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# Leading the way in STEM education

By Debbie H. "Dee" Johnston May 20, 2012

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The May 6 Daily Press editorial ("Fuel for a rising tide") noted that "to compete in a global economy, our public education system needs to include greater emphasis on science, technology, engineering and math ("STEM") education."

The editorial then asks, "School Boards, are you listening?"

The answer from the [Newport News](#) School Board is that we are not only listening, but have been strategically using limited resources and partnering with local businesses and organization to lead the way in STEM education. Here are a few examples:

- Using one-time federal stimulus funding, Newport News Public Schools (NNPS) renovated all middle and high school science labs and revised the science curriculum to take advantage of the 21st century facilities now available to our students. Science is now approached in a hands-on, problem-solving manner that prepares students to apply that knowledge in today's career fields.
- Heritage High School is part of the Peninsula-wide Governor's Academy for Innovation, Technology and Engineering.
- NNPS has formed strong partnerships with many area organizations to promote STEM education. NNPS and Newport News Shipbuilding, [NASA](#) Langley, Jefferson Lab, to name a few partners, are working hard to provide students with experience in STEM careers.
- To promote interest in engineering and other STEM fields, Newport News Shipbuilding partnered with NNPS in April to host the first Egg Drop Engineering Competition for middle and high school students. According to Newport News Shipbuilding's Career Pathways Manager Jennifer McClain, "Our partnership gives the shipyard the opportunity to provide input in preparing students for STEM careers."
- The [Denbigh](#) High School Aviation Academy has built a strong partnership with NASA Langley. According to NASA Langley's Head of Education Roger Hathaway, "By addressing STEM needs now and teaching our kids to be problem solvers, students will go on to address needs at not only NASA, but also Jefferson Lab, the shipyard and needs across the nation."
- NNPS partnered with the Newport News Education Foundation, Jefferson Lab, the Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce, and the Peninsula Council for Workforce Development in March to hold the first-ever STEM Summit on the Peninsula to raise awareness of the need for STEM education and encourage the business community to help grow the STEM initiative.
- NNPS recently won three competitive STEM-related grants from the Virginia Department of Education in partnership with Jefferson Lab, [University of Virginia](#), [Radford](#), Virginia Commonwealth University, and Longwood.

The above reflects only a small portion of the STEM initiative in Newport News Public Schools. NNPS also has strong Career Pathways and magnet school programs that align with STEM subjects. With a solid STEM foundation in our schools, the goal now is to join forces with more

organizations to build a world-class STEM initiative.

The need for community-wide involvement was put succinctly by STEM Summit participant Dr. Deborah [George Wright](#), vice president of workforce development at [Thomas Nelson Community College](#):

"Preparing a STEM-ready population of young people who can succeed now and in the future is a team sport that requires players in public education, business, higher education and local government, said Wright. "NNPS has put together a team of partners that is among the best anywhere and is reaping rewards for our students, our economy, and our region."

We agree with the Daily Press that public schools must be involved in helping prepare future workers and invite readers to join the team that is working to make this happen.

*Johnston is chairman of the Newport News School Board. To learn more about the NNPS STEM initiative, please visit [nnschools.org](http://nnschools.org). For information on how to join the STEM partnership contact Patrick Finneran at [patrick.finneran@nn.k12.va.us](mailto:patrick.finneran@nn.k12.va.us).)*