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## At Ease with Science in Alabama

Picture an elementary school where students can't wait for their next science lesson. It would have to be a school whose teachers feel comfortable teaching science.

A recent poll of Alabama elementary teachers revealed that they consider science to be their weakest subject. So the Gulf Coast Exploreum Science Center in Mobile, Ala., will use a new \$455,000 grant from HHMI to help 2nd and 3rd grade teachers feel more at ease in their science classrooms.

Over the next four summers, 384 teachers from Mobile and three surrounding counties, where the median income is below the state average, will participate in a summer institute to learn to use self-contained science curriculum modules developed and tested nationally by the Lawrence Hall of Science in Berkeley, Ca., with support from the National Science Foundation. The modules include experiments in which every child in a class can participate and hands-on activities that teach the fundamental principles of topics such as force and motion, plant growth and development, Earth materials, and life cycle of the butterfly. They address both national and state science education standards.

Once teachers are trained to use the modules, they will be able to borrow them to use in the classrooms of rural school systems that lack resources such as laboratories and basic science equipment such as spring scales or stethoscopes.

Alabama ranks near the bottom nationally in science, math and technology education. In 2000, only 52 percent of the state's 10th graders passed the state science exam. The Gulf Coast Exploreum hopes its partnership with these southern Alabama schools will markedly improve the science literacy and "comfort level" of 2nd and 3rd grade teachers, helping them to generate interest in science and raise students' test scores.