

Easton educators want more Science from Scientists

BY PAULA VOGLER CORRESPONDENT / FEBRUARY 18, 2016

With a nudge from Selectman Dan Smith when he proposed the idea to the school committee last year, almost 300 sixth-grade students at Easton Middle School have been reaping the benefits of a new program introduced last fall.

"Science from Scientists" brings real scientists into the classroom every other week to engage students in hands-on science activities from people who work in various STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) fields.

At a Feb. 11 selectmen's meeting, Assistant Superintendent Lisha Cabral made the case for making the program school wide next year. It would be among the items on the school's list that could be done if selectmen move forward with a Proposition 2 ½ override request.

Yasmin Kroll, Science from Scientists development officer, said the United States ranked behind 19 other countries in science literacy.

She said while STEM jobs are growing three times faster than non-STEM jobs, just 17.3 percent of grade 8-12 students are proficient and interested in STEM careers.

Last year, the school department decided it needed to ramp up efforts with STEAM education, which adds "art" to its STEM team.

"We realized science (for students in school) was about to come out with brand new standards that were much more rigorous," Cabral said. "Just like any other service industry, you need to stay on top of new developments."

Not only does the program help students, Cabral said it also gives the professional development teachers need to stay up to speed.

She said teachers choose 18 of 80 science modules available for Science from Scientists to come in and work with their classes on.

"All year long they have opportunities to engage these students," she said.

While the cost is \$15,000 for every other week of sessions for six classes of students, Cabral said the district actually spent \$30,000 so the organization could come in every week to cover the school's 12 classes of sixth graders.

She said donors like FEEE, Stonehill College, Ameresco, Woodard and Curran, and Whelan Associates made the program possible.

In order to bring the program to all students in grades 6-8, Cabral said the school district would need to spend \$90,000 next year. Smith said currently 8 out of 10 of the highest paying jobs for college graduates were in STEM fields.

Kroll said the program is designed to "improve students' attitude and aptitude" in STEM areas.

"We want them to feel excited going into science," she said. "We bring in charismatic scientists and hands on materials."

Kroll said science, technology, and engineering test scores are tracked and there is a 25 percent improvement on fifth grade MCAS scores for students exposed to the Science from Scientists program.

The program is unique, according to Kroll, because it takes place during school hours, has a measurable impact and is endorsed by the state.



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By Paula Vogler
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