Students Participate in Naval Sea Systems Dahlgren Supported Summer Academy

DAHLGREN, Va. (NNS) -- Middle school students blasted water rockets high over Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC) Dahlgren's parade field during the Virginia Demonstration Project (VDP) Summer Academy July 6-17 in Dahlgren, Va.

The students built and demonstrated myriad robotics projects directed at solving problems while learning science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills during the session at NSWC Dahlgren, a field activity of Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA).

"VDP's goal is to increase the attraction of the Navy's warfare centers as an eventual place of employment for the students participating in the program," said Bob Stiegler, VDP program manager. "Experience to date has shown that students can be attracted to and retained in engineering programs if they are exposed early to the joys of creation through design, discovery through research and invention through hands-on experimentation."

"Several students said they want to be an engineer now, and that really gives you a sense that you're doing something good," said Dena Kota, NSWC Dahlgren engineer and VDP Summer Academy mentor.

NAVSEA is committed to growing the future leaders of America. Through efforts to further diversity and combat the decline in younger individuals seeking careers in STEM, NAVSEA has become increasingly involved, both in participation and funding, with programs that encourage young men and women to pursue challenging career paths at an early age.

Throughout the two-week summer camp, 32 science teachers from the greater King George, Stafford, Spotsylvania and Fredericksburg, Va., area school systems challenged students with problem scenarios that required various technological solutions.

The teachers teamed with 16 mentor volunteers from NSWC Dahlgren, who provided valuable insight and guidance to the students.

"It is important to provide encouragement and stimulation to our young people regarding the field of science," said Jane Bachman, VDP Summer Academy director and NSWC Dahlgren Advanced Concepts and Payloads engineer. "The working environment experience where students can sense the why, what and how things are done through interaction with scientists and engineers can benefit them when making their future career decisions."

VDP is part of Naval Research - Science and Technology for America's Readiness (N-STAR), a science and technology workforce development program launched in 2004 by the Office of Naval Research. It was initiated to show a diverse group of pre-teens and teens that math, science and engineering are fascinating, fun and socially relevant.

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