



Published on *DoD STARBASE* (<http://dodstarbase.org>)

[Home](#) > Relaunch of STARBASE A Win For Us All

---

## Relaunch of STARBASE A Win For Us All

It took an act of Congress, literally, but beginning in February area fifth-graders will again get to watch 3-D printers in action, test physics using marble launchers and meet pilots of military aircraft.

After a one-semester hiatus, STARBASE Montana, a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math curriculum for fifth-graders, will return to Cascade County.

Last school year, fifth-graders from schools in Cascade County spent a week at the STARBASE program in facilities housed at the Montana Air National Guard, tackling hands-on lessons and meeting professionals working in science and engineering. The program challenges students to think as scientists, engineers and innovators through experiments, solving real-world problems and design challenges.

Scarce federal dollars threatened to sunset the program, which got started in earnest locally last school year. However, strong lobbying from parents and educators from most of the 40 states that have STARBASE programs convinced Congress to restore the line item for the program in the Department of Defense budget.

“There were nine STEM education programs in the Department of Defense and STARBASE is the only one that survived, so I think that says something the quality of the program,” said Mike Stone, director of STARBASE Montana.

Ruth Uecker, Great Falls Public Schools assistant superintendent for grades K-6, is a fan.

“This program is a lot more than a memory maker,” she said. “It’s exposure to science and technology in a highly engaging environment. Our students are exposed to professionals working in those fields who talk to the kids about the pathway they took.

“STARBASE opens the doors they need to go through to enter those careers.”

There are 76 STARBASE programs in 40 states. The Department of Defense provides \$300,000 for up to four programs in each state. Communities or school districts collaborate by providing things such as transportation to the STARBASE classrooms and lunches for students.

Originally, the plan was for the program to shift to another entity, such as the National Science Foundation or the federal Department of Education. When the program wasn’t picked up by another organization — budgets are tight everywhere — lobbying began to restore the funding in the Department of Defense. The federal budget delay interrupted that plan and STARBASE, which operates in Montana in Helena and Great Falls, didn’t take place this fall.

Now things are back on track. The Great Falls Public Schools is interviewing job candidates. The teachers for the program will be employed by GFPS but are paid by the DOD.

In February, area fifth-graders will have the chance to spend two days at MANG participating in an abbreviated two-day program.

“That way we can still give almost every fifth-grader in the county a chance to participate,” said Stone.

In a year of sequestration, a federal government shutdown and political partisanship that at times makes us cringe, restoring the line item to fund STARBASE is a refreshing example of what can happen when government works well.

U.S. industry warns that there are more jobs in science and engineering than can be filled with qualified U.S. applicants. The pay in those careers tends to be at the upper end of income scales.

Collectively we all benefit when our students have opportunities to pursue those types of science and engineering careers. When kids grow up and make good livings in growing career fields, we all move ahead.

Stone, an Army veteran and former science teacher, said many of the STARBASE presenters are professionals who graduated from local schools.

So how many times does he hear “I wish we would have had this program when I was a fifth-grader?” from those pilots, engineers and scientists?

“More times than I can count,” Stone said.

— Tribune editorial board

Posted January 2014

For the original article, please click [here](#) [1].

---

**Source URL:** <http://dodstarbase.org/articles/relaunch-starbase-win-us-all>

**Links:**

[1] [http://www.greatfallstribune.com/article/20131221/OPINION/312210018/Our-opinion-Relaunch-STARBASE-win-us-all?nclick\\_check=1](http://www.greatfallstribune.com/article/20131221/OPINION/312210018/Our-opinion-Relaunch-STARBASE-win-us-all?nclick_check=1)