

# NIEHS K–12 Program

Because of the public's desire to understand the effects of and risks to human health from exposure to physical and chemical agents, there is a critical need to develop a mechanism for educating people about environmental health science issues. To address this need, the NIEHS initiated an education program for children in kindergarten through twelfth grade (K–12) that will enhance the dissemination, utilization, and effective implementation of materials and curricula pertaining to the environmental health sciences. The NIEHS program has become the leading K–12 program among NIH institutes in terms of productivity, creativity, dissemination, and diversity.

A necessary step in achieving the objectives of the K–12 program is the provision of teachers with the requisite disciplinary and pedagogical skills. Through NIEHS-supported programs, educational materials addressing multiple environmental health science issues have been generated that are grade-level-appropriate for K–12 students. Moreover, teacher training has been conducted at sites around the nation, from New Jersey to Alaska.

The first phase of the extramurally funded K–12 program began with a request for applications (RFA) announcement in 1993, "Environmental Health Sciences Education: Instructional Material Development (IMD)." Significant features of the program required collaboration between educators, environmental health scientists, and technical writers.

The second phase of the program, the RFA "Environmental Health Sciences Education: Teacher Enhancement," addressed the training needs of K–12 faculty for the successful implementation of the materials developed in phase one. This second component linked researchers in environmental health sciences with teachers at the K–12 level, a partnership that should help to ensure that all students are exposed to a view of the environmental health sciences that accurately represents the scientific enterprise. A listing of principal investigators and their projects, which were funded in 1996, can be found at <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/od/k-12/allextra.htm#ted>.

With the announcement in 1999 of the RFA "Environmental Health Science As an Integrative Context for Learning," the NIEHS K–12 program has evolved into a package that uses both novel instructional materials as well as teacher enhancement and development in teaching about the environmental health sciences. The objectives of this program are to determine if overall school performance and achievement can be enhanced using the environmental health sciences as an integrative context.