

Akiba kids studying penguins

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The first and second grade classes at Akiba-Schechter Jewish Day School are doing a study on penguins in Antarctica. The study incorporates an advanced interdisciplinary learning that is not usually taken on by students in this age group.

Since early November, the first and second grade students at Akiba-Schechter, 5235 S. Cornell Ave., have been watching eight penguin couples, two of which they named Chilly (male) and Sheleg (female), during the 2011-2012 Adélie Penguin breeding season at Cape Royds in Antarctica. The web-based photos show how penguins are adjusting to climate change in Antarctica due to global

warming.

"My philosophy is that curriculum should be one inch wide and six feet deep covering a variety of academic subject on just one idea," said Jackie Rapp, teacher of the first and second grade class at Akiba-Schechter.

Rapp said while studying the penguin couples, the students are incorporating history, art, science, conservation, history and geography into the lesson.

In addition to written reports, the learning process included study of Sir Earnest Henry Shackleton, one of the early explorers of the polar region, a geographical study of the region of Antarctica, the practice of conservation in which the children donated their allowances

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A flag created by Akiba students as part of their research on penguins flies proudly in Antarctica.

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to adopt a penguin, discussion with University of Chicago scientist Abby Crites about her exploration of the South Pole in which the kids made a flag that Crites took on her expedition and planted in Antarctica and regular e-mail communication with scientist and Penguin Education Outreach Coordinator Jean Pennycook, who helps the students understand what they are viewing during their daily penguin watch.

Rapp said the 6- and 7-year-old students

have remained totally engrossed in this learning experience.

"There was a period of time when Sheleg was missing and Chilly had to go get food, which means the nest was left unprotected, the children were so sad," Rapp said. "I think when the eggs hatch they are going to go ballistic."

She said, "It amazes me that the class is communicating with "someone at the bottom of the Earth but for the children I think it's just like watching TV."

The children will conclude the project by giving oral reports to the other grades that will visit their classroom. The penguins are expected to hatch around Dec. 13.

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