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BCC, New Bedford schools get life sciences boost

By Kevin P. O'Connor
Fall River Herald News

FALL RIVER — The next great industry in Massachusetts will be based in medicine and life science, state officials say.

The industry is already here, it is growing and expanding away from Harvard and MIT and it is globally known, said Travis McCready, president and CEO of the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center.

And to back up those words McCready came to town with checks: The MLSC granted Bristol Community College \$4.4 million to renovate its science and engineering buildings. Schools in New Bedford and Fall River also received money.

The hope, McCready said, is to interest students in science and technology so they will go into the life sciences field to help the industry grow.

"This is all part of our master plan, to capture these students young," he said.

McCready announced the grants Monday during an event in the John Sbrega Health Science Building at BCC.

In addition to the \$4.4 million BCC will get in the grant, the college will appropriate \$2 million of its own money to finance the projects planned.

The money will be used to upgrade six laboratories at BCC that will be used by students in the health science field, according to Anthony Ucci, the associate vice president of academic affairs at BCC.

"You've probably heard employers say they can't find employees with the skills they need," he said. With the upgrades, students will train on the latest equipment used in the life science fields to



Travis McCready, president and CEO of the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center, discusses the grants awarded to BCC and other Fall River schools Monday morning. [KEVIN P. O'CONNOR/THE HERALD NEWS]

build surgical instruments, prosthetics and vaccines, Ucci said.

"The lasting impact of this grant will be far greater than the immediate future," he said.

The development of the life science

curriculum is one of the hallmarks of Sbrega's presidency at BCC, according to Robert Mellion, the CEO of the Bristol County Chamber and an adjunct professor of social sciences at BCC.

"BCC is laying the educational

foundation for a lot of the economic growth and the turn around for the city and the South Coast," Mellion said. Health care and life science is the largest employment sector in Fall River now and it is growing.

"BCC figured this out 20 years ago because of Jack Sbrega," Mellion said.

The grant money is provided through MLSC, an investment agency formed and funded by the state. The agency will award a total of 63 grants worth \$39 million to colleges, high schools and middle schools around the state.

It will be used well locally, Sbrega promised.

"The money will be put to good use to further enhance the experience of the student," he said.

Grants for New Bedford schools were announced by the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center as follows:

■ New Bedford High School will get \$110,000 to establish a biotechnology training program in partnership with Amgen Biotech Experience and the Harvard University Life Sciences Outreach Program.

■ Global Learning Charter Public School in New Bedford is receiving \$107,982 to create a new biotechnology course based on a hands-on, project-based program. Global Learning will also add biotechnology programming and research skills to its robotics course and introduction lab skills in other life science and chemistry courses.

■ New Bedford Middle Schools are getting \$25,000 to expand their life science curriculum initiative and couple effective STEM instruction at Keith, Normandin and Roosevelt middle schools.