

Postdocs showcase outreach program at local school

By Eddy Ball

Members of the NIEHS community turned out May 2 to show their support for outreach efforts by Institute trainees at Lowe's Grove Middle School in Durham, N.C.

Linked Video

[Watch a video about the debut Citizen Schools program at Lowes Grove \(03:05\).](#)

The WOW! Event marked the conclusion of the spring 2013 program, conducted by NIEHS postdocs as part of the [Citizen Schools North Carolina](http://www.citizenschools.org/northcarolina/) (<http://www.citizenschools.org/northcarolina/>) effort in Durham and Charlotte schools. It was a time for families, friends, and members of the community to celebrate the achievements of their young students' ten weeks of extracurricular learning about science, technology, and other professions.

The programs at Lowe's Grove, and other schools nationwide, are presented by what the Citizen Schools organization calls citizen teachers, as part of a grass-roots campaign to ground education in a real world context, to nurture the next generation of America's workforce. With support from the NIEHS [Office of Science Education and Diversity \(OSD\)](#), early-career scientists from the Institute volunteered scores of hours, both at work and home, in preparation for ten weeks of enrichment for the students, in a series of learning activities related to respiratory health.

Along with expanding student awareness of science itself, explained outreach program coordinator Huei-Chen Lao, "The program brings scientists very near to the students, to show that scientists are just normal people with a passion for learning about the world around them." Interacting with young scientists, agreed OSD Director Ericka Reid, Ph.D., presents students with approachable models for who they could be, if they decide to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM). That relationship is reflected in the term "apprentice," which is how the Citizen Schools program describes its student participants.

Building on the past, looking to the future

NIEHS involvement in the Citizen Schools program at Lowe's Grove began in 2011, with trainee-initiated planning for the spring 2012 "Healthy Lungs, Happy Living" apprenticeship (see [story](#)), the largest volunteer apprenticeship ever at Lowe's Grove. The program was so successful that Citizen Schools was eager to host the NIEHS respiratory health curriculum again this spring.

Planning for the fall program has started already, with Institute postdocs developing a new curriculum in cell biology. Several volunteers from the spring program have already made a commitment for the next session beginning in September. [Lao](#) encourages postdocs, scientists, and other NIEHS employees, with an interest in outreach and teaching, to join current volunteers at Lowe's Grove in the fall.

Career development as a labor of love

For the nearly 30 postdocs who have been a part of the NIEHS Citizen Schools program, outreach is an opportunity to pay back, pay forward, and invest in careers. In addition to nurturing young minds, as they were nurtured by their own mentors, and promoting scientific literacy for the next generation, volunteers are adding experience to their resumes that will help them stand out in job searches to come.

"It's a great opportunity to share what we love," said Laboratory of Structural Biology visiting fellow [Sara Andres, Ph.D.](#), "to get younger students interested in science, so one day they can do the same thing." An important part of what motivates the volunteers is to help advance STEM careers, overall.

"One of the reasons I was interested, was because I wanted to see what the U.S. school system is like," explained Laboratory of Signal Transduction visiting fellow [Felicity Davis, Ph.D.](#), a native of Australia, who added that she's ready for more involvement with the program. "Sara and I are both signed up for the next time [the fall cell biology internship]."



Lao, left, and Reid enjoyed some time together, as the NIEHS spring outreach and science education program at Lowe's Grove came to a successful conclusion. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



NIEHS Deputy Director [Rick Woychik, Ph.D.](#), center, was on hand to learn about, and experience, each of the four team exhibit experiments from interns in lab coats. Standing behind him, left, is Laboratory of Molecular Carcinogenesis fellow [Kimberly Wiggins, Ph.D.](#) (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

“I plan to use this on my CV as an initial teaching experience,” Andres added. “I know they’re younger, but teaching is teaching at all levels.”



NTP biologist [Pamela Ovwigho](#), second from right, brought along her son for a little hands-on introduction to respiratory health. Before long, he was enjoying himself, as he took apart the lung model for a closer look at the sections of that all-important organ. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



NIEHS Office of Fellows' Career Development Director [Tammy Collins, Ph.D.](#), center, and her husband, John, joined in the fun, as she showed her support for the fellows' outreach work in local schools. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



For the students, who had worked with their own teams to get projects ready for the big night, part of the fun was checking out the other displays. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



As the NIEHS volunteers broke down their displays to make room for another group, Reid, left, and Collins joined Citizen Schools North Carolina liaison [Joshua Johnson](#) and Senior Campus Director [Jin Ellington](#). (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Volunteers showed off the “Healthy Lungs, Happy Living” poster, as they prepared to pack up equipment for the trip back to NIEHS. On hand the big night, left to right, were Davis; Epidemiology Branch fellow [Margaret Adgent, Ph.D.](#); Andres; Laboratory of Reproductive and Developmental Toxicology fellow [Miranda Bernhardt, Ph.D.](#); Wiggins; and Lao. Not shown: Laboratory of Reproductive and Developmental Toxicology research fellow [Wipawee \(Joy\) Winuthayanon, Ph.D.](#) (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

Volunteers from NIEHS

Contributing to this year's effort are a lucky 13 trainees from research groups across the Institute:

- Margaret Adgent, Ph.D.
- Sara Andres, Ph.D.
- Miranda Bernhardt, Ph.D.
- Lindsay Buckley, Ph.D.
- Christopher Campos, Ph.D.
- Felicity Davis, Ph.D.
- Jacqueline de Marchena, Ph.D.
- Yanshun Liu, Ph.D.
- Caroline Pantazis
- Wipawee (Joy) Winuthayanon, Ph.D.
- Shannon Whirledge, Ph.D.
- Kimberly Wiggins, Ph.D.
- Taylor Wolfgang

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