

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Las Cruces 7<sup>th</sup> Grader Wins Desert Data Jam

Megan McDaniel from Picacho Middle School took home first place in the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Desert Data Jam, which is hosted by the nonprofit Asombro Institute for Science Education. Three hundred thirty-nine students participated in the Desert Data Jam, and 54 of the top projects from each class made it to the final competition on April 25-27.

The Data Jam is an annual competition hosted by the Asombro Institute for Science Education in partnership with the USDA's Jornada Experimental Range. It challenges 7<sup>th</sup> graders to find creative ways to present scientific data collected in our region to non-scientist audiences. Past creative projects have included children's books, songs, videos, physical models, infographics, and games.

For her winning project "How Fast Do Leaves Leaf Us?" Megan used crochet to represent leaf litter decomposition rates in Las Cruces, Alaska, and Costa Rica.

"Megan's project was a perfect example of the creative communication skills and scientific understanding that students gain from the Desert Data Jam," said Dr. Stephanie Bestelmeyer, Executive Director of the Asombro Institute.

Second place was awarded to Kate Shankel and Delila Ruth from Sierra Middle School for the project "Decomposition Mission." There was a tie for third place between Soraya Kamali and Nilasha Basnyat from J. Paul Taylor Academy for their project "Mammals in the Court" and Avery Liefeld and Tian Tian Gong Rong from Sierra Middle School for their project "It's Snowing Dust." Thirteen additional projects received honorable mentions.

The Data Jam was created in Las Cruces in 2012 and has since been replicated by other organizations in Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, and Puerto Rico.

The Asombro Institute for Science Education is a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing natural science literacy through engaging, place-based education. Asombro science educators provide hands-on science education programs for more than 22,000 K-12 students annually in classrooms, schoolyards, and at the organization's Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Anyone interested in learning more about the Asombro Institute for Science Education, membership, and volunteer opportunities should call 575-524-3334 or visit [www.asombro.org](http://www.asombro.org).

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