



A Million Dollar Boost for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Education

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MOSCOW, Idaho, Jul 21, 2010 (GlobeNewswire via COMTEX News Network) -- The University of Idaho will dig deep and statewide to discover and address the root causes of why Idaho is losing its advantage in global competitiveness. At the heart of the new initiative -- supported by major funding from the Micron Technology Foundation -- is learning why some Idaho students may not perform well, or pursue careers, in the areas of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and developing educational programs based upon those findings.

With the Micron Foundation's four-year, \$1.2 million leadership gift, university researchers will reach out through the institution's statewide presence to Idaho's population -- citizens, parents, teachers and students -- and identify what creates barriers to STEM learning. Once those root causes are found, the university's analysis of and findings from the data will be available to enable a next step of partnerships across the state to develop programs that will begin building increased STEM competitiveness.

"We appreciate the Micron Foundation's leadership in helping the university and Idaho address critical barriers to learning and involvement in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which should enhance the state's ability to help the U.S. reclaim its global competitiveness," said University of Idaho President Duane Nellis. "This is a core strength of the University of Idaho, through our land-grant mission: to develop comprehensive research and survey data and programs that can be used to effect change and better our state and the nation."

The new STEM Educational Research Initiative takes a comprehensive approach analyzing current barriers that hinder STEM education, understanding how cultural, socio-economic, and rural and urban factors impact students' ability to grasp the STEM disciplines, and STEM teacher education and development.

"The Micron Foundation is committed to helping our youth see how STEM plays a role in their everyday life and can be part of their future," said Micron Foundation Executive Director Dee Mooney. "As a co-sponsor of the University of Idaho's research initiative, we look forward to learning more about the way in which our communities can improve student experiences in STEM education to ultimately increase their success."

The university already provides leadership in several collaborative STEM-focused programs, including the McCall Outdoor Science School, the annual Engineering Design EXPO, and the university's partnership with Boise State and Idaho State universities in the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR). These existing programs, and others to be developed, will give the university the setting in which to test its findings on what creates barriers to STEM and how to overcome those barriers.

"We are pleased to have the Micron Foundation's support for the first stages of this important program," said Jack McIver, university vice president for research and economic development. "The state will benefit greatly from this critical initiative that anticipates the creation of a STEM-literate population in Idaho."

The university's colleges will collaborate and draw upon their strengths to achieve the initiative goals. Areas of expertise include: graduate programs in education through the nationally ranked College of Education; public policy, cultural dynamics and sociology research, outreach and engagement through the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences; research design and quality data creation through the Social Science Research Unit in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences; statewide access through the Extension Network; program evaluation through the College of Engineering; and science and math educators from Engineering and the College of Science.

"The STEM initiative and the privilege of working with the multidisciplinary team are really energizing to me," said Jim Gregson, statewide coordinator for the university's STEM programs. "The Micron Foundation funding enables us to identify and better understand, in a sophisticated way, the complex root problems associated with STEM education, rather than focus on the related symptoms."

Gregson said that while numerous STEM initiatives have emerged across the nation, this initiative is distinctive "because it recognizes that the social, cultural and economic context in which STEM is situated has an impact on the extent to which these disciplines are valued, taught, learned and practiced."

The University of Idaho STEM Educational Research Initiative has some distinctive elements that will help it affect deep changes -- in attitude, learning and outcomes -- in how science, technology, engineering and math are perceived, taught and learned. The richly crafted, multi-year initiative includes:

- Conducting focus groups and interviews statewide with citizens, teachers, parents, students and school administrators to identify community-specific factors that shape attitudes toward STEM disciplines and how those attitudes impact success;
- Identifying challenges to success in science, technology, engineering and math and formulate programs and courses of study that engage and excite students to succeed;
- Sharing information through a statewide dialog and discussion on barriers and paths forward; and
- Developing educational programs to create a corps of STEM-literate teachers. □

"To us, success will mean not only producing trustworthy findings from this research initiative, but also having this research shape and inform future

statewide STEM initiatives," added Gregson.

About the Micron Technology Foundation

The Micron Technology Foundation, Inc., a private, non-profit organization established in 1999 with a gift from Micron Technology, Inc., is committed to the advancement of education and local communities. The Micron Foundation partners with educators to spark a passion in youth for science, technology, engineering and math; engineers the future for students; and enriches the communities through strategic giving where team members live, work and volunteer. To learn more, visit www.micron.com/foundation.

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About the University of Idaho

Founded in 1889, the University of Idaho is the state's flagship higher-education institution and its principal graduate education and research university, bringing insight and innovation to the state, the nation and the world. University researchers attract nearly \$100 million in research grants and contracts each year; the University of Idaho is the only institution in the state to earn the prestigious Carnegie Foundation ranking for high research activity. The university's student population includes first-generation college students and ethnically diverse scholars. Offering more than 130 degree options in 10 colleges, the university combines the strengths of a large university with the intimacy of small learning communities. The university is home to the Vandals, the 2009 Roady's Humanitarian Bowl champions. For information, visit www.uidaho.edu

NOTE TO MEDIA: University President Duane Nellis and Micron Technology Foundation Executive Director Dee Mooney will be available to media during a telephonic conference call on Wednesday, July 21, at 3 p.m. MT/ 2 p.m. PT. To join the call, dial 888-706-6468, and enter participant code 8122663#

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