



Connecticut United for Research Excellence, Inc.
The Center of Connecticut's BioScience Cluster

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Bioscience Explorations Will Roll Out a Second Mobile Science Laboratory for Connecticut's Students

New Haven, CT – Connecticut United for Research Excellence, Inc. (CURE) will roll out a second mobile science laboratory this fall designed to bring cutting edge bioscience education to Connecticut elementary school students, said Sarah Berke, Ph.D., director of CURE's educational arm, Bioscience Explorations.

The cost of the new mobile laboratory is approximately \$2 million, \$1.1 million of which was provided by CURE member Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc. The state of Connecticut has also contributed \$500,000 toward the capital costs of BioScience Explorations, including the new elementary school-focused mobile lab.

CURE, a statewide coalition of over 100 members, including major pharmaceutical companies, emerging biotechnology companies and major research universities, began its educational initiative in 2001, with the introduction of a 40-foot mobile laboratory called the BioBus. Since then, some 60,000 Connecticut students in grades 4-12 have conducted hands-on, inquiry-based science experiments on the bus. The educational initiative, now called Bioscience Explorations, has grown to include three other components: BioConnection, an equipment loan program; curriculum development; and teacher workshops. The elementary laboratory further expands CURE's commitment to stimulate interest in the biosciences and improve science literacy of Connecticut students.

"Connecticut's future depends on a tech-savvy, highly educated work force," said Governor M. Jodi Rell. "Science education – and more importantly, imagination and a genuine interest in the sciences and technology – must be nurtured early. These kinds of investments are essential to the success of our young people and to the economic health and vitality of our state."

"Boehringer Ingelheim and CURE share a common goal of wanting to stimulate interest in the biosciences at an early age and make the best science education possible for all Connecticut's students," said Sheenah Mische, Ph.D., associate director, talent-acquisition and academic relations, Boehringer Ingelheim, and chair of the board, Bioscience Explorations. "One of the most effective ways to do that is to deliver state-of-the-art science to the doorsteps of elementary schools."

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“Studies show students decide whether they are interested in science by grades 4-6 which underscores the importance of Boehringer Ingelheim’s contribution,” said Paul Pescatello, CURE president and CEO. “Eight years ago, the state’s biotech industry recognized how it could help develop Connecticut’s workforce, and created the BioBus program. This most recent financial contribution speaks volumes for the industry’s commitment.”

The new mobile laboratory initially will target grades 3-5 in the 13 state-designated priority school districts, but eventually, will serve grades K-5, said Berke, who is designing the bus with a California-based specialty vehicle company. The current BioBus Mobile Lab will shift its focus to grades 6-12.

Experiments on the elementary mobile laboratory will focus on three areas -- environmental stewardship, alternative energies, and life systems -- which support the State of Connecticut’s Core Science Framework. The new laboratory will sport solar panels on the roof to power the vehicle’s electricity, a wind turbine similar to those on sail boats, and a back-up hybrid generator. Computer stations will display the real time energy being generated by the green technology as well as monitor data obtained by the weather station onboard. The sides of the lab will expand similar to a recreational vehicle, and an observation tower will be used for star gazing on family science nights.

Berke said staff scientists have developed a comprehensive 6-8 week curriculum around the mobile lab visit, including pre- and post BioConnection modules outlining additional scientific investigations and teacher professional development workshops. The lab will remain at each school for one week, providing a more comprehensive experience for students and teachers.

Three distinct reports demonstrate the need to address science education at the elementary school level, according to Berke. A 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report showed an estimated 33 percent of fourth and eighth graders are proficient in science. A 2007 NAEP study concluded the state’s low-income students fell further behind than elsewhere in the U.S, and the 2007 CAPT test showed 58 percent of Caucasian students met goal on each of the four sections of the CAPT, compared to 18 percent of Hispanic and 15 percent of African-American students.

Berke announced the addition of the mobile laboratory at the 5th annual conference of the Mobile Lab Coalition, a national 50-member organization of traveling laboratory programs, institutions of higher education, K-12 schools and school systems. Bioscience Explorations hosted the conference this year in New Haven.

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About Bioscience Explorations

CURE's award-winning Bioscience Explorations (www.ctbiobus.org) is an educational outreach service consisting of four parts: 1) a mobile science laboratory (Connecticut's BioBus); 2) an equipment loan program (BioConnection); 3) custom-developed curricula; and 4) teacher professional development. The programs' mission is to be a key bioscience education resource in Connecticut igniting enthusiasm, understanding, and support for science and technology. Program goals are to provide comprehensive, state-of-the-art, and interactive bioscience experiences for students, teachers, and the general public; to serve as a nexus for knowledge transfer among formal science learning, higher education and industry; and to encourage students to pursue science careers. The programs, which are offered free of charge thanks to the continuing support of sponsors, have visited more than 445 schools, reached more than 60,000 students, and trained more than 775 teachers.

CURE (Connecticut United for Research Excellence, Inc.) (www.curenet.org) is a statewide, member-supported coalition of more than 100 educational and research institutions, biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies and other supporting businesses. It is dedicated to promoting the growth and increasing public understanding of biomedical research and science in Connecticut.

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