

Ocean Connectors Project
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The Ocean Connectors program recently kicked off the 2011-2012 field trip season in San Diego, California. With support from the GEMS program, this year Ocean Connectors field trips will be more interactive and hands-on through the addition of microscopes, a plankton trawl, and a dissolved oxygen testing kit. The goal of the Ocean Connectors program is to connect underserved youth with the marine life in their own “backyard”, the Pacific Ocean, and to inspire environmental stewardship and conservation. The new equipment purchased with GEMS funds will help Ocean Connectors to achieve these goals this school year by allowing students to take a closer look at ocean health.

Ocean Connectors students receive a firsthand look at plankton during field trips to wetland habitats, nature centers, and National Wildlife Refuges. Students are now able to manipulate real scientific equipment to help them visualize the microbial organisms that inhabit the sea. Students discuss how these organisms connect to other marine life, like baleen whales. Ocean Connectors students study the California gray whale as a case study species, and the new GEMS equipment provides a valuable portal to discuss the importance of microscopic life in the ocean. Students learn that microbial organisms play a critical role in ocean ecosystems, contributing to the survival of humans and many types of marine life, sizes great and small.

In the months ahead, Ocean Connectors students in San Diego will continue to take various outdoor excursions to foster our youth’s connection to and understanding of the ocean. Getting the students outside and into contact with marine life is an essential element to inspiring stewardship. GEMS funds are not only enriching Ocean Connectors field trips through the addition of new technology, but also by contributing to the transportation costs involved with the trips. GEMS funds directly provided the transportation for approximately seventy-five students to attend Ocean Connectors field trips recently, thus forming the essential bridge between inner-city youth and the marine environment.

www.oceanconnectors.org