

Science Foundation Arizona P: 602.682.2800  
400 E. Van Buren St. Ste 200 F: 602-682-2890  
Phoenix, Arizona 85004

Media Contacts  
Pati Urias  
602.568.9763  
psuprconsultants@gmail.com

Darcy Renfro  
Science Foundation Arizona  
602.682.2800  
drenfro@sfaz.org

**For Immediate Release**  
Thursday, July 1, 2010

**TEACHERS SEARCH FOR ANSWERS ON “WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA?” IN SCIENCE  
AND MATH LEARNING**  
**Science Foundation Arizona, University of Arizona B2 Institute inspire K-3 teaching;  
participants include rural teachers**

(Oracle, AZ) Fifty teachers from school districts in Gila, Maricopa, Mohave, Pima and Pinal Counties are spending part of their summer break unraveling the mystery of “What’s the Big Idea?” while learning new techniques to integrate research into everyday classroom lessons, making it fun and engaging for their K-3 students to learn science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills.

As part of the Arizona Center for STEM Teachers (ACST) Summer Institute 2010, funded by Science Foundation Arizona (SFAz) and presented through a partnership with the University of Arizona’s B2 Institute, educators spent most of the month of June tackling hands-on research projects as “The Big Idea” to weave challenging yet exciting science and math concepts into everyday classroom lessons. Exposing young children to science and math learning helps them to develop a 21<sup>st</sup> century skill set early on, which combines research, collaboration, problem-solving and effective communication proficiencies and basic math and science concepts.

The two-week intensive workshop took place at the Biosphere 2, north of Tucson, where participants were exposed to the Earth’s ecosystems in a man-made glass structure. The facility houses an ocean and coral reef, wetlands, tropical rainforest, Savannah grassland and fog desert, enabling teachers to learn how to harness the power of discovery and use different techniques to effectively teach math and science in a student’s early years, a time when they are most impressionable.

“Providing teachers with a learning environment that surrounds them with wonder and inspiration will help them create that same type of experience for their students - regardless of where they live and teach in Arizona,” said William C. Harris, President and CEO of SFAz. “These educators are the gateway to the future: they will shape the leaders and scientists of the future, perhaps those whose ‘big ideas’ will evolve into solutions for the real world, or maybe create the next ‘Google’ or ‘Microsoft.’”

This is the second year of the ACST Summer Institute. Last year’s program included enrichment for teachers in grades 4 - 8, who returned to their districts with a fresh perspective on teaching science and math in their classrooms. The 2010 session, led by a group of master teachers, is intended to help educators in the early grades to expand the standard curricula by incorporating science and math and their daily applications into virtually every subject they teach.

“Early childhood teachers are often forgotten in the professional development world when it comes to supporting them in educating our children in the areas of STEM,” said Briana Gryzynger, ACST Committee Chair. “If we are going to effect any change in the science abilities of our country, we need to start at the beginning – teach our children from the earliest ages to be and think like scientists.”

“Providing an enriching experience that will give teachers the tools they can use to create science and math programming that is interesting and engaging, regardless of whether they are in metro or rural areas of the state, is an important step in making STEM education more accessible to all students,” said Darcy Renfro, Vice-President of SFAz and Executive Director of STEM Initiatives.

“It is an opportunity for me to learn teaching strategies that will provide my students with an enriched understanding of this world and their relationship to it, as well as giving them increased skills and abilities to accomplish their greatest educational and personal potential,” said Teresa Gardner, a 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher with Young Elementary school in Gila County.

Teachers from rural and metro Arizona attending the B2 Summer are from Phoenix, Tucson and variety of districts statewide, including Kingman Unified and Morrystown Elementary (outside of Wickenburg).

The ACST Summer 2010 Institute continues through July 2<sup>nd</sup>.

-30-

**About Science Foundation Arizona:** Science Foundation Arizona (SFAz) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization initiated in 2006 by the Greater Phoenix Leadership Inc., Southern Arizona Leadership Council and the Flagstaff Forty in conjunction with the executive and legislative branches of state government. SFAz serves as a catalyst for high-wage, knowledge-based jobs and economic diversity through administration and strict oversight of research, development and education grants to public education and other non-profit research performing institutions. For more information, visit [www.sfaz.org](http://www.sfaz.org).