

Project Oceanology



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To: Education Committee

From: Lauren Rader
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Re: Education Issues
Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program
S.B. No. 942, Section 16, Subsection (a)

Dear Education Committee Members,

I am writing to urge you to continue funding the Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program and to maintain access to this program for organizations and students from throughout Connecticut. This competitive grant program has served thousands upon thousands of students in Connecticut since its inception in 1994. My organization, The Interdistrict Committee for Project Oceanology, has received IDCG support for over two decades for many successful programs. In my role as Chief Instructor, I have been responsible for both program management and program implementation of these grants. In this capacity, I have seen first hand, the incredible impact these opportunities have had on Connecticut's students.

Project Oceanology is a non-profit (501c3) collaborative marine science and environmental education program formed in 1972 by teachers and public school administrators from Southeastern Connecticut who recognized the potential and importance of the marine environment as an educational resource. Approximately 20,000 K – gray students a year are introduced to hands-on, minds-on learning about coastal marine environments through their exposure to Project Oceanology. Project Oceanology maintains and operates two modern research vessels, the Enviro-Labs II and III, and a fleet of small boats. It also has a state-of-the-art facility

on the University of Connecticut's - Avery Point campus, which features multi-media classrooms, a computer lab, and wet and dry labs.

Over the past twenty plus years, Project Oceanology's IDCG programs have served nearly 15,000 students statewide. The broad range of the IDCG program has enabled Project Oceanology to meet students at their level of learning. Our programs have included academic year programs for elementary, middle and high school students; afterschool programs, Saturday programs, summer day programs and summer residential programs. Some of these were developed as an introduction to science for young learners, while others included high-level research opportunities – the kind normally only found at the collegiate level. All of the programs emphasize the importance and value of diversity as a path to success; this includes both diversity in a biological sense (species, communities, ecosystems) and diversity in human communities (racial, ethnic and socio-economic). Students learn that communities thrive when diversity is high, but struggle when diversity is low.

Over the years, I have been privileged to see the impact exposure to these opportunities have had on students. I have participated in discussions about stereotyping and personal beliefs that have brought a roomful of high school students to tears and they have come out stronger and more compassionate because of their sharing. I have witnessed Hartford students taking pride in showing off their school to their peers from Glastonbury and fourth graders take their first boat ride on Long Island Sound. I have helped scared students hold their first spider crab and then watched as they coordinated the measuring of hundreds of crabs for data collection. And I have watched several students grow from shy, middle schoolers to confident, productive leaders, many choosing to enter environmental fields or work with others.

I know that my job is not to create future scientists; instead, my responsibility is to instill a knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the natural world in my students and to provide them with the resources they need to make informed and responsible decisions. Over the next fifty years, Connecticut will face increasing environmental challenges related to the marine environment – from intensified coastal storms, to decreased fish stocks, to sea level rise. Communities throughout Connecticut must be able to respond to these challenges, but it takes an informed citizenry to be successful.

Students participating in Project Oceanology IDCG programs consistently demonstrate increased achievement on content assessments after their participation and parents have commented that their children are more engaged in their learning and more considerate and respectful of others. In post-program teacher evaluations, more than 95% of teachers responded that Project Oceanology programs helped develop individual and community connections to the

environment. More importantly, 97% responded that these programs also helped to effectively reduce isolation issues, reflected the culture of participating students, helped students function effectively in various cultural situations, promoted positive values, and developed positive interactions between students.

I am asking your help with the following:

Please do not decrease or eliminate the funding for the Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program. Efforts to reduce isolation and promote high academic achievement throughout Connecticut have shown to be successful and the number of applicants has only grown.

Please do not narrow the pool of organizations that are eligible to apply for this funding or students who can benefit from it. Throughout its history, the Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program has allowed different organizations from throughout Connecticut to apply for funds to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation and promote high academic achievement. The new language would limit organizations like Project Oceanology from applying for this funding and cut off thousands of students from all over Connecticut from first-hand, hands-on experiences on the Connecticut shoreline and waters of Long Island Sound.

Please rescind the proposed changes to Section 16, Subsection (a) and reinstate the original wording of section 10-74d of the general statutes, fully fund and allow the Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program to continue to provide opportunities for agencies from throughout Connecticut, such as Project Oceanology, to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation and promote high academic achievement of all students in reading, writing, mathematics and science.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Lauren M. Rader
Chief Instructor