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Cal Poly Leads Preparation for Next Generation Science Standards

SAN LUIS OBISPO — Cal Poly will host 130 teachers from local school districts for Super STEM Saturday this weekend, a conference designed to give elementary, middle and high school teachers tools for applying new science standards in their classrooms.

Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) are coming to K-12 schools in 2016, and Cal Poly is helping the Central Coast get ahead of the curve in putting them into practice. NGSS is a set of education benchmarks establishing what elementary-through high school students need to know and be able to do.

Cal Poly faculty and industry and educational partners will conduct a variety of workshops showcasing ideas for incorporating technology, math and literacy into science classes. These include: methods for teaching sustainability, led by local company iFixit; active learning science kits produced by the Cal Poly Liberal Studies Department; and digital media demonstrations by the YMCA Youth Institute Tech Teach/Film Crew.

“We’re giving teachers the opportunity to be well-trained in the Next Generation Science Standards before they have to implement them,” said Lola Berber-Jimenez, chair of the Liberal Studies Department.

The May 2 conference — the only one of its kind on the Central Coast — will close the first year of the Math and Science Teacher Leadership Collaborative. Funded by a \$1.5 million grant from the state Department of Education, the program offers three years of intensive training for 60 third- through fifth-grade teachers from the Atascadero Unified, Lucia Mar Unified, San Miguel Joint Union, Paso Robles Unified and Templeton Unified school districts.

Teachers in the program have been working together to develop groups of lessons — called modules — that address the new standards and include hands-on activities. They also test these modules in the classroom, refining them to improve student learning. These teachers instruct other educators how to implement the new standards and serve as leaders in the teaching community.

“By participating in this program, I’m gaining a huge amount of content knowledge that will help me better convey scientific concepts to my students,” said Charlie Berry, a fourth-grade teacher at Kermit King Elementary School in Paso Robles. “The students in my class have been able to do a variety of hands-on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) activities and put their ideas to work by developing new inventions.”

The conference seeks to inspire excitement in the classroom — for students and teachers alike, Berber-Jimenez said.

“We’re excited to provide a platform for teacher collaboration and leadership,” she said. “It’s so important for the people who will be teaching the next generation of scientists to have the resources they need to become experts. This group is at the

forefront of a tremendous reform in science education.”

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