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By Cpl. Rubin J. Tan | Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort | September 05, 2013

MCAS BEAUFORT S.C. -- Fifth-grade students from Hilton Head Island Elementary School spent a week aboard Fightertown as they participated in Starbase's first class of the school year.

The Starbase is a Department of Defense funded program implemented to expose youth to the technological environments and positive role models found on military bases and installations.

Starbase incorporates on concepts used in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, while introducing new tools, technologies and experimental application in the existing school curriculum. The program focuses on 5th-grade students.

Each class is held in a classroom environment with various experiments and projects for students to complete. During the five-day course, requirements in the local and national STEM curriculum are fulfilled.

"Allowing the children to learn hands-on greatly aids in the teaching of advanced concepts and it also encourages them to be motivated and have the desire to learn," said Savannah French, Starbase lead instructor.

The DoD Starbase curriculum includes 3.5 hours in physics, 3.5 hours in chemistry, 4 hours in technology, 4 hours in engineering, 2 hours in mathematics operations and applications, and 1.5 hours in STEM careers.

Students in the class participate in various experiments. One assignment for example, is a problem solving design engineering project where students are given a budget and are tasked to create a contraption able to protect an egg from a fall.

The course curriculum also extends from the classroom to squadrons where students are able to meet pilots and learn more about the aircraft aboard Fightertown.

"From a teacher's point of view, you can tell this is a very comprehensive program that was very well thought out," said Michele Quigley, Hilton Head Island Elementary School 5th grade teacher.

There are 76 DoD Starbase locations on military installations across America plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Starbase has been provided a facility aboard the Air Station since 1999, offering classes to local schools.

Classes held by the program occur mostly during the school year, but a few are held during the summer months.

Robert Semmler, Air Station Starbase Director, oversees the program and presents the classes with their completion certificates.

“It’s important to give children the tools to succeed,” said Semmler, a native of Fairfax, Va. “We try to do that, and you can’t do it all in 5 days, but we plant that seed.”

A graduation ceremony is held at the end of each class to recognize the students’ for their accomplishments while aboard the Air Station.

For more information about Starbase or to schedule a visit, contact Semmler at 524-1320 or email semmlerrw@gmail.com [1]. The Starbase website is www.dodstarbase.org [2].

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