



The Virginia Bioscience Foundation (the “Foundation”), a 501c3 affiliate of the Virginia Biotechnology Association, which represents the interests of life science companies in Virginia, is seeking business and high school participants for stage 2 expansion of its Life Science Virginia Program, a talent pipeline development initiative designed to help address future talent needs of our growing life science industry. According to Virginia’s Economic Development Partnership, the life science sector announced 62 life science industry projects in just the past five years, representing over 6,200 jobs and \$2.5 billion in investment. These investments are driving the growth of Virginia’s life science industry. We also need talent for our new and growing businesses; yet our students are unlikely to choose a life science career path without meaningful exposure earlier in their education.

The Life Science Virginia program is intended to stimulate interest in life science studies and careers among high school students by engaging with industry scientists in real-world projects, business tours, and career talks. We have recently completed a pilot Life Science Virginia program, which was funded in part by GO Virginia. LifeNet Health and Landstown High School (Virginia Beach City Public Schools) participated in Region 5 (Hampton Roads) and the Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS) and Varina High School (Henrico County Public Schools) participated in Region 4 (Richmond-Petersburg).

Young scientists from LifeNet Health and DCLS collaborated with high school teachers to design hands-on science experiments. They spoke about life science subjects relevant to the students’ course material, conducted tours of their facilities, and discussed their career journeys. All participants, including students, teachers, and scientists, found the experience rewarding and relevant. Here are a few quotes about the experience from the participants:

“Reflecting on the interactions, the authenticity is what I enjoyed most. It was rewarding to witness students asking organic questions and become more engaged as the lessons progressed. In addition, I would also like to highlight the alignment. Because the activities were built around the curriculum, it was easy for me, as a classroom teacher, to activate students’ prior knowledge by referencing lessons or activities. From this, students were able to easily make connections and gain a deeper understanding of the real-world applications.” – Cassandra Epps, Director of the Center for Environmental Studies and Sustainability, Varina High School

“The enthusiasm and curiosity displayed by the students were truly inspiring. They eagerly engaged in hands-on activities, lab experiments, and discussions, gaining a deeper understanding of the critical role life sciences play in healthcare and biotechnology..... Moreover, the impact of the Go Virginia program extends beyond the classroom. By fostering a

connection between students and local industry professionals, we are cultivating a future workforce that is well-prepared and excited to contribute to the life sciences sector.” – Jean Neubauer, Vice President Biosciences Learning Center, LifeNet Health



Based on their pilot program experiences, LifeNet and DCLS plan to continue their engagements with the high schools.

The Foundation is seeking other life science businesses and high school teachers throughout Virginia who might be interested in the next stage of expansion of the program. We understand the need for practicality in terms of level of commitment by all parties, so we plan to connect each high school with a business to discuss the students' curriculum and what might make sense for a real-world project. Project duration could last a week, a month, or whatever the participants feel would be valuable and practical. We also want to weave business tours and career talks into the engagements with the students. Limited budget funds may be available for materials or equipment. We would like to begin planning for implementation in the fall or winter of 2024. The Life Science Virginia workforce program is intended to be an ongoing program.

If you are interested or would like to learn more, please contact Eric Rhoades, Virginia Bioscience Foundation Board member, at rhoadesem@gmail.com or Jim Powers, Chair, Virginia Bioscience Foundation, at powersjc51@aol.com.

Thank you for supporting our industry and the education of our students.

Best regards,

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