March 5, 2019

To: Appropriations Committee

From: Jim McCauley, Executive Director  
jmccauley@oceanology.org

Re: Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program  
Education Issues

Dear Appropriations Committee Members,

I urge you to support of the Department of Education Interdistrict Cooperative Grant (IDCG) program. Through the IDCG program, Project Oceanology provides Connecticut students with inquiry-based marine science programs through our hands-on educational enrichment activities which are tremendously effective at meeting the Department of Education’s goals of increasing student achievement and reducing racial, ethnic, and economic isolation.

Project Oceanology’s IDCG program, Connecticut River Connections, brings students of diverse backgrounds together to learn and apply scientific inquiry practices related to the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound environments. The Connecticut River is a natural resource that provides an exceptional educational framework to introduce teams of students from paired urban and suburban or rural schools to the world of marine science. Students engage in the study of marine and aquatic ecosystems of the Connecticut River through a series of hands-on, brains-on experiences involving classroom, marine laboratory, and field activities along the shoreline and aboard Project Oceanology’s research vessels. Students spend 30 contact hours in small groups and learn teamwork and collaboration skills. They also learn that diversity in race, ethnicity and/or social class broadens perspectives and benefits each individual team member.

In FY18, Connecticut River Connections provided programming to approximately 900 middle school students across the Connecticut River Valley; 44% of the students were Asian, Pacific Islander, Black/African American, Hispanic or Latino; half the students were from districts with more than 47% of their students enrolled in Connecticut’s free or reduced lunch program. Results of student, parent, and teacher post-program evaluations revealed strong support for Connecticut River Connections.

- 92% of students enjoyed their experiences in the program
- 75% of students reported improved understanding and scientific abilities.
- 100 of students, particularly urban students, enjoyed meeting and working with other students and would like to work with those students again.
- 100% of teachers felt that the program was valuable and beneficial to their students and also helped students improve their academic and social skills.

Due to decreased funding in the IDCG program this year, Connecticut River Connections is serving only 200 students.
The education of Connecticut’s youth has been and should continue to be considered one of the core and essential services for our residents. The IDCG program is an important component of those services but has been reduced from more than $14M in FY10 to $6.3M in FY17 and even more sharply in FY18 and FY19 to only $1.5M. As shown in the graph, Project Oceanology’s IDCG funding has been reduced at a similar rate with the sharpest reduction of more than 75% this year.

Established as an Interdistrict Committee of school districts under Section 10-158a of the Connecticut General Statutes, our facility at Avery Point in Groton was built with state funds under the UConn 2000 program as part of the Coastal Marine Science and Technology Center. Approximately 30% of Project Oceanology’s annual revenues derive from member schools, 35% from other visiting schools, 10% from IDCG funds, 10% from summer camps, and the remainder from public cruise activities, foundation grants, and donations. Our partnership with the University of Connecticut allows our $200k annual lease value to include in-kind services valued at $150k, but we receive no direct state funding.

I urge you to restore Interdistrict Cooperative Grant funding to the $6.3M (FY17) level to ensure a greater number of Connecticut’s youth are reached by these high quality programs, student achievement is increased, and racial, ethnic, and economic isolation is effectively reduced.

If you have any questions, please contact me (jmccauley@oceanology.org) or the Chairman of Project Oceanology’s Delegate Assembly, Dr. Nicholas Spera (nspera@msmhs.com).

Sincerely,

Jim McCauley
Executive Director