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Top Texas STEM Teachers Gather for Texas Regional Collaboratives Conference

- August 11th., 2010

Successful partnerships, innovative instructional techniques and exceptional teachers were celebrated at the 16th Annual Meeting of the Texas Regional Collaboratives for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Teaching (TRC), which was held in Austin June 29-July 1. The highly anticipated event drew over 700 attendees, including state policy makers, science and mathematics teachers, TRC project directors, representatives from institutions of higher education, corporate partners and scientists.

This year's conference theme was "STEM Education Excellence for a 21st Century Workforce." As TRC founder and executive director Dr. Kamil A. Jbeily stated, the event was designed to encourage TRC members to renew their commitment to forging strong relationships with education, state and corporate partners in order to produce a highly skilled 21st century workforce.



Dr. Kamil A. Jbeily



[View slideshow of conference seminars.](#)

opportunity to absorb a wealth of new information as well as network with colleagues.

A sampling of this year's outstanding presentations included "How Children Learn: Brain Research and Inquiry-Based Science," "The Science-Literacy Connection," "It Isn't Your Momma's Science Class" and "Fostering Algebraic Thinking in the Middle Grades." The sessions not only communicated the latest in research-based content but also served as demonstrations of highly effective pedagogical strategies.

"The teachers come to share their local programs and in telling their stories infect other Collaboratives with their ideas and enthusiasm," said Dr. Mary Hobbs, TRC's Coordinator for Science Initiatives. "I think everyone leaves feeling truly appreciated. It's a privilege to be able to host this event and treat those who attend as the special science and mathematics educators they are!"

The highlight of this year's conference was an evening dinner, reception and exhibition, during which a showcase of outstanding and interactive STEM lessons was displayed for all attendees to enjoy.

During the dinner and reception, winners of several prestigious science and mathematics teaching and mentoring excellence awards were announced. Award recipients for the 2010 conference included:

Ellen White, Harlandale ISD—Toyota USA Foundation Science Mentoring Excellence Award

"Achieving excellence in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education is a national priority declared by President Obama and outlined in the White House Education Agenda," said Jbeily. "We at the TRC are excited to join forces with federal and state education leaders, corporate partners and thousands of teachers and educators to help Texas and the nation achieve that goal. Our economic competitiveness, standard of living and national security depend on a collective commitment to inspire and equip our students to pursue and excel in science- and technology-related careers."

The TRC annual meeting includes three days packed with general sessions, breakout sessions and panel discussions presented by top educators and scientists. Teachers and project directors who attend the conference have an

Rhonda Stone, De Kalb ISD—Toyota USA Foundation Mathematics Mentoring Excellence Award

April Ghionzoli, Brownsville ISD—AT&T Foundation Mathematics Teaching Excellence Award

James Bergman, Amarillo ISD—AT&T Foundation Science Mentoring Excellence Award

Leann Spears, Era ISD—Shell Science Teaching Excellence Award

Margaret Eddy, Aldine ISD—Shell Science Mentoring Excellence Award

Sandra Elms, Ector County ISD—El Paso Corporation Science Teaching Excellence Award

Orlando Montalvo, Sharyland ISD—El Paso Corporation Science Teaching Excellence Award

Heather Makare, Taylor ISD—UT Center for Science and Mathematics Education Mathematics Mentoring Excellence Award

Ross Ann Hill, Idalou ISD—The Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation Science Teaching Excellence Award.

“These winners exemplify excellence,” said Jbeily, “and I want to tell you that I am so inspired by them – by everyone here. We gather each year to learn from one another, network, engage our policy makers and corporate partners, and highlight our successful strategies, and I hope that you look forward to this conference as much as I do.”

“This is all about making great things happen in more places. We know good things are happening in islands around the state. The challenge is to make sure that *every* teacher has the advantages and resources to be the best that he or she can be. The best way to do that is to provide sustained, excellent professional development – that is the Texas Regional Collaboratives’ mission.”

This year, conference attendees were honored by a keynote address from Texas House Representative Mark Strama, who is a long-time supporter of the TRC and chair of the House’s Technology, Economic Development and Workforce Committee.

“Given the resources that we now have,” said Strama, who focused his talk on the plethora of solutions that technology offers to the education system, “what can we do about the one-to-many instructional model? Technology is what will enable us to transform that model.

“Software easily has the capacity to do diagnostic assessments of students to see where they are academically, teach them exactly what they need at that point and advance them to the next level only when they’re ready and have mastered the necessary foundational skills. Software can do all of that. That would be transformational, and it’s not out of reach.”



Texas House Representative
Mark Strama



Dr. Norma V. Cantú
Chair of the College of Education's
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Norma V. Cantú, chair of the College of Education’s Department of Curriculum and Instruction; Anne Vexler, manager of math and science partnerships at the Texas Education Agency; and Renée Flores, executive director for external affairs at AT&T also delivered comments during the reception.

“The quality of the teacher standing in front of the class is the single most important factor in affecting student success,” said Vexler. “It’s clear that somebody’s doing something right when it comes to STEM education, and I think it’s you! Texas can truly celebrate the quality of the teachers here in this room – I think our students are very lucky to have you all.”

As a closing to the reception and dinner, Jbeily announced that the winner of the TRC’s Distinguished Service Award was Dr. Keith Mitchell, the Collaboratives’ technology coordinator. The Distinguished Service Award is the highest honor bestowed by the TRC, and Mitchell was chosen as this year’s honoree because of his transformation of the TRC’s use of technology, taking it from “archaic” to exemplary.

“Thanks to Keith Mitchell,” said Jbeily, “we have an incredible website and a thriving online community. He has such creative, effective ways of connecting people and making maximum, and practical, use of technology. He is retiring August 31, but his legacy will last far, far into the future.”

The Texas Regional Collaboratives for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Teaching is an award-winning statewide network of 65 P-16 partnerships that provide sustained and high intensity



Renée Flores
Executive director for external affairs at AT&T

professional development to P-12 science and mathematics teachers. The work and contributions of the TRC are made possible by the exemplary partnerships that it has with the Texas Education Agency and many corporate and foundation partners who have invested in its operations and services for many years. In addition to the Texas Education Agency, generous supporters

include Shell, AT&T, El Paso Corporation, Toyota USA Foundation, The Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation and the National Science Foundation.

The TRC was founded in 1991 at the Texas Education Agency. In 1996, the program was moved to the Center for Science and Mathematics Education at The University of Texas at Austin's College of Education. Since its inception, over 19 years ago, the TRC has served over two million students statewide through the improved instruction and performance of participating teachers. It has developed the leadership capacity of over 30,000 science and mathematics teachers through high quality, sustained professional development. Many of these teacher leaders are serving other teachers and playing leadership roles at the campus, district and state levels. Currently, the TRC has partners and participants in all 254 Texas counties.

The organization was inducted into the Texas Science Hall of Fame and has received commendations from the U.S. Department of Education, Texas governor and legislature, business partners, and many community and education leaders for distinguished achievements and contributions in support of education reform.

"I have long recognized the importance of science, technology, engineering and math research and education programs," said John Cornyn, U.S. Senator, in a letter welcoming TRC conference attendees to Austin. "As home to some of the world's leading technology companies, Texas is committed to educating the next generation of talented professionals skilled in math, science and engineering. I applaud the TRC and offer my sincere gratitude for your efforts to ensure that our education system will be able to meet the challenges of the 21st century and beyond."

For more information about the TRC's 2010 conference, to access conference photos and to learn more about the TRC's history, events, resources, participants and accomplishments, please visit [Texas Regional Collaboratives Website](#).

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Anne Vexler
Manager of math and science partnerships at the Texas Education Agency



Keith Mitchell

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