



Underground Research Facility

South Dakota Science and Technology Authority

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**\$25,000 grant increases South Dakota educator access to SURF professional development**

*A grant from the John T. Vucurevich Foundation provided stipends, materials for South Dakota educators attending SURF's virtual professional development*

**LEAD, SD**— This summer, 147 K-12 educators representing 65 South Dakota school districts completed professional development courses, shared expertise with their colleagues and received daily stipends—many without leaving their homes and families.

The opportunities were part of the Sanford Underground Research Facility (SURF) Education and Outreach (E&O) team's summer professional development series.

Thanks to a \$25,000 grant from the John T. Vucurevich Foundation, the SURF E&O team added an additional program to their 2022 series. The all-virtual program provided a week of training, materials and stipends for 26 educators from 17 South Dakota school districts.

“This grant allowed us to go beyond the hybrid structure we've used in the past and to create a dedicated virtual program with materials and stipends for educators across the state,” said Nicol Reiner, director of E&O at SURF.

Tony Althoff, a third-grade teacher in the Lead-Deadwood Elementary School District who participated in the program, said the virtual format made the program accessible to more educators across the State of South Dakota. “Even though we were remote, it was nice to see other teachers from across the state joining the discussion,” Althoff said.

The curriculum was researched, written and facilitated by SURF's E&O team and focused on sustaining and supporting three-dimensional science learning. This approach shifts science education from rote memorization to thinking like a scientist, investigating scientific concepts and solving problems.

“We highlight proven, effective science teaching practices that take students from learning about scientific concepts to figuring out why or how things work for themselves,” Reiner said.

The programs provide educators with tools to enhance their teaching and meet South Dakota education standards. Educators also have the opportunity to earn graduate credit at a reduced rate through Black Hills State University (BHSU).

In 2021, [another John T. Vucurevich Foundation grant](#) supported the creation of a hybrid in-person/virtual professional development program.

“The continued support of the John T. Vucurevich Foundation helps to bring resources to teachers from across the state who are paving the way for future generations of scientists and engineers,” said Staci Miller, director of the SURF Foundation. “We are deeply grateful for John

T. Vucurevich's donation toward SURF's professional development series and their partnership with SURF."

### **A summer of professional development**

In 2022, the E&O team facilitated a total of 8 weeks of summer professional development. The programs, most of which are in-person, focus on a variety of topics, including mathematics, place-based learning and embedding computational thinking in science and math subjects.

Reiner said the programs fill a real need for educators and provide a venue for discussion. "We try to create a space where educators can have deep conversations," Reiner said. "We're not just telling them things we've learned and researched; we're giving them a space to share their expertise and learn from each other as well."

Several programs in the series were created in partnership with organizations including BHSU, South Dakota EPSCoR, Technology & Innovation in Education and the South Dakota Department of Education.

During the school year, the E&O team brings SURF science into classrooms across the region through curriculum units, presentations and field trips. Learn more about [SURF's resources for educators](#).

*The Education and Outreach program is a collaborative partnership between Sanford Underground Research Facility and Black Hills State University. Our goal is to use the excitement and promise of deep underground science and engineering to inspire and engage students, educators and the wider community through a variety of programming.*

*The SURF Foundation supports Scientists of the Future, striving to inspire and empower our youth in the pursuit of futures in STEM. [Click here to learn more or to make a donation to the SURF Foundation.](#)*

*SURF is operated by the South Dakota Science and Technology Authority (SDSTA) with funding from the Department of Energy's Office of Science. Our mission is to advance world class science and inspire learning across generations. Visit SURF at [www.SanfordLab.org](http://www.SanfordLab.org).*