

## Virginia Education Secretary visits VIMS

(September 10, 2012) Virginia Secretary of Education Laura Fornash has visited countless classrooms during her distinguished career, but her recent visit to the Virginia Institute of Marine Science may have provided the first opportunity to do so in a boat.

Fornash and Deputy Education Secretary Javaid Siddiqi visited the VIMS campus in Gloucester Point on September 6, an outing that included a trip aboard the research vessel Moray to the nearby Goodwin Islands, one example of the many non-traditional “classrooms” used for teaching and research at VIMS.

Fornash and Siddiqi learned about VIMS’ many educational programs during offshore and onshore discussions with VIMS Dean and Director John Wells, Associate Dean of Academic Studies Linda Schaffner, Chief Financial & Administrative Officer Jennifer Latour, CBNERRVA Director Willy Reay, and a number of staff and students. CBNERRVA—the Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Virginia—is a federal partner that owns and manages the Goodwin Islands and a trio of other pristine nature reserves along the York River.

Schaffner says “We were excited by today’s opportunity to show the Secretary and Deputy Secretary the diverse settings we use for educational activities, and the wide-range of audiences we serve, from graduate students in our School of Marine Science to teachers and pupils in local schools.”

“We really enjoyed our visit with the administrators and the students,” says Fornash. “They’re doing great things for the Commonwealth with their research and educational programs, and I especially enjoyed hearing how they’re engaging young minds in the field of marine science.”

VIMS administrators highlighted several educational programs during the secretaries’ visit. One—the PERFECT Partnership—places VIMS graduate students into middle schools and high schools for a full year of teaching and learning. The program—whose goal is to improve the K-12 curriculum and stimulate interest in science by bringing real-life scientists into classrooms—has so far allowed 23 VIMS graduate students to work with teachers and pupils at 4 local schools—Booker T. Washington Middle School in Newport News, Chesapeake Bay Governor’s School in Rappahannock, Page and Peasley middle schools in Gloucester County, and York High School in Yorktown.

Three of the PERFECT fellows—VIMS graduate students Sam Lake, Jenna Luek, and Christina Pondell—shared their experiences with the Secretary and Deputy Secretary during the pair’s visit.

“We heard today how successful the PERFECT program has been,” says Fornash, “not only for the pupils and teachers, but for the graduate students who’ve learned how to share their science with students and the public.”



*Virginia Education Secretary Laura Fornash.*

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The secretaries also learned about the role of graduate students in VIMS research, with Ph.D. student Derek Loftis describing his work as part of the Institute's storm-surge modeling team.

### Educational Collaborations

A second area highlighted during the secretaries' visit was the educational collaboration between VIMS and the pair of federal partners that share its campus—CBNERRVA and Virginia Sea Grant. These two programs—both funded largely by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration—work closely with VIMS researchers and the Institute's Marine Advisory Service staff to provide education and technical training for resource managers, marine businesses, communities, and other stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth and beyond.

CBNERRVA is particularly active in public schools and outreach, with a classroom and field program that reaches every 7th grade student in Gloucester and Mathews Counties, a monthly Discovery Lab for families, a series of popular summer camps, and other offerings.

### Infrastructure Needs

A final focus of the visit was a discussion of VIMS' infrastructure needs, particularly with respect to the Institute's aging oyster-breeding facility. The building, constructed in 1975, houses the staff and equipment that currently provides free brood stock to more than 90% of Virginia's commercial hatcheries. It also serves as the training ground for the industry's rapidly growing workforce through VIMS' Oyster Aquaculture Training program.

Laura Fornash was appointed Secretary of Education by Governor Bob McDonnell in 2011. As a member of the Governor's Cabinet, she helps develop and implement the state's education policy. In addition, Secretary Fornash provides guidance to 16 public universities, the Virginia Community College System, 5 higher education and research centers, the Department of Education, and several state-supported museums. Prior to her appointment, she served as Deputy Secretary of Education and as the Executive Director of the Governor's Commission on Higher Education Reform, Innovation, and Investment. She spent the first 20 years of her career with Virginia Tech in a number of different divisions including student affairs, continuing education, distance learning, and government relations.

Before joining the McDonnell administration, Javaid Siddiqi spent 12 years with Chesterfield County Public Schools, where he served as a high school teacher, middle school assistant principal, and high school assistant principal. Most recently, he served as the principal of Robious Middle School where he led the implementation of Expeditionary Learning, a nationally recognized school reform model.



*VIMS graduate students describe their educational and research activities with the Secretary and Deputy Secretary during a luncheon meeting at VIMS.*