

EDUCATION

# Elected officials see STEM work

Aviation Academy promotes science, technology, engineering, math aid

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NEWPORT NEWS — Students at Deer Park Elementary in Newport News noticed a problem last fall: Rainwater full of pollutants would often pool on their mostly dirt playground — and eventually end up in the Chesapeake Bay.

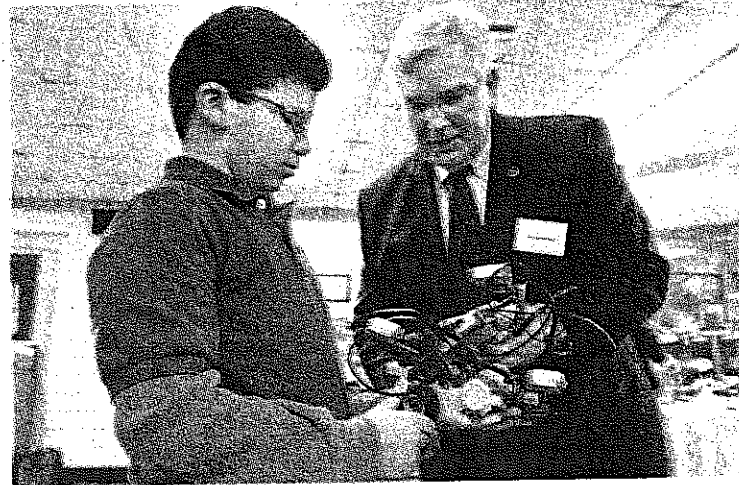
Because they had learned at the environmental science magnet school that grass helps to filter pollution, they asked the community to donate grass seed, which was planted and grown into a lush green playground in the spring.

“It (stops) the pollution ... from going into the watershed and affecting the animals,” said Emma Klompenhouwer, a Deer Park Elementary School fourth-grader.

Using halves of 2-liter soda bottles — one filled with dirt, one with a patch of sod and a third with leaves and pine needles — Emma and classmates demonstrated Monday morning how water is filtered when it flows through each material.

The presentation was one of more than a dozen exhibits put on by 65 Newport News Public Schools students for state lawmakers and local elected officials at the division’s “Take your legislator to STEM school day.”

The program at the Aviation Academy aimed to gain support for the science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM,



JOE FUDGE/DAILY PRESS PHOTOS

Harley Nieves, 10, shows state Sen. John Miller a display of robotics from Carver Elementary School. State lawmakers and local elected officials were at Aviation Academy on Monday morning to learn about STEM programs at Newport News schools.

programs at schools across the division.

Visitors had opportunities to learn about an airplane-building project at the Aviation Academy and robotics at Menchville High School, as well as marine sciences at Booker T. Washington Middle School, the Electric Car Club at Warwick High School and more.

Virginia state Sen. John Miller, D-Newport News; Del. David Yancey, R-Newport News; and Del. Mamye BaCote, D-Newport News, attended with a representative from Rep. Robert C. “Bobby” Scott’s office.

Newport News City Council members Tina Vick and Sharon Scott also were among the guests.

In a presentation to the officials, Newport News schools Superintendent Ashby Kilgore explained that STEM initiatives across the division are growing with the help of partnerships with local businesses.

Kilgore asked the visitors to

think about policy ideas that could help build professional development programs for teachers, offer STEM students learning opportunities, or give tax breaks or incentives to partnering businesses.

“I think just like we built our program around a framework of teachers, students and partners, I think that’s where our policy implications could come, too,” she said.

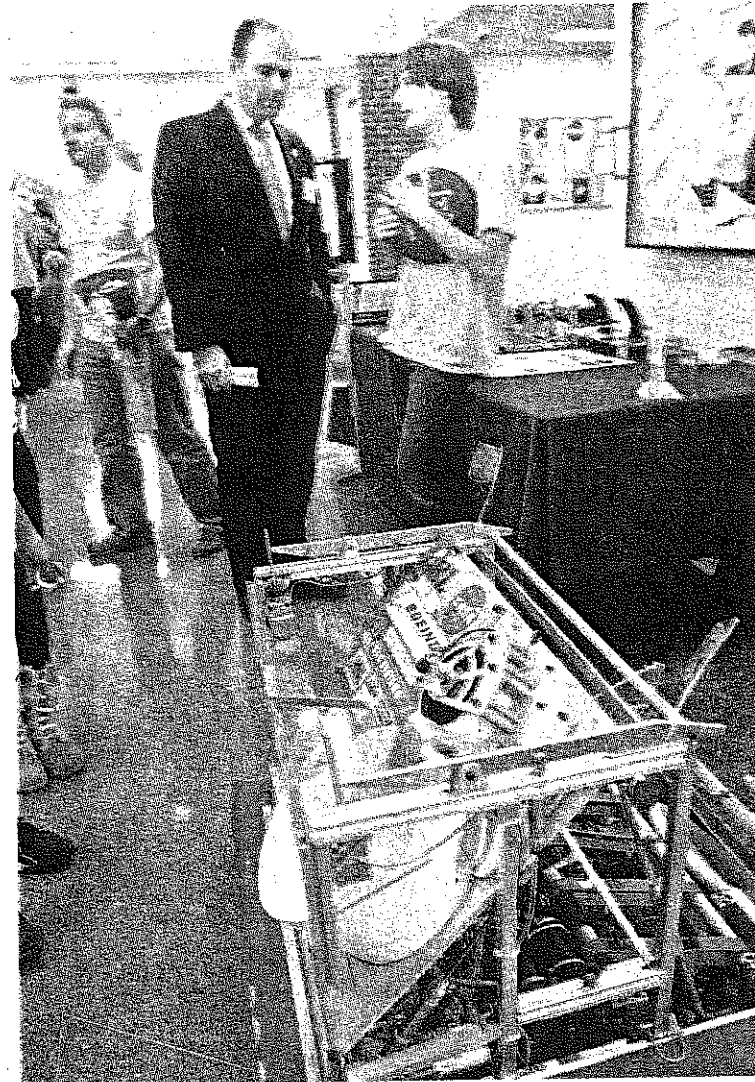
Miller said he was impressed to learn at the event about a summer professional development program for teachers at Newport News Shipbuilding.

“What a wonderful program to help align the real-world needs with the academics in schools,” he said.

Miller said learning about what’s happening at public schools is important for his work with the Senate Education Committee.

“It helps me better fight for those limited education dollars,” he said.

Laurel Vaughan, a sophomore



Del. David Yancey talks with Chad Biever, 16, from Menchville High School about its school’s robot.

who attends the Governor’s STEM Academy at Heritage High School, presented a tic-tac-toe game she built in an honors computer programming class.

Vaughan said she was excited but nervous to show her work to the officials.

Vaughan said she’s not sure yet whether she will use computer

programming in a future career, but she was glad to participate in Monday’s event so she could learn about other opportunities.

“It’s kind of cool seeing what everyone else can do in the STEM field,” she said.

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