

McAuliffe Center program connects student teachers and middle schoolers

July 17, 2009 John Hilliard



Some local middle schoolers are learning more about space - and student teachers are getting extra classroom experience - through a new summer program at Framingham State College.

"No one has really ever thought about professional development for (student) teachers while they're still in college," said Mary Liscombe, director of the Christa McAuliffe Center at Framingham State College.

For the last few summers, the center has hosted about 20 children from Framingham schools to teach them more about science and engineering.

This year, that effort brings middle schoolers from Framingham together with eight college students who are studying to become teachers, and adds an extra week to the now three-week program for middle schoolers.

"I've gotten so much confidence...we don't get this experience in education (teaching) classes," said Amanda Grove, a student teacher at the college. Yesterday, students studied Apollo 11's 1969 launch

and journey to the moon, part of a weeklong

lesson on space science. As a project, they built specially cushioned cases to protect eggs during a fall, which Liscombe said touched on principles NASA uses when sending probes to land on Mars.

The student teachers work for eight weeks during the summer on classroom curriculum for science, math and related areas, and use that training during their time with the middle school students.

Grove is studying to become a high school health teacher. She said that the program goes beyond science, and gives them extra experience on preparing a classroom.

"Here we're doing planning, we're doing curriculum" development, said Grove.

Another student teacher, Christina Chelli, of Franklin, said she was getting real world experience working with the middle schoolers.

"(After) coming here, I could teach a class now," said Chelli.

The teacher-training program is funded with about \$31,000 combined from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the National Institutes of Health, Liscombe said. The goal is to

improve the young educators' grasp of science, including student teachers who aren't planning to be science teachers.

"We want to give them a broad excitement about science," said Liscombe.



During the school year, the center also teaches kids and trains up to 700 teachers in scientific developments.

Currently, eight of Framingham State's student teachers are working with about 20 of the town's middle schoolers - the local schools oversee which kids go to the college program. Aside from the science education, the kids benefit from seeing a college first-hand at a young age.

"The Framingham public schools like it because it gets their kids onto a college campus," said Liscombe.

Liscombe hopes to get enough funding to continue the program next year, so the current group of student teachers can return, and younger educators in training can join them. She estimates they'll need at least \$50,000 in grants to continue it, and they want to offer the program nationally, and replicate it at other Challenger Centers like the one at Framingham State.

Liscombe said the importance of a program like the one overseen by the McAuliffe Center is that it connects kids directly to science education. Some people take science education for granted because of the prevalence of technology in daily life, she said, and without encouragement, many kids may not decide to pursue a scientific field as a career.

"Kids want to grow up to be an assistant to a celebrity...we haven't been doing a good job about getting them excited about this," said Liscombe.

More needs to be done to encourage the teaching of science, she said.

"We have to teach them how to think, and we have to teach them how to solve problems," said Liscombe.

Kayman Chong, entering his freshman year at Framingham High, has taken part in the McAuliffe summer science program for three years. He said he keeps coming back because he gets to meet new people.

Framingham's Collen Smith is entering the eighth grade, and said he enjoys learning about space.

"It's pretty fun here. I'm learning a lot of stuff," he said.

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