

# Newport News: Aviation Academy students ahead of schedule with airplane

**Their teacher said they might finish the two-year project in a little more than a year**

By Sarah J. Pawlowski, [spawlowski@dailypress.com](mailto:spawlowski@dailypress.com)

January 5, 2014

NEWPORT NEWS — Aviation Academy students are ahead of schedule, just one month into a project to build a full-sized airplane.

Juniors and seniors who attend the program are building a 750-pound, two-seat aircraft. The students work on the project during class, on Thursdays after school, and on some Saturdays. The original goal was to finish the project in two years, but it'll likely be done by this time next year, according to their teacher.

"They're moving faster than we thought," lead teacher Dhyronn Goggins said.

The Aviation Academy is a four-year high school program in [Newport News](#) Public Schools, located behind the Newport News-Williamsburg International Airport. Students learn skills to prepare them for careers in aviation, electronics, engineering and technology.

The academy received the kit from the Eagle's Nest Projects, which donates kits to schools to build airplanes. The Aviation Academy is one of eight schools with kits, and the first on the East Coast, according to school officials.

The first shipment of aluminum sheets, fasteners and other parts to build the wings and tail of the airplane arrived in August. About 20 students were selected to work on the project, and they spent the first several weeks of school learning skills needed to build the plane. Work on the project started in November.

The plane's vertical tail is the first piece to be completed. The component keeps the airplane stable so it can fly straight. The students who assembled the piece said it was an easy task to complete.

"It's going together really well," student Joseph Charland, 16, said. "I'm actually quite surprised."

The students are each assigned roles — from management to laborer — based on what courses they've completed at the academy. While none of the students or their teachers has ever built a plane, they've constructed projects, such as tool boxes and wings that required similar skills.

A board in the classroom contains "work cards" to help students keep track of the parts and the steps in the process. They match the cards with instructions from the manufacturer, and videos guide them through each step.

One morning before the holiday break, a group of students sanded and sprayed with primer "formers"— rib-like structures that give support to the plane's main body. Another small group soldered electrical components for an AM/FM radio. The activity was practice for the skills they'll need to master to complete the airplane's electrical system.

Matthew Holden, a 16-year-old in his third year at the academy, said he's happy to see how the skills he's learned in the classroom can be used in the real world. He said he might consider a career building airplanes.

"Now we get to apply it to the airplane, which is really cool," he said. "It's sparked a little interest in me."

*Pawlowski can be reached by phone at 757-247-7478.*

Copyright © 2014, [Newport News, Va., Daily Press](#)