

# Innovation Thrives

*Laguna Elementary teacher lauded for getting students excited about math and science with a slew of hands-on activities*

**By Andrea Rivera**  
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The grass is greener at Laguna Elementary because of sixth-grade teacher Michael Marbut.

Marbut was honored last week with an "Innovation Hero" award from the Arizona Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Education Center at Science Foundation Arizona for his efforts in teaching math and science.

One of Marbut's efforts to promote math and science among his students is the green grass that has sprouted for the first time in Laguna's courtyard.



*Teacher Michael Marbut and students Braulio Gonzalez and Emily Goodwin plant desert plants in the new desert loop at Laguna Elementary School. Photo: Jim Davis / Arizona Daily Star*

"He puts grass out on the campus and makes it pretty," said Giselle Duran, one of Marbut's sixth-graders. "We get to help by taking care of it."

Marbut and his Plant Club students planted ryegrass seed this school year that yielded a green lawn in the courtyard. Students maintain the grass with push mowers. Marbut is only the second teacher to receive the new statewide award, which will be used to raise public awareness about the need for more leaders in science and math education, Arizona STEM Education Center Executive Director Darcy Renfro said. Renfro said the future of our state and even our country depends on science, technology, engineering and math.

Marbut was recognized for his contributions to math and science education at a surprise

ceremony last Tuesday.

"I'm shocked at getting this award," he said at the time. "But really, it's all the people I work with and the students that earned this award today."

He received a \$500 Visa gift card that he can use to buy classroom supplies. In addition to the green grass, Marbut also has helped establish a pond, tortoise habitat, greenhouse and a work-in-progress desert loop at Laguna.

Laguna Principal Theresa Leal-Holmes nominated Marbut for the award.

"He takes the math and science and uses it to apply it to the environment or to a natural setting," she said. "It's not just a capsule where they learn math and science factually. They go out and experience it."

Marbut's students are happy to help, Leal-Holmes said.

Many work in the pond or tortoise habitat during lunch or after school. "His students are so engaged in math and science," she said. "Any time you have students engaged they learn so much more."

His students say they are engaged because he won't allow them to fall behind in his class. "He's a very good teacher. If we don't understand something, we just raise our hand and ask," sixth-grader Miriam Turcios said. "He gets us ready for tests by helping us learn everything before the tests."

Antonio Cardenas added: "He explains things so clearly. He's teaching us a lot." Marbut's students agree he's left a lasting impression on them and the school.

"He's great at teaching math and science. He's working on all this stuff for the school and it's great," sixth-grader Martin Celaya said.

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