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## Taking Legislation from Capitol Hill to the Classroom the Focus of Texas Regional Collaboratives Conference

- July 30th, 2008



The TRC's annual conference, held on July 9 this year at the Austin Airport Hilton, is an opportunity for all of the program's partners and participants to come together and celebrate a year of growth and successes.

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**The program cover for the Texas Regional Collaboratives for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Teaching (TRC) 14th Annual Meeting** features a picture of the Texas State Capitol alongside scenes from science and math classrooms, perfectly embodying the theme of this year's event – “From Legislation to Implementation: Achieving Excellence in STEM Education.”

“Excellence in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education is something of a mantra for educators, policymakers and employers”, said Dr. Kamil A. Jbeily, TRC founder and executive director. The TRC's goal, as an organization, is to provide high quality, research-based, and sustained professional development for teachers to help them excel in an environment of complex and rapidly changing state and national standards.

“We know that STEM education is a hot public policy issue of state and national significance, and that's not likely to alter any time soon. Part of our aim and purpose is to be flexible and capable enough to help teachers meet changing requirements with confidence and skill. We're here to serve the teachers, educators, and all of our partners to make Texas a showcase for the



The Texas Regional Collaboratives conference features three days of fun, interactive, research-based professional

rest of the nation when it comes to STEM education.”

development classes for science and mathematics teachers.

The July conference, which took place in Austin July 9-11, drew approximately 450 Texas Regional Collaboratives participants and partners from around the state. Like the professional development courses and workshops that the TRC holds throughout Texas each year, the annual conference highlights the most current breakthroughs in science and technology, the most innovative teaching techniques, and provides endless opportunities for networking.



The award-winning Texas Regional Collaboratives program has established partnerships in all 254 Texas counties and has served more 14,000 science teachers and 8,500 math teachers.

At the awards ceremony, Shell Oil Company, AT&T Foundation, the Toyota USA Foundation, El Paso Corporation, The Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation and UT Center for Science and Mathematics Education presented teaching and mentoring excellence awards to 11 exceptional TRC teachers who were nominated by their districts. Special recognition for excellence in instruction and mentoring included plaques as well as monetary awards.

TRC professional development coordinator Marsha Willis, who chaired the excellence awards selection committee, said: “winners of the awards exemplified the TRC focus on higher level thinking skills of applications, analysis, and synthesis rather than merely memorizing facts and information. These teacher leaders use teaching methodologies that challenge students to analyze, use, and apply information to take action and be productive citizens.”

At an evening showcase of science exhibits, the spirit of celebration continued, with corporate partners enjoying interactive science demonstrations, policymakers having an opportunity to get feedback from teachers and project directors applauding their protégées’ innovative lessons.

“All of the TRC partners – the teachers, institutions of higher education, business leaders, TRC project directors, community members, policy makers and our friends in higher education – have a very sophisticated grasp of the importance of collaboration.” said Dr. James P. Barufaldi, Ruben E. Hinojosa Regents Professor in Education and director of the Center for Science and Mathematics Education.

“It has an indescribable, visible impact on everyone, though, when you gather 450 of them in one large room and actually look out at the crowd and see the tangible evidence of this substantial community that’s been created! There is the support from corporations for school districts, support from teachers for their students, support from policy makers for the teachers. It’s a very moving testament to the sheer commitment and dedication of a great number of people to Texas and our children - it inspires all of the partners and galvanizes them to produce even more powerful results the next year.”

In recognition of the powerful results that TRC partnerships have delivered since their inception 17 years ago, the program received welcome news this year from the El Paso Corporation, a generous benefactor and dedicated advocate. During the conference dinner, El Paso Corporate Foundation

During the three-day conference, educators are able to showcase interactive, cognitively challenging science, math, technology, and engineering lessons that exemplify excellence in STEM education. This year’s scientific demonstrations and presentations included hands-on lessons that encouraged student inquiry, drew on the arts, and required concept integration.

Because the annual conference is as much a celebration of classroom victories enjoyed over the previous year as it is a training opportunity, the awards presentation, evening showcase of exhibits and the reception and dinner remain some of the most popular features of the event.



Dr. Kamil A. Jbeily and Leticia Konigsberg, El Paso Corporate Foundation Education Program Coordinator





Dr. Kamil A. Jbeily, TEA deputy associate commissioner Gina Day and Dr. James P. Barufaldi associate commissioner Barbara Knaggs, TEA science director Dr. Kenn Heydrick, TEA deputy associate commissioner Gina Day, AT&T representative Bob Digneo, and Shell Oil representatives Frazier Wilson and Monte King.

Darby and Knaggs delivered brief comments to the standing-room-only dinner audience, with a keynote address from state Rep. Donna Howard.

“As I travel around the state,” said Howard, “I ask teachers and administrators in schools that receive excellent ratings what makes the difference, what gives them that extra boost in achievement. They all concur that strong professional development is key and then second in line is sustainability of the professional development training and support. The TRC excels at this.”

“We have to continue to get better and better at teaching our children critical thinking skills, collaboration and how to innovate. We must focus on these 21st Century skills because those are what jobs and a global economy demand. We’re just so thankful for what the Texas Regional Collaboratives do – you’re ensuring our future.”

Echoing the conference theme of taking legislation and implementing it at the classroom level, all guest speakers addressed state and national policy changes that will demand a higher level of math, science and technology competence from students and, consequently, will challenge teachers to innovate.

“The TRC is such an important component for us as we work to meet our goals,” said TEA associate commissioner Knaggs. “We know that of the 20 fastest-growing occupations, 15 of those 20 require substantial preparation in math and science. We must continue to improve student achievement in math and science if we want to ensure that our children are prepared to compete in the global economy.”

“The Texas Education Agency sees its longstanding partnership with the TRC as key to achieving that goal. Professional development delivered by the TRC supports the new requirement of four years of high school math and science, and there is a TRC focus on STEM. This year’s conference, in fact, targets STEM and new, innovative, integrative ways of thinking about math and science teaching and learning. The TEA funds a statewide network of 61 Regional Collaboratives – that’s hundreds of school districts and dozens of institutions of higher learning. We feel that our support for the TRC is an excellent way to leverage money and support.”

The evening celebration was capped with the announcement of science teacher mentor Nancy Schultz as the recipient of the TRC 2008 Distinguished Service Award. This was the first year that the award was presented to a teacher, and Schultz garnered the honor in recognition of over a decade of excellence in teaching, mentoring, coaching, recruiting and serving the mission of the Texas Regional

Education Program Coordinator Leticia Konigsberg, announced to TRC attendees that the El Paso Corporation would be more than doubling its financial support and presented the program with a check for \$125,000.

“The El Paso Corporation believes in the Texas Regional Collaboratives,” said former educator Konigsberg, “and is very proud to support the program as it gives science and math teachers what they need for success. We want to ensure that the Collaboratives continue to empower educators and offer them the resources needed to prepare the next generation of scientists and engineers.”

In addition to Konigsberg, distinguished attendees at the conference included state Rep. Drew Darby, Texas Education Agency (TEA)



Texas state Rep. Donna Howard, conference keynote speaker

Collaboratives.

The Texas Regional Collaboratives is headquartered at The University of Texas at Austin in the College of Education's Department of Curriculum and Instruction, and it is part of the Center for Science and Mathematics Education. To date, the award-winning program has received over \$45 million in funding from state, federal and corporate sources. Generous supporters include the Texas Education Agency, Shell Oil Company, AT&T Foundation, El Paso Corporation, Toyota USA Foundation, the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation and the National Science Foundation.

"The state leadership of Commissioner Robert Scott and the commitment and support of the TEA administration have resulted in significant investments in the TRC and in a scale-up in the number and scope of activities statewide," said Jbeily. "TEA's support, coupled with substantial contributions of corporate and foundation partners have generated a powerful synergy of people and organizations working together to improve STEM education in Texas and beyond."

The program has enjoyed commendations from the U.S. Department of Education, policy makers, state legislators and business partners, and in 2000, the TRC was inducted into the Texas Science Hall of Fame. In 2001, the TRC was recognized by the Texas governor, Senate and House of Representatives for distinguished achievements and contributions in the support of education reform.

In 2006, a landmark \$1 Million gift from Shell Oil Company allowed the TRC to expand its highly successful collaborative concept to Louisiana. Partnerships based on the Texas model formed there and now offer enhanced professional development training for Louisiana science teachers.

—Kay Randall, University Communications, 512-363-6520

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