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[Home](#) > Rep. Comstock visits Winchester STARBASE Academy

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WINCHESTER, Va. — Rep. Barbara Comstock visited 5th grade students from Indian Hollow Elementary School taking part in activities at the Winchester STARBASE Academy Jan. 30, 2015, at the Virginia National Guard’s Cherry-Beasley Readiness Center in Winchester, Va. Hands-on activities for the day included completing an electrical circuit and programming robots.

Science and Technology Academies Reinforcing Basic Aviation and Space Exploration, or STARBASE, is a Department of Defense educational program, sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs where students participate in challenging activities in science, technology, engineering and math. Students are immersed in a unique classroom experience for five days where all activities are student-centered, hands-on, encourage higher order thinking and incorporate STEM applications in the real world.

“We know these are the jobs of the future, and STEM education is essential to a 21st century economy,” Comstock said. “Getting the kids excited about it is how you keep them engaged at this critical age. This is where we know we lose kids in science, and having this kind of hands on program captures their imagination.”

Students attend STARBASE for a five-day program on site at the readiness center. So far this year more than 440 students have taken part in the STARBASE program from Winchester, Frederick and Clarke counties and 10 more classes will attend before the school year ends, explained Susan Corrigan, director of the Winchester STARBASE Academy.

“I love it, and I know the kids love it,” said Sharon Cooley, principal of Indian Hollow Elementary School. “It has been a wonderful opportunity because it allows the students to really practice problem solving and communication skills, teamwork and all their science, math and technology subjects. It really brings it all together.”

In addition to Corrigan, STARBASE has two instructors who hold Virginia teaching licenses, as does Corrigan. The instructional team also has an information technology specialist who teaches the computer-aided design and robotics lessons and also supervises projects on the program’s very popular 3D printer.

In the two and half years since the program started, more than 1,700 students have attended the five-day program, she said. In addition, STARBASE instructors also participated in outreach programs including being a part of a four-day afterschool STEM program with Daniel Morgan Middle School and being guest instructors at STEM nights at different schools. They have also visited several area schools to conduct individual lessons.

The only complaint Corrigan has heard from area teachers is that they don't have enough room to handle all the demands for the popular program. But she said that many teachers have said they can use the experiences at STARBASE throughout the year back in their regular classroom.

Comstock was elected to Congress in November 2014 to represent Virginia's 10th Congressional District which consists of Loudoun County, Clarke County, Frederick County and parts of Fairfax County and Prince William County as well as the cities of Winchester, Manassas Park and Manassas City. She currently serves on the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee and the Science, Space and Technology Committee, where she serves as chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Research and Technology.

Learn more about Winchester STARBASE Academy at <http://go.usa.gov/SJs4> [1].

For Original Article, Click [Here](#) [2].

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Links:

[1] <http://go.usa.gov/SJs4>

[2] <http://vanguard.dodlive.mil/2015/01/30/6769/>