

The smell of fresh cage bedding and a mix of animal aromas greeted Environmental Ed teacher Evan Brandt as he walked into his classroom to start the day. Since coming to North four years ago, Brandt had to adjust to teaching an entirely new subject and having over 50 animals to take care of and feed.

“My intent was to move away from the middle school scene,” Brandt said, “however possible and in whatever manner it took. It was weird at first having a bunch of animals in my classroom, to the point where it kept me up at night. Because it was overwhelming to go from nothing, to 60 individual lives that I was in charge of. Eventually I got used to it, it took about a year. It was definitely weird at first, but now I’m very comfortable with it and I like it.”

Environmental Ed students learned about animals as well as critical threats facing the global environment.

“I learned that environmental care is extremely important to how we live our lives,” senior Joe Corbett said. “For example, lots of factories and manufacturing plants produce carbon dioxide and it enters our atmosphere which is causing a lot of climate change. Near the North Pole glaciers are melting because it’s getting so hot. Greenland is basically a gigantic ice cube, and right now it’s melting because of all the carbon dioxide in our atmosphere. We’ll learn about environmental issues like global warming, solar energy, stuff like that.”

Though the Environmental Ed curriculum included a number of different topics ranging from climate change to prominent environmental figures and activists, students were especially excited to study and play with the animals.

“We do research on the animals to have our own information,” senior Abigail Molina said. “We also make feeding schedules for each animal, we clean the cages, things like that. We socialize them and try to play with them.”

While students were taught to take care of all animals, some had a few favorites that they would take special care of in particular.

“I’m in charge of the sugar gliders,” Molina said. “They’re so sweet but they’ll bark at you and scream at you the whole time. Mr. Brandt lets you sign up to take any of the animals home over breaks, even the summer, as long as your parents will let you.”

While the none of the animals presented an extreme threat, they still need to be handled with care.

“I take care of the snakes mainly, like the Western Hognose,” senior Brogan Dahlin said. “It’s not venomous, but it does bite occasionally. It’s blind in its left eye so it’s gotten kinda defensive, but he’s not venomous so he’ll just cause swelling and irritation if he bites you. I’ve been bit on my pinkie but we got it off quick enough that I didn’t have anything serious happen.”

Whether it was animal care, climate change, or recycling, Environmental Ed students left the class with a greater appreciation of the natural world.

“That class has shown me that it’s more about noticing what you’re doing,” Corbett said. “It’s all general population knowledge. Obviously we need to recycle and do clean things like that, but it’s more teaching us how to recognize the problem and take that action.”