



For Immediate Release

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Winning Teachers Announced in DNA Learning Challenge Prize

Sponsored by ISKME and 23andMe, the Award Highlights Use of Personal Genetics to Teach Life and Social Science

April 25, 2015 (**Half Moon Bay, CA**) –The four winners of the DNA Learning Challenge — an award to recognize the innovative use of personal genetics in teaching life and social science — were announced today.

Sponsored by the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education, ISKME, and 23andMe, the DNA Learning Challenge is meant to increase awareness of the rapidly advancing field of genetics among middle school and high school teachers, and inspire those educators to integrate personal genetics as a science-learning tool.

“Personal genetics and genealogy tools can be used to teach key concepts in diverse fields, ranging from biology and anthropology to geography and bioethics,” said Megan Simmons, ISKME Education Project Lead.

The winners were drawn from an impressive pool of entries that came from teachers across the United States. The four winners were singled out for their ability to reimagine how they teach science curriculum. Each winner will receive 23andMe kits and training to help them create and share high-quality education materials on ISKME’s open education library, [OER Commons](#) and [23andMe’s Academic Program](#).

23andMe’s Academic Program started a few years ago in response to teachers on their own initiative using the company’s DNA test as a tool to teach biology or social science lessons, said Dr. Esther Kim, education manager at 23andMe.

“When we saw how personal genetics teaching tools enhanced student engagement and learning in diverse subject areas and settings, we decided to put those tools and associated curricula on our public site so that any educator or student could easily access them. We are excited to add these four innovative models for teaching with personal genetics on our site.”

After the challenge was announced this past December at ISKME’s [Big Ideas Fest](#) — a gathering focused on education innovation — teachers were asked to submit their ideas for this challenge:

How might you use personal genetics to reimagine the way we study life science or social science?

Among the winning proposals was one submitted by AP Biology teacher Heather Skillen, from Fox Chapel Area High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. One of her students was interested in participating in the Learning Challenge, so they brainstormed their bioinformatics lesson idea together.

Social studies teacher Michael Skomba from Somerville High School in Somerville, New Jersey, created an instructional design plan building on his classes’ understanding of the human genome

to dive deeper into his Early Humans Unit. “I hope that it will spark more interest in science and stoke their curiosity. I also hope that they will make cross-curricular connections between their genetic results and study of the history of early man. They can trace their lineage through the first human migrations.” Skomba said.

Palak Kundu used 23andMe kits as a student in medical school and will now be using them with his students at Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital School in Stanford, California, to study basic pathophysiology of lactose intolerance. “I’m hoping students appreciate the vast amount of information about themselves that can be revealed by science and new technologies. I hope this translates their experience as patients into a genuine curiosity about science and technology.” Kundu said.

U.S. Accelerated History teacher, Thomas Holterman, at Oak Creek High School in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, is going to have his students create a family history book, or slide presentation tracing their family history. This is a highly individualized activity that is designed to be a journey of self-discovery for students. “I hope my students continue with their research and hand down their findings for posterity. I also hope that my kids become interested in the science aspect of the testing. My goal always is to fire the imagination of my students and cause them to ponder the world.” Holterman said.

A team of experts in education as well as project partners selected the winning ideas, which were judged on innovation, the use of multi-disciplinary subjects, and their ability to engage students.

More information about the DNA Learning Challenge is available [here](#).

About ISKME:

An independent, education nonprofit established in 2002, ISKME’s research and development enables schools, colleges, universities, and the organizations that support them to expand their capacity to collect and share information, and create knowledge-driven environments focused on learning and success. ISKME also helps foundations and government agencies examine and improve their own and their grantees’ processes for continuous improvement, evaluation, and learning. The company is based in Half Moon Bay, CA and more information is available at www.iskme.org.

About 23andMe

23andMe, Inc. is the leading personal genetics company. Founded in 2006, the mission of the company is to help people access, understand and benefit from the human genome. 23andMe has over 850,000 customers worldwide with over 80 percent consented to participate in research. 23andMe, Inc. is located in Mountain View, CA. More information is available at www.23andMe.com.