



NORTH CAROLINA
AQUARIUM
SOCIETY



AQUARIUM SCHOLARS SUMMARY

2023-2024



AQUARIUM SCHOLARS

Bringing the Wonders of the Aquariums to North Carolina Title I Schools

THE NORTH CAROLINA AQUARIUM SOCIETY

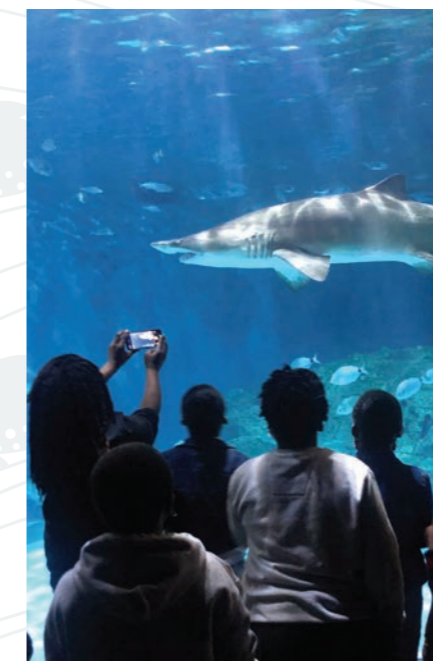
The North Carolina Aquarium Society is a private, nonprofit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to supporting the state-operated NC Aquariums at Fort Fisher, Pine Knoll Shores, and Roanoke Island, as well as Jennette's Pier in Nags Head. Through donations, exhibit and program sponsorships, membership programs, gift shop sales, and advocacy, the Society is able to bolster the Aquariums' educational initiatives, engaging experiences, conservation action, and world-class animal care beyond the limitations of the appropriated state budget.

Guided by a 45-member Board of Directors, the Society contributes millions of dollars annually to advance the Aquariums' mission to "inspire appreciation and conservation of our aquatic environments." Renowned for its innovation and excellence in public-private partnerships, the Society has secured over \$100 million in funding over the past 25 years, collaborating closely with the Aquariums and the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.



"THE AQUARIUM SERVED AS A POWERFUL EDUCATIONAL TOOL, INSPIRING MY STUDENTS TO BECOME STEWARDS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND FOSTERING A LASTING APPRECIATION FOR THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF ALL LIVING BEINGS IN OUR STATE."

2023-24 GRANT RECIPIENT



THE NEED

The NC Aquariums have a long-standing tradition of delivering dynamic and inspiring educational programs to students from across the state. For nearly half a century, millions of students have engaged in these programs, which often feature live animals or immersive experiences in coastal habitats. These programs not only educate and inform, but also broaden students' exposure to careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), forging lasting connections to the natural world that extend beyond traditional classroom instruction.

Despite the success and impact of these programs, recent years have seen a decline in student participation, particularly from underserved communities. Teachers and school leaders attribute this decline not to a lack of interest, but to insufficient school funding. Many students from these communities have never experienced the wonders of an aquarium or visited the coast, underscoring the need for renewed support and access to these transformative experiences.

THE PROJECT

In 2017, recognizing the challenges schools face in bringing students to the NC Aquariums and Pier, the Aquarium Society launched **Aquarium Scholars**, an innovative program funded by a consortium of private donors. This initiative enhances access to the Aquariums' science and environmental education offerings for underserved students across the state. By fostering a partnership between the Aquariums, North Carolina public schools, and Aquarium Society donors, **Aquarium Scholars** empowers teachers to immerse their students in the underwater world, creating impactful learning experiences and lasting memories.



EDUCATORS CAN BE AWARDED FUNDING FOR:



FIELD TRIPS



OUTREACH VISITS



VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

The application process is simple. Educators from Title I eligible North Carolina schools can easily apply for Aquarium Scholars mini-grants via the NC Aquariums website. These grants fund a range of experiences, including field trips to one of the three Aquariums or Jennette's Pier, Aquarium outreach programs in the classroom, or virtual learning sessions with an Aquarium educator. The diversity of options ensures that regardless of the school's proximity to the coast, there is a program that is relevant and accessible to engage students.

Mini-grant awards for class field trips typically range from \$350-\$1,250. In addition to covering program fees, these grants can also be used for transportation costs, including buses and fuel, substitute teachers, chaperone admission, and meals. North Carolina school groups always receive free admission to the Aquariums and Pier.

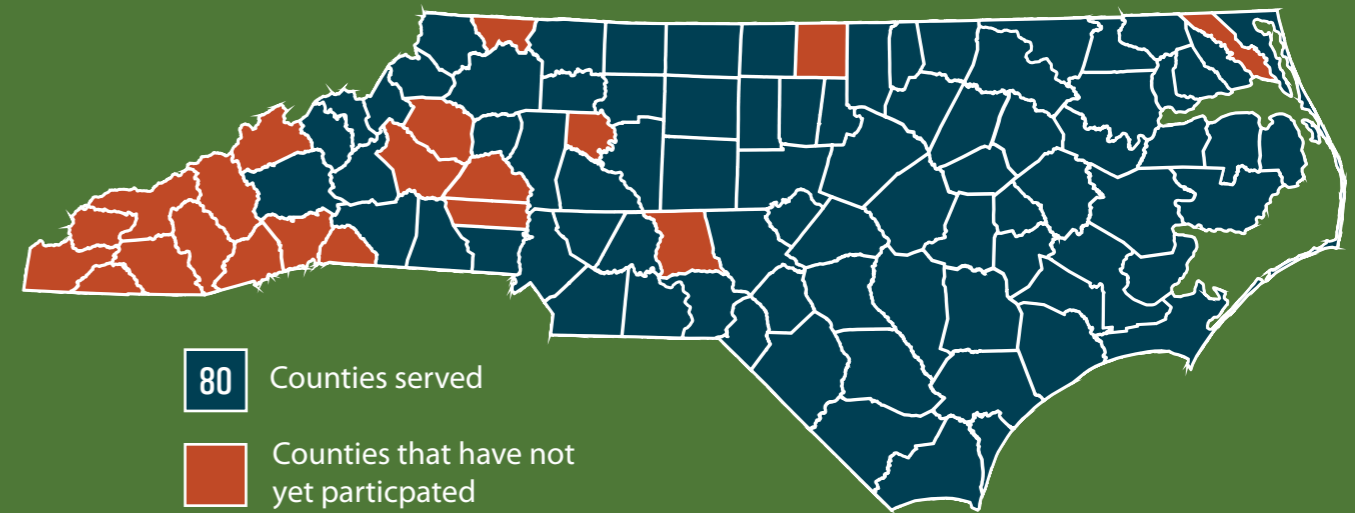
THE IMPACT

Field trips and programs such as those made possible through Aquarium Scholars have been shown to be effective tools to increase student engagement (Greene et al, 2013) and academic improvement, including test scores (Riskowski et al, 2009). Further, these experiences have lasting impact. One study found that 96% of students could recall a field trip they took years earlier, and nearly 100% could recall one or more things they had learned on the trip (Faulk & Dierking, 2010).





COUNTIES SERVED SINCE 2018



2023-2024 AQUARIUM SCHOLARS OUTCOMES:

Number of Students Served	17K
Total Grant Funding Awarded	\$160K+
Number of Grants Awarded	160
Field Trips	117
Outreach Visits	40
Virtual Programs	3

CUMULATIVE OUTCOMES SINCE 2018:

Number of Students Served	86K
Total Grant Funding Awarded	\$681K+
Number of Grants Awarded	973
Field Trips	520
Outreach Visits	223
Virtual Programs	230

"I THINK THIS WAS ONE OF (IF NOT THE) BEST OUTREACH PROGRAMS I HAVE EVER EXPERIENCED AS A TEACHER...OUR FOURTH-GRADE STUDENTS NOT ONLY LEARNED ABOUT THE DIFFERENT REGIONS OF NC, BUT THEY ALSO LEARNED NEW VOCABULARY AND GOT TO SEE LIVE ANIMALS UP CLOSE. I WAS ABLE TO MAKE LOTS OF CONNECTIONS TO THINGS THEY LEARNED IN THE OUTREACH PROGRAM IN OUR CLASSROOM. I AM TRULY GRATEFUL OUR STUDENTS HAD THIS EXPERIENCE."

2023-24 GRANT RECIPIENT

THE FINDINGS

The North Carolina Aquarium Society worked with an external evaluation and research firm to gauge the value to students and educators of the Aquarium Scholars program in 2023-2024.



81% of teachers had not previously taken their students on a field trip to an aquarium



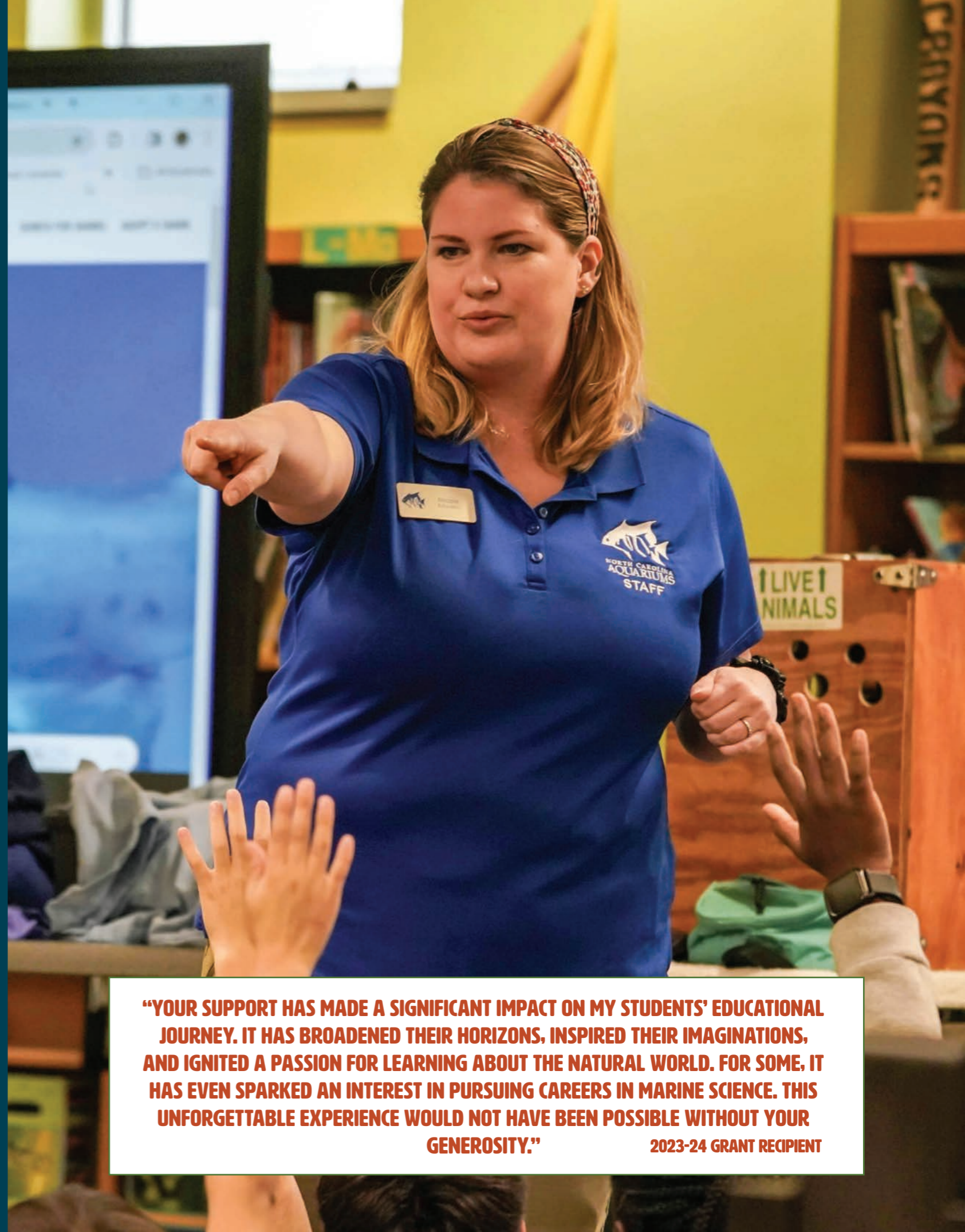
42% of teachers said their students had interest in taking action to protect wildlife following participation in the program and were able to share specific examples of what this looked like



Teachers were 28% more confident to teach about North Carolina habitats and wildlife after participating

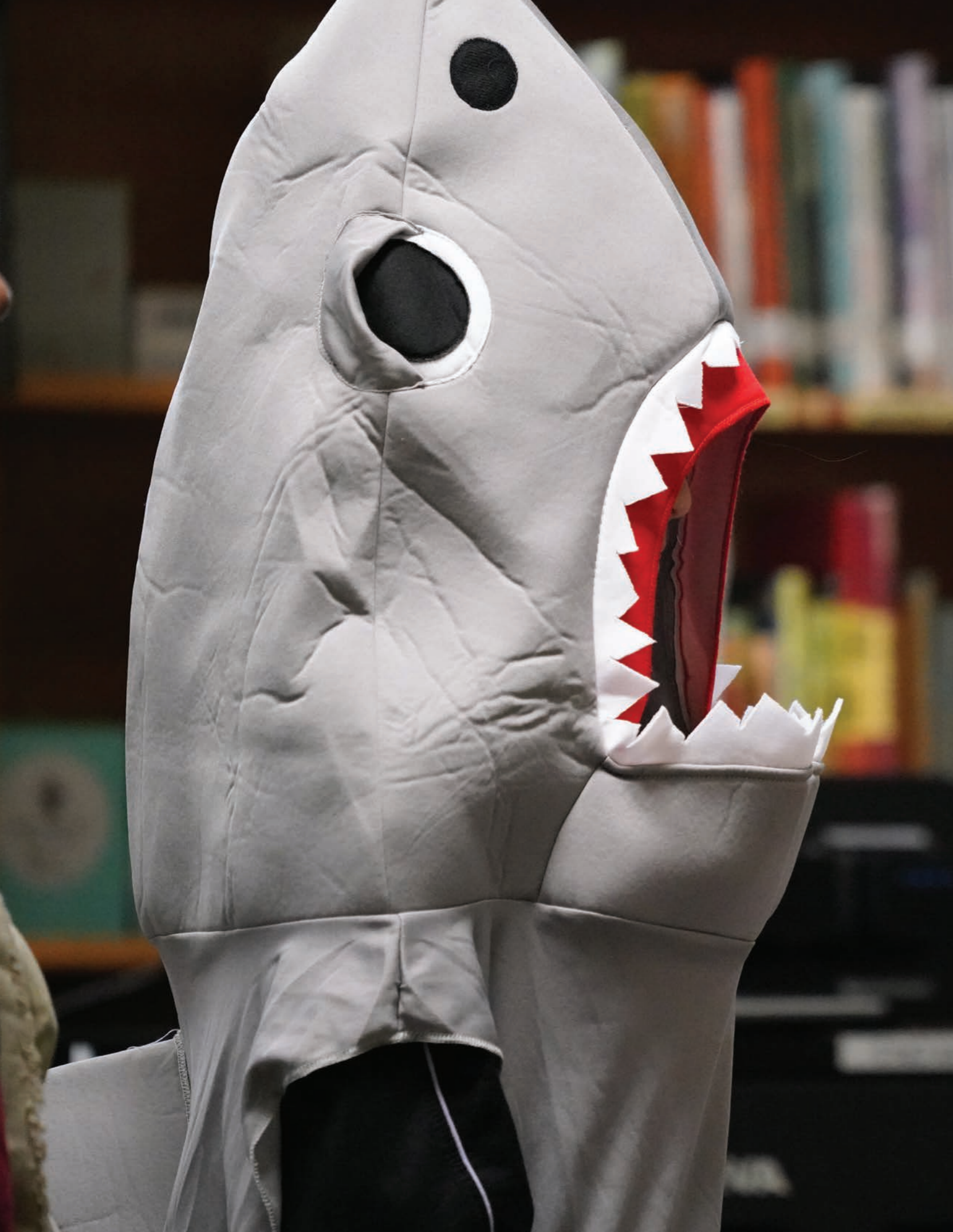
Participating teachers were given a series of statements about student learning, which they rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Across the board, teachers agreed that students increased their connection to nature in North Carolina, understood more about North Carolina habitats and animals, developed empathy for North Carolina animals, and were interested to learn more.

The Aquarium helped my students feel connected to nature in North Carolina	4.6
The Aquarium helped my students understand the connection between people, animals, and habitats in North Carolina	4.6
The Aquarium sparked interest in my students to learn more about oceans	4.5
The Aquarium helped my students feel empathy towards animals	4.5
The Aquarium sparked interest in my students to spend time in nature in North Carolina	4.4
The Aquarium sparked interest in my students to learn more about careers related to the Aquarium	4.1



“YOUR SUPPORT HAS MADE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON MY STUDENTS’ EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY. IT HAS BROADENED THEIR HORIZONS, INSPIRED THEIR IMAGINATIONS, AND IGNITED A PASSION FOR LEARNING ABOUT THE NATURAL WORLD. FOR SOME, IT HAS EVEN SPARKED AN INTEREST IN PURSUING CAREERS IN MARINE SCIENCE. THIS UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT YOUR GENEROSITY.”

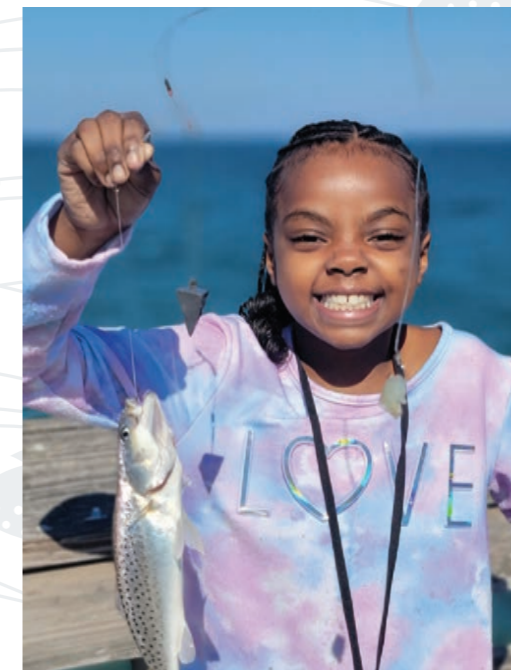
2023-24 GRANT RECIPIENT



PROGRAM SUPPORT

FOUNDERS

R.A. Bryan Foundation
Duke Energy Foundation
Grady-White Boats
NC GlaxoSmithKline
Wells Fargo Foundation



SPONSORS

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Rotary Club of Kinston
Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q
Southern Bank Foundation
Tetlow & Roy Park Aquarium Legacy Fund
Triad Foundation
Walters Family Foundation
Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation

A special thanks to the numerous individuals across the state who support the Aquarium Scholars program, including the NC Aquarium Society Board of Directors

"ON BEHALF OF MY CLASS AND OUR SCHOOL, I WANT TO EXTEND OUR DEEPEST GRATITUDE FOR YOUR GENEROUS CONTRIBUTION THAT MADE OUR RECENT VISIT TO THE PINE KNOLL SHORES AQUARIUM POSSIBLE...FOR MANY OF MY STUDENTS, THIS WAS THEIR FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE OCEAN, MAKING THE TRIP EXTRAORDINARILY SPECIAL. MANY STUDENTS TOLD ME THIS WAS THE COOLEST EXPERIENCE OF THEIR LIVES."

2023-24 GRANT RECIPIENT

Cited Literature:

Falk, John & Dierking, Lynn. (2010). School Field Trips: Assessing Their Long-Term Impact. Curator: The Museum Journal, 40, 211 - 218. 10.1111/j.2151-6952.1997.tb01304.x.

Riskowski, Jodi & Todd, Carrie & Wee, Bryan & Dark, Melissa & Harbor, Jon. (2009). Exploring the Effectiveness of an Interdisciplinary Water Resources Engineering Module in an Eighth Grade Science Course. International Journal of Engineering, 25.

Greene, J., Kisida, B., & Bowen, D. (2013). The educational value of field trips. The Journal, 14 (1). EducationNext.



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