Statewide STEM Education Program Reaches More than 3300 6th Graders in Worcester County

DIGITS Makes Connections between What Students Study in School and How Math and Science are Used in the World around Them

Boston, MA – June 2013  DIGITS is an innovative program that connects sixth-grade classes in Massachusetts schools with STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) professionals to inspire student interest in STEM subjects and careers. STEM professionals, recruited as volunteers by DIGITS, presented to more than 3300 sixth grade students in Worcester County over the course of the 2012 – 2013 academic year, talking about their careers and emphasizing the importance of math and science in today’s world.

First implemented in Massachusetts schools in 2009, DIGITS STEM volunteers visited 33 schools in 19 communities across the region. Participating communities include Bolton, Clinton, Douglas, Fitchburg, Gardner, Lancaster, Leominster, Milford, Oxford, Pepperell, Rutland, Sturbridge, Sutton, Webster, West Boylston, West Brookfield, West Warren, Winchendon and Worcester. Of the 33 schools in Worcester County hosting volunteers, 7 participated for the first time this year and 7 other schools have participated for all 4 years of the program’s operation in the region.

The DIGITS program is based on a uniquely designed alphabet with a STEM icon embedded in each letter. This alphabet has evolved into a set of hands-on activities that volunteers use to engage students in the classroom. The program also provides a set of online STEM resources to teachers to supplement classroom instruction over the course of the academic year. The goals of the program are to demonstrate to students the connections between the math and science they study in school and the world around them and to open their minds to the exciting career opportunities that science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields provide. DIGITS is available free of charge to all Massachusetts public schools with a sixth grade.

Worcester Superintendent Dr. Melinda Boone has encouraged schools in her district to participate in the program over the last four years. She stated, “We recognize the importance of STEM education for our students and programs such as DIGITS provide a creative way for them to meet and interact with role models and learn about the broader impact of math and science on the world.”

“Building STEM literacy among America's next generation of leaders is critical,” said DIGITS CEO Joyce L. Plotkin. “Our volunteers from across the state are great role models for the students, represent multiple STEM sectors, and are broadly reflective of the workforce - 44% women, 24% minority, and 56% with advanced degrees.”

Local Massachusetts organizations including Abbott Laboratories, Cisco Systems, Dassault Systemes, EMC, IBM, Intel, Karl Storz Endoscopy, MathWorks, MEDITECH, Raytheon, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., and Worcester Polytechnic Institute, provided 31 STEM professionals to visit the region’s classrooms.

Kevin Lorenc, Director of Communications for MathWorks, DIGITS lead sponsor stated, “As a STEM company, we are committed to generating awareness about the need for STEM education and to increasing the flow of qualified professionals into the STEM pipeline. We are proud to work with DIGITS and happy to empower our
employees to deliver a compelling STEM message to students.” MathWorks provided the largest number of volunteers in the region, with 8 employees visiting participating schools.

DIGITS is now in its fourth year of implementation and has been recognized by the Governor’s STEM Advisory Council with its @Scale endorsement, acknowledging DIGITS as a successful, measurable, and scalable program. Over the last three years of the program, 36,273 students in 229 schools in 127 cities/towns were motivated to study math and science by 409 volunteers from 90 companies/state agencies. Last year, the program reached 20% of all sixth graders in the state, more than 14,000 students. Over 50% of the schools that participated are Title 1 schools with a high percentage of at risk students. Students reached by the program showed a statistically significant increase in their interest in and knowledge of STEM subjects and careers and an increase in interest in STEM-related after school activities.

About DIGITS:

DIGITS is a cross-sector STEM education/awareness initiative that partners STEM professionals with sixth-grade classes across the Commonwealth to increase student interest in math and science subjects and careers and provides an online portfolio of STEM resources to teachers. Created by six leading science and technology industry associations representing the IT, life sciences, engineering, and clean energy sectors, DIGITS is implemented in partnership with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association, and the Massachusetts Secondary School Administrators’ Association. DIGITS is currently underwritten by grants from MathWorks (lead sponsor), Massachusetts Department of Higher Education STEM Pipeline Fund, Vertex Pharmaceuticals, Dassault Systemes, Meditech, Society for Information Management (SIM), Google (through the Tides Foundation), Millennium, Cisco, EMD Serono, IBM, Raytheon, Broadcom, PTC, and an anonymous donor.

For more information on DIGITS, go to www.digits.us.com. You can also view the program’s theme song/music video “Make DIGITS My Business” on the website.

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