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Cary Institute part of \$12.5 million grant to promote environmental education

By: Janine Stankus , Staff Reporter

The Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies was part of a \$12.5 million grant awarded by the National Science Foundation's Math and Science Partnership program in October. Twelve organizations, including universities and school systems from across the country, were involved in this grant partnership, whose aim is to enhance environmental education in schools for grades 6-12.

The Cary Institute has had a standing relationship with the National Science Foundation. It is the lead organization for a National Science Foundation grant that they've had for eleven years, devoted to the study of the Baltimore area. Dr. Alan R. Berkowitz, Cary Institute Head of Education, said that he'd also been in contact with the three lead scientists involved in the educational study that this new grant will fund.

As part of this new grant, the Cary Institute will focus its attention on developing lessons and training for both students and teachers, aimed at promoting ecological literacy. The lessons will incorporate science, technology, engineering, and mathematics concepts and will employ "cutting edge technology," according to Berkowitz.

The grant seeks to help students explore interactions between humans and the environment in a way that is relevant to them. "We want kids to have a useful understanding," said Berkowitz. For each different locality and culture, there is a separate set of environmental problems for citizens to look at. He explained that the goal is to "pare down a long list of concepts" to make the lessons more palpable.

"We already have a partnership with the Millbrook School that is very much in line with this," said Berkowitz. The Institute works with teachers and students to connect the big ideas in environmental science to their own locales.

This new grant will allow the Cary Institute to continue its work locally and in Baltimore. A new staff member has been hired as part of this project, and will most likely start in the spring.

Fostering ecological awareness in students could have a positive effect on the future of our planet. "Our impacts on the environment are significant and complicated, said Berkowitz. "The more intelligent and insightful people can be, the better solutions we will come up with, at an individual level and at the society level.