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Aviation STEM Program Debuts at D.C.-Area Shabach Academy

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AFRO Staff Writers



The Shabach Christian Academy in Landover, Md. debuted the first Aviation STEM program for elementary school students in the Washington Metropolitan area on Oct. 31.

Students, parents, administrators, elected officials and community leaders came out to witness a hands-on demonstration and receive information on the STEM program, an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.

Attendees also received a tour of the school led by Principal Nicole McNeil, and a chance to talk with students.

During classroom instruction as part of the program, students will have STEM exposure using the NEXT Generation Science Standards and National Science Education Standards, also known as NESS. Students will also use the scientific method to explore the aviation sciences and conduct hands-on investigations.

"I think today's event went very well," McNeil told the *AFRO*. "The range of presence for the people to come out and look at the program and support our school is significant. What this program represents is the application of content that the average child struggles to understand."

The school created the program in partnership with AviationEd, Inc., an organization of aviation and education professionals committed to inspiring the next generation to pursue their career goals. They took part in developing the curriculum and instruction for the program.

"It's a phenomenal program," AviationEd's Director of Program Development Dr. James E. Sulton, III told the *AFRO*. "It's so great to see so many people from the community come out and support our kids. One thing that is really important, that I think kind of gets overlooked a lot of times in our educational environment, is that kids need something that they can grab a hold to. So what we're trying to do is to bring STEM to life with our Aviation education curriculum. The program has really taken off and we've had a lot of kids be successful."

The school also joined a collaborative effort between the First Baptist Church of Glenarden, Destiny Aviation Services, and Virtual Flight Academy to design a unique flight lab to compliment the STEM program. The partnership created a flight lab with state-of-the-art educational technology, including four PC-based flight simulators.

"I like learning about the airplanes and the black gas that fuels up the energy to make the plane go," six-year-old Caleb West of Mitchellville, Md., a first grade student, told the *AFRO*.

The aviation program was introduced earlier this year to the students.

Bryan Love, 11, of Upper Marlboro is a sixth grader at Shabach, and is in his first year at the school. "The program is fun," Love told the *AFRO*. "I like the simulators a lot. We get to do a lot of experiments and projects too that I like."

West and his classmates spend five minutes every Wednesday in the flight lab. Love and his classmates spend 10 minutes every Friday in the flight lab.

In addition to the aviation STEM program, the school also offers interactive learning centers boasting innovative technology such as "Time to Know," a digital teaching platform; a critical thinking curriculum; a dynamic fine arts program; and a Biblical integration.

I think that this was an historic event," President of Shabach Ministries, Inc. Cynthia J. Terry told the *AFRO*. "I'm really excited about it. Not just for Shabach, but for our community and for the greater Washington Metropolitan area. I know that there are



several other schools that have Aviation programs, but we have actual simulators and the kids get really excited about that. If they can learn Math and Science and get excited about it when they get to college, they are still going to be excited about it."

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