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All parents are looking to give their kids an edge in the world, some sort of advantage to ensure that they succeed. Luckily for this community, many local fifth-graders will begin getting that chance.

On July 20, the Washington Air National Guard officially opened a new chapter of the program, the Evergreen STARBASE. STARBASE is a Department of Defense funded youth program designed to enhance the understanding and appreciation of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

"The goal is to encourage kids to pursue math and science once they move onto middle school and high school and are permitted to choose electives," explained Lisa Dowling, Evergreen STARBASE program director. Dowling has spent 26 years serving in the Air National Guard and has also been a teacher for 17 years.

"That is why we target fifth graders specifically," she said.

The statistics, particularly in Washington state where high tech jobs are the largest sector hiring, reflect that more STEM education is necessary. While the state is fourth nationwide for technology-based corporations, it is only 46th for participation in Science and Engineering graduate programs. In fact, by 2018, experts predict that Washington will see a 24 percent increase in STEM jobs, which is above the national average.

"The reason this program is such a success is because the kids are actually getting to do things, they're not just listening to a teacher talk about it or being told to read about it," she said.

To that end, the curriculum includes hands-on activities and fun interactive demonstrations in the fields of physics, robotics, rocketry, chemistry, computer-aided design and engineering. Luckily, the program's location on base also allows for interaction with some of the units, such as the Western Air Defense Sector, which has already presented a mission brief to kids during a preliminary camp this summer.

Classes at Evergreen STARBASE are taught in five-day sessions, for a total of 25 hours. The enrichment program is held during normal school hours, yet it is full funded by the DoD and the school districts involved must only provide transportation.

The first classes, which will be conducted in partnership with the Tacoma and Bethel school districts, will start Sept. 17. Classes will hold 35 students at a time and, in total, 28 sessions are scheduled for this upcoming school year.

"Our hope for the future is of course to eventually expand and handle more classes per day in

order to reach as many students as we can," Dowling said.

Parents who would like to see their children attend classes at Evergreen STARBASE should contact their school district.

By [Melissa Renahan](#) ^[1] on August 3, 2012

<http://www.northwestmilitary.com/families/education/2012/08/northwest-military-ranger-airlifter-newspaper-JBLM-washington-air-national-guard-opens-evergreen-sta/> ^[2]

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