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Introducing Deep Underground Science to Middle Schoolers: Challenges and Rewards

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Work is in progress to define the mission, vision, scope and preliminary design of the Sanford Center for Science Education (SCSE), the education arm of the Deep Underground Science and Engineering Laboratory (DUSEL), a proposed major research facility of the National Science Foundation. If final funding is approved, DUSEL will be built at the site of the former Homestake Gold Mine in Lead, South Dakota beginning in 2012. The SCSE is envisioned to serve as a model for the integration of a science education center into the fabric of a new national laboratory. Its broad mission is to share the excitement and promise of deep underground science and engineering at Homestake with learners of all ages worldwide. The science to be pursued at DUSEL, whether in physics, astronomy, geomicrobiology, or geoscience, is transformational and sparks the imagination of learners of all ages. While the SCSE is under design, an early education program has been initiated that is designed to build capacity for the envisioned center, to prototype individual programs, and to build partnerships and community support. This talk will give an overview of the middle school portion of that program and its context within the overall content development plan of the SCSE.