

Battelle gives \$750,000 for education

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By John Trumbo, Herald staff writer

Students in Washington can expect to see more hands-on science in their classrooms soon thanks to a \$750,000 gift from Battelle Memorial Institute.

Battelle's donation is earmarked to expand the Washington State Leadership and Assistance for Science Education Reform program into the state's high schools over the next three years. Also known as LASER, the program is a partnership of private and public entities that works to improve science and math education in public schools.

It comes just as Gov. Chris Gregoire prepares to recommend a four-fold increase in state funding for science education over the next biennium.

Battelle's contribution includes about \$100,000 to support the Battelle Science Materials Resource Center in Kennewick. The center already provides science education materials for classrooms and professional development opportunities for more than 700 teachers in 16 school districts from the Tri-Cities to Clarkston, reaching 25,200 elementary and middle school students.

The remaining money will be divided equally between the Pacific Science Center in Seattle and for introducing the science education model into high schools elsewhere across the state.

Battelle, which manages the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, has been a partner in LASER from the start.

LASER was introduced in 1999 to encourage teachers to have elementary school students do more hands-on discovery in science and math. Today 151 school districts serving 75 percent of Washington students have adopted the LASER model.

Carl Kohrt, president and CEO of Battelle, told the Tri-City Herald editorial board Thursday that Battelle is committed to developing the nation's technical literacy through programs like LASER.

"We want to be involved. We want to catalyze something a community can grow and call its own," Kohrt said. Battelle's collaboration with the Pacific Science Center is a way to ensure there is "a pipeline of young people who are capable of leading our country 20 years from now," he said.

Bryce Seidl, CEO of the Pacific Science Center, said Battelle's gift and involvement in LASER "is changing the way science is taught" by "improving the capacities of teachers to teach."

The donation comes just when Gov. Gregoire is preparing to release her budget proposal to invest more in science and math education.

"Science and math skills are critical for success in our innovation economy," Gregoire said in a Battelle release dated today. "The LASER program is an exciting public-private partnership that brings world-class resources to our teachers and enables our students to learn science better through hands-on, minds-on instruction."

Jeff Estes, a co-director of the state's LASER program and manager of science and engineer education at PNNL, said the governor's commitment "will help schools get started and make what is already going more robust."

LASER has received \$3 million from the state in the past two years, but because of its successes, part of it demonstrated in WASL science and math scores, Gregoire is recommending \$12 million in the next biennium.

That would expand LASER to about 1,000 more classrooms, said Judy Hartmann, the governor's executive policy adviser for grades K-12. Hartmann said LASER has proved it can work.

Battelle staff reported that schools using the LASER model in science instruction have seen "as much as a 20 percent increase in the number of students reaching proficiency on the WASL exam."

LASER's success prompted Battelle and the Pacific Science Center to establish a leadership institute in the Tri-Cities where science teachers and administrators from throughout Washington can learn the LASER model of teaching science.