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MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM®

## Education Programs Press Kit

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## NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# AQUARIUM CELEBRATES HOSTING 2 MILLION STUDENTS FOR FREE EDUCATION VISITS

## *Programs dating to grand opening help create ocean advocates*

On January 24 the Monterey Bay Aquarium marks a notable milestone when it celebrates hosting 2 million students who have taken part in free education programs at the world-acclaimed aquarium. Every year since it opened its doors in 1984, the aquarium has hosted 80,000 schoolchildren free of charge – a program that sets the Monterey Bay Aquarium apart from all others nationally.

At a time when school budgets are being slashed and time devoted to science instruction is limited, field trips and hands-on science activities have never been more critical. That is why every day, aquarium instructors work tirelessly to connect students and teachers with the marine world.

“This important work, not always visible, is central to all we do to assure a future with healthy oceans,” said Julie Packard, the aquarium’s executive director. “Through our education programs, we’re having a lasting impact on the lives of young people.”

The nonprofit aquarium receives no government financial support for its education initiatives. The programs are supported by aquarium donors and members through its Children’s Education Fund. The 80,000 school children and teachers who visit the aquarium each year come from preschool through high school and from all parts of California. They explore the award-winning exhibits and learn about ocean conservation. Whether it’s singing marine-focused songs with preschoolers who’ve never before seen the ocean or exploring marine biodiversity with high school students in classrooms with seawater and living ocean animals, the goal is to inspire the next generation of ocean stewards.

The hands-on approach creates an emotional connection that encourages learning and caring, and gives children the confidence that they can make a difference for the oceans, according to Cynthia Vernon, vice president for education programs at the aquarium.

Nearly half of the students who visit with their schools, take part in staff-led Discovery Lab Ocean Explorer or Splash Zone programs or as part of a unique gathering of homeschooled families while others take part in self-guided visits with school groups.

The Splash Zone/Head Start Discovery program has been a national model for engaging and connecting preschool students, teachers and families to science learning and environmental education. The program was

recognized in the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy report in 2004. To date, nearly 17,000 preschoolers have participated in this one program.

The learning doesn't stop when students leave the aquarium at the end of the day. Educators and students have access to a rich array of materials created by the aquarium's education staff they can use – before, during and after their visit – to connect to classroom work in math, science and language arts. In fact, these are an essential component to enrich the educational experience. The curriculum materials are crafted to meet state science standards, and are tailored for different grade levels, from kindergarten through high school.

“To truly achieve our ocean conservation mission, we must engage, inspire and motivate new generations of ocean champions,” Vernon said. “Our education programs for visiting students play a vital role. They help us foster an emotional connection to the ocean, which is reinforced and supplemented throughout the child's academic career.”

The aquarium's growing Children's Education Fund ensures that the aquarium's education programs remain free for future generations.

“Exhibits are just one part of our story,” said Packard. “From the beginning, education programs have been fundamental to our vision to inspire students and teachers to care about – and care for – the oceans. This fund makes that possible.”

The Monterey Bay Aquarium, acclaimed as one of the world's finest, has attracted nearly 50 million visitors and has won national awards for its permanent and special exhibitions, its architecture, and its cultural, educational and economic impact.

The mission of the Monterey Bay Aquarium is to inspire conservation of the oceans.

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**Editors: The Monterey Bay Aquarium celebrates the “2 million student” milestone on January 24 from 10:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m., with participation from students from schools from the four counties (Fresno, Monterey, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz) that have brought the most visiting school groups over the years. Call Public Relations if you want to attend or for more information about and images and footage of the aquarium's education programs.**

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# Monterey Bay Aquarium Education Programs

## Fact Sheet

- What:** A \$3 million annual education program budget helps students and the adults who influence them discover their connection to the ocean and take the next steps in becoming active and effective ocean conservationists. Monterey Bay Aquarium's education programs complement and support school-related education efforts and state science standards. They also engage learners of all ages in relevant, hands-on experiences with nature, expand their understanding of fundamental science and ocean conservation issues, develop and exercise critical thinking skills, encourage them to make and act on environmentally conscious decisions and empower them to be role models.
- Where:** Monterey Bay Aquarium, 886 Cannery Row, Monterey, California.
- When:** Year-round. Visit [www.montereybayaquarium.org](http://www.montereybayaquarium.org) or email [educationprograms@mbayaq.org](mailto:educationprograms@mbayaq.org) for more information.
- What's unique:** The Monterey Bay Aquarium's education programs place equal importance on establishing an initial connection with students by introducing them to the wonders of the ocean, and on nurturing that connection over time as students take on the role of conservation leaders. Programs are structured for multiple grade levels, starting with pre-K students in local Head Start programs, and continuing with elementary, middle and high school students. Through an all-encompassing combination of school programs, teacher professional development, summer, evening and weekend teen programs, and community outreach and partnerships, Monterey Bay Aquarium's education programs empower and inspire students, their families and peers, and local communities to learn about and conserve our oceans.
- Program summary:** Since opening in 1984, the Monterey Bay Aquarium has maintained a central focus on education for school children, providing free visits to 2 million students (through January 2012). Exploring the living wonders of Monterey Bay, students are inspired and encouraged to take an active role in caring for the ocean. The aquarium's education programs complement and support school-related education efforts and state science standards. They also engage learners of all ages in relevant, hands-on experiences with nature, expand their understanding of fundamental science and ocean conservation issues, develop and exercise critical thinking skills, encourage them to make and act on environmentally conscious decisions and empower them to be role models.

School programs at Monterey Bay Aquarium consist of five different approaches:

- **Discovery Labs** offer students eight different grade-level-specific programs, each aligned with the California Science Content Standards. These provide students with hands-on interactions with living organisms and opportunities to explore their personal connection to the natural world.
- **Home School Days** offer homeschool students and families the opportunity to visit and participate in open-ended programs that provide a deeper understanding and appreciation of marine habitats and the organisms living there.
- The aquarium's **Splash Zone/Head Start Discovery program** bolsters school readiness and parent involvement for language-diverse young children, through a blend of science learning and environmental education that builds on aquarium exhibits and educational resources. The program is delivered bilingually, in English and Spanish.

- **Ocean Explorers** programs are designed to introduce students to the aquarium, its exhibit animals and research programs, providing students with “inside stories.” All programs are aligned with the California Science Content Standards.
- **Self-Guided Programs** allow school groups to explore the aquarium and its exhibits at their own pace, following the learning experiences designed by their teachers.

Professional development for teachers at the aquarium consists of:

- **Teacher Institutes** that offer educators, experts and researchers, grade-level specific professional development sessions at the aquarium over the course of a week during summer, followed by multiple sessions either onsite or via the web, throughout the year.
- **Teacher Workshops** for those educators who are unable to commit to a full institute program are single day events that focus on current research and specific conservation issues of the Monterey Bay region.

Teen programs at Monterey Bay Aquarium include three programs for middle and high school students:

- **Teen Conservation Leaders** participate in a two-week summer training followed by 100 hours of volunteer service to the aquarium through exhibit interpretation for our guests and support in its summer education programs. Service learning activities can extend throughout the year, providing high school students additional opportunities to learn about environmental issues that face local communities, and help address some of those issues through restoration and education projects. In the process, they develop important job and life skills, build self-confidence and earn community service hours.
- **Young Women in Science** is a week-long summer camp for middle school girls, offering them the chance to get excited about science and ocean conservation as they explore ocean habitats, marine issues and careers alongside female scientists and educators as mentors. Through their experiences in the program, students develop a personal connection with the natural world, increase their self-confidence and learn how to become stewards of the ocean.
- **The Watsonville Area Teens Conserving Habitats (WATCH)** program provides Pajaro Valley high school students with an opportunity to engage in an in-depth exploration of ecosystems in their community. WATCH integrates academic learning, youth development and community-based conservation projects, in a relevant and meaningful way that connects students with their community and the ocean. Students earn community service hours needed for graduation and are eligible for college scholarships from the aquarium.

**For more information:**

Visit [http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/lc/teachers\\_place/](http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/lc/teachers_place/) to learn more about how the aquarium interacts with students and teachers. To request an interview with aquarium educators or student groups, please contact Public Relations at 831-644-7522.

## Education by the Numbers

- More than 70% of school groups participating in aquarium education programs are from public schools.
- Most school groups come from four counties: Fresno, Monterey, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz.
- The aquarium has provided free field trip visits to an average of 80,000 students each year since opening in 1984.
- Approximately 1,500 Head Start students and their parents have participated in Splash Zone programs each year for the past 11 years – 17,000 to date.
- Approximately 14,000 students and 5,000 adult chaperones participate in Discovery Lab classroom programs each year.
- Approximately 14,000 students and 5,000 adult chaperones participate in Ocean Explorer auditorium programs each year.
- In 2011, the aquarium offered five flexibly-structured Home School Days; 4,897 students and 3,567 adults participated at no charge.
- 93% of teachers who brought students indicate that the aquarium’s conservation mission came through during the visit, 67% indicated that the mission fits well with their curriculum and 85% indicated that the mission makes the programs more valuable to them.
- Teachers give the aquarium’s education programs a high rating for educational value – a score of 6.55 on a 7-point scale.
- Third through fifth grade students comprise the highest visitation (37%), followed by kindergarten through second grade (32%), sixth through eighth grade (17%) and ninth through 12th grade students (14%).
- The aquarium works with Head Start centers (44 total) in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties to provide multiple aquarium visits and free transportation to preschoolers and their parents each year, and to provide ongoing training and support for Head Start parents and teachers.

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