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Sky Islands Public High School is Tucson's Best Kept Secret

by Dr. Shari Popen

There's no good reason to dread the start of the next school year, because Sky Islands Environmental High School is building a reputation for its exceptional teaching and learning environment. Small classes and smart teachers keep students returning each year, and parents onboard with their education. Their integrated curriculum is guided by layers of the regional ecosystem—its history, cultures, arts, archaeologies and natural patterns—linked to the larger world.

With students in grades 9-12, Sky Islands is entering its fourth year as Tucson's "green" school. At its heart is a school culture that promotes trust, respect and responsibility—a vibrant network in which students connect to each other and learn to take ownership

of their school and their learning.

As the school settled into its new location on 17 acres along the Rillito River this past year, students installed raptor boxes onsite with the help of Arborist Juan Barba and Bartlett Tree Experts; cycled Saguaro Park East with Trips for Kids; camped at Rose Canyon; and climbed Arizona's Vista Point on Mt Lemmon with Pangea Mountain Guides. Proudly, four Sky Islanders (out of 12 spots) were selected to participate with Southwest Conservation Corps as 2011 summer interns.

The Ramada guest series at the weekly school council meetings featured Tucson's Who's Who—from Ben's Bells to BICAS, Weedwhackers, "Treetures," Pan Dulce, Za Boom Ba!, SunTran and The Solar Store.

Why is Sky Islands such a well-

kept secret? Perhaps it's because the school keeps its head down and its heart in the game—transforming the school year into a truly transformative educational experience. This year Sky Islands has just added two new teachers and offers a new class: Introduction to Japanese and Photojournalism. There are camping trips to New Mexico in the works, too. And, it's all free! Sky Islands is now enrolling for the fall. Come in or call to save a seat or a place on the next school hike.

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