Adventist**
Donna Meador
- St. Joseph**
Sue Hanshaw
- Tenino Parkside**
Wanda Blanksma
Andrea Parsons

- Dalene Marganelli
Wanda Blanksma
- White Pass/Randle**
Kari Loucks
- Winlock Miller**
Kathryn Robertson
Carmen Parkinson
- Toledo**
J.B. Ewers
Libby Walker
- Mossyrock**
Liz Meldrum

Note: Some teachers have multiple classes