



BESANT HILL SCHOOL  
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# ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM: Bioneers

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In late October 2019, 11 BHS students accompanied by Shannon Rowan and myself, attended the 30th annual Bioneers conference in San Rafael, California. This trip marked the 15th consecutive year Besant Hill students and teachers have attended the conference. With well over 3,000 attendees and 30 years of visionary leadership, Bioneers is the premier conference for today's climate and cultural visionaries. Besant Hill students were able to experience keynote addresses from award-winning authors Bill McKibben, Eve Ensler, Terry Tempest Williams, and Paul Hawken, as well as several other extraordinary activists.

At the conference, Besant Hill students were members of a 500+ student youth leadership alliance. The alliance was created to bring together students of varying backgrounds, who are dedicated to social and environmental justice, scientific research, and discovering ways to create a more just and equitable society and natural environment through education and action. The youth leadership program provided opportunities for our students to participate in forums and panels with a diverse group of their peers.

We were particularly excited to hear Bill McKibben since every student is reading one of his books during Class Connections. Since Bioneers is a relatively intimate gathering, we knew it would be possible



MILO H. - M. '20 WITH AUTHOR AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST, BILL MCKIBBEN

to meet McKibben and glean some insight and inspiration from the acclaimed author. What started as a simple email, informing him of our reading project and attendance at Bioneers, quickly culminated in a text message at the conference from Mr. McKibben himself, inviting BHS to meet privately with him after his keynote address. Mr. McKibben sat down with us for 30 minutes and discussed our school, the books we are reading, and he provided guidance on what we can do to effect change. McKibben has written over a dozen books on climate change and is the founder of 350.org. *Foreign Policy* named him to their inaugural list of the world's 100 most important global





BESANT HILL STUDENTS OVERLOOKING THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE ON THEIR TRIP TO THE BIONEERS CONFERENCE IN MARIN, CA

thinkers, and the Boston Globe said he was “probably America’s most important environmentalist.”

Students found inspiration in the many workshops they attended throughout the weekend. Risa G. ‘21 recalled the message of speaker Gerry Tello: “When you go to a new place you have the knowledge of your ancestors as well as the ancestors of the land you are on. So you are never alone, you always have the support of past generations” (Gerry Tello 2019).

Bioneers is a gathering like no other and contains the spirit of Aún Aprendo, our school’s motto, in that all of the Besant Hill conference participants are there to learn about new ways the environment and the

climate crisis are being examined by contemporary scientists, policymakers, activists, indigenous, artists, and authors.

The attention, joy, and curiosity our students displayed were exemplary. It was such a privilege to bear witness to their growth as students and participants at this unique conference. Collectively and individually the whole group was curious, demonstrated critical thinking, and had fun. ♦

Read more at [www.besanthill.org](http://www.besanthill.org).

*Besant Hill School offers a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, including more than 20 art electives, AP-level courses, competitive athletics, engaging fitness program, outdoor education, experiential education programs, small class sizes, and a 4:1 student-teacher ratio.*

**Aún Aprendo**  
“I am still learning.”

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