PRESS RELEASE

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SCIENCE ALLIANCE FORMED TO AUGMENT INSTRUCTION AT MULLANPHY

Partnership Transforms Science Education in the Classroom

ST. LOUIS, MO, November 5, 2009 – Have you ever wondered why bubbles are round? Or how lizards regulate their body temperature? Or why cacti have thorns? Elementary students at Mullanphy Investigative Learning Center, a St. Louis Public Magnet School, have pondered these questions and many more as part of the Science Alliance.

The Science Alliance, formed as a collaborative partnership between the Missouri Botanical Garden, the St. Louis Zoo, St. Louis Science Center, and Mullanphy , with funding from the Boeing Company, have worked together for 18 months to build a successful "science lab school."

The three main components of the Science Alliance are teacher professional development, student field experiences, and Family Science Nights. The program combines summer training workshops with school-year in-classroom learning for teachers, as well as regular meetings of grade-level teams for lesson planning and discussion. Garden, Zoo, and Science Center educators bring materials into the classrooms and model lessons for the teachers using the inquiry method to teach science. All lessons are correlated to the Missouri Grade Level Expectations.

Now beginning the second full school year, teachers will be taking more of a lead role, with partners providing support. One fifth grade teacher said at the end of the first year, "As a former medical researcher for Washington University and Saint Louis University, I have a huge amount of content-area knowledge, but I was struggling with how to present knowledge/experience to my students in a more engaging way. Last summer, I attended a week-long workshop on inquiry that the Science Alliance team facilitated. The experience freed me up to be more creative in my lesson plan designs."

The students are benefiting as much as the teachers. When asked how the science program had changed since the previous year, one fifth grader said, "It's been more difficult this year, but it's been better." Students are encouraged to ask questions and devise experiments to answer their own questions on the topics they are

learning. The teacher becomes a facilitator of learning. Students participate in field trips to each of the three institutions in conjunction with specific units being taught. For example, when third graders are learning about plant parts and adaptations, they go to the Garden and participate in a class on plant adaptations to see real plants.

"One of our goals has been to get parents to the local science institutions - and we have been very successful in doing so," said Tracie Cain, Garden educator and Science Alliance project coordinator. "Our Family Science Night in August 2009 at the Missouri Botanical Garden attracted 544 Mullanphy students, family members, and teachers. Of those, 29 families had never been to the Garden, despite it being located in their community," she commented.

Family Nights are held six times per year, three times at school and once at each institution. The goal is to engage parents more closely in their children's education, and in science learning in particular.

One thing the Science Alliance team knows is the value of comprehensive evaluation. The Science Alliance has shown success on many key measures, including: increased teacher science content knowledge; increased teacher understanding and application of inquiry-based teaching strategies; enhanced student engagement and learning in science; positive family interest in and support for their children's science education; improved standardized test scores for 5th grade students in the area of science; and the development of an effective school partnership with area institutions to reach shared learning goals. Assessment of the program is continuing. The institutions hope to implement this model at other schools in the future to promote successful science education.

For more information please contact Tracie Cain, Missouri Botanical Garden, (314) 577-5147, or the Office of Public Information for St. Louis Public Schools (314) 345-2367.

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