Coastal Marine Biolabs Announces a $1.1 Million Award from the National Institutes of Health for Project that Blends Neuroscience Research and Science Education

August 06, 2014 12:15 PM Pacific Daylight Time

VENTURA, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Ventura Harbor-based Coastal Marine Biolabs (CMB) announced today a $1.1 million Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA) from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to launch its NeuroLab project. The 5-year pre-college research education project, which involves a collaborative team of prominent biomedical scientists, neuroinformaticians, education researchers, and science media and communications experts, engages high school students in groundbreaking research focused on nervous system development and spinal cord “hardwiring.”

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The SEPA award will expand the impact and scope of a successful pilot project that received initial corporate support from Edison International. According to Ralph Imondi, CMB’s Executive Director, funding from NIH for project expansion was seriously delayed by a plan in 2013 to consolidate federal funding for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education into three agencies. The restructuring plan would have eliminated SEPA and similar STEM programs funded by NIH, the only federal agency that supports pre-college STEM programs focused specifically on biomedicine and public health literacy. “Rejection of the plan was an important ‘win’ for CMB and other organizations around the country that seek to inspire and prepare a new generation of health science innovators,” said Imondi.

According to Linda Santschi, CMB’s Scientific Co-Director and a primary investigator on the SEPA project, funding for NeuroLab is especially timely given the recent launch of the landmark BRAIN Initiative (short for Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies). “Stimulating student interest in emerging career opportunities for nervous system discovery and innovation will be central to the long-term success of the BRAIN initiative in revolutionizing the study of the nervous system and the treatment of nervous system disorders,” said Santschi.
The new funding from NIH leverages a nearly $1 million science education innovation grant that CMB received from the National Science Foundation’s Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers (ITEST) program. Taken together, these awards represent significant milestones for CMB, which was established 8 years ago by research scientists to address science education reform. "Using rigorous evaluation, CMB measures the success of its programs by their uptake, impact on the knowledge and career aspirations of students, and ability to promote meaningful changes in STEM teaching practices in the classroom," said Imondi. "We are able to demonstrate strong indicators of program success along each of these dimensions. The challenge now is to build upon these early successes to sustain and expand the impacts of CMB’s educational programs beyond a level that can be achieved through federal funding alone."

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