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MEDIA CONTACT:
Nahal Mogharabi, (909) 396-3773, Cell: (909) 837-2431
Kim White, (909) 396-3456, Cell: (909) 323-9479
press@aqmd.gov

South Coast AQMD's Air Quality Education Programs Reach More than 31,000 Students
Creating awareness of local air quality issues for elementary, middle and high school students

DIAMOND BAR – The end of the 2021-2022 school year marks the South Coast Air Quality Management District's (South Coast AQMD) most successful year to date for its free air quality educations programs. Together, the Why Healthy Air Matters (WHAM) and Clean Air Program for Elementary Students (CAPES) programs reached more than 31,000 students since 2019. The programs prioritize schools and youth organizations in environmental justice communities who are most impacted by air pollution and are part of the agency's mission to educate students that breathing healthy air is their right.

"These programs are long overdue from all government agencies," said South Coast AQMD Board Member Rex Richardson. "South Coast AQMD took the lead to make sure these environmental education programs are free and available to all students in its jurisdiction."

The WHAM program introduces students to academic and career paths they can take to help clean the air. Students in the WHAM program learn about air quality through a hands-on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) based curriculum featuring four lessons on air quality regulations, air chemistry, health effects of air pollution, air pollution sources and reducing air pollution. This curriculum, aligned with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), is flexible to fit all lesson plans.

"The WHAM program was easy to implement and aligned well with NGSS," said Emily DeBaca, a teacher at Simon Rodia High School in South Gate. "The students were highly engaged and really took ownership of their learning. They really enjoyed using the air sensors to collect data relevant to their environment. My favorite part was seeing students interested in the issue of air pollution and the effects it has on our own community. WHAM will be a unit they remember beyond graduation."

The CAPES program educates kindergarten through 6th grade students about the importance of air quality, the impact of air pollution, and actions students can take to improve the environment. As part of the program, students are equipped with tools to make healthier, clean air choices. Educators participating in this program are provided with short videos and a curriculum kit that includes lesson plans, worksheets, and answer keys.

In the 2021-22 school year, WHAM was implemented in a total of 409 classrooms in 70 high schools and 45 middle schools within the agency's jurisdiction reaching more than 10,000 middle and high school-aged students. CAPES was implemented in a total of 90 schools, reaching more than 6,000 students throughout South Coast AQMD's jurisdiction.

Both programs are available at no cost for eligible schools, youth groups, clubs and organizations. Registration for the 2022-23 school year is currently open for eligible elementary, middle schools, high schools, youth groups, clubs and organizations.

For more information on WHAM, please visit: www.aqmd.gov/wham.

For more information on CAPES, please visit: http://www.aqmd.gov/home/programs/education/capes.

South Coast AQMD is the regulatory agency responsible for improving air quality for large areas of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, including the Coachella Valley. For news, air quality alerts, event updates and more, please visit us at www.aqmd.gov, download our award-winning app, or follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Guest speaker Gloria Anebere and host Chloe Lee participating in the 2022 WHAM Earth Day Webinar

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