

Peninsula students talk with International Space Station astronauts

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Students in [Newport News](#) and Williamsburg got a rare opportunity this week to place some very long distance calls.

On Tuesday, more than 340 students at [Denbigh](#) Aviation Academy participated in a "live chat" at 10:25 a.m. with astronauts aboard the International Space Station using a satellite downlink. And Wednesday, Berkeley Middle School students in Williamsburg will connect with the station via amateur radio.

[NASA](#) officials and educators are hoping that events such as these, held throughout the country each year, will encourage kids to enter fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, or STEM.

"This is the first time we've ever done anything like this," said Aaron Smith, director of the Denbigh Aviation Academy. He said the school has conducted several tests to ensure everything went smoothly Tuesday morning. "It's almost like [Skype](#). It's a satellite feed to the station. We get to see them, but they don't necessarily see us."

The chat with Denbigh students lasted about 20 minutes. Beforehand, education specialists from NASA Langley visited the school to answer students' questions regarding science and technology.

Tanner Loper, 15, who is a freshman at Denbigh High, said he's excited about the opportunity. He said he wanted to attend the aviation academy to get something out of the ordinary with his education. "I was looking for something just a little bit more exciting than just classes," Loper said.

Loper said he is curious to learn how the astronauts prepare for emergency situations in space.

Tristen Brannon, 17, a senior at Denbigh High, said students have put a lot of thought and preparation into the questions they wanted to ask the astronauts. "You're not sure what to expect. A lot of this has to do with mentally preparing yourself," Brannon said.

Smith said Denbigh Aviation Academy offers courses on aerospace science as part of its curriculum. "It examines the history of aviation, where it's going in the future and careers tied into it as well," Smith said. But he added events such as the one Tuesday will be a tremendous help in showing students they can find rewarding careers within the field.

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