

## Dallas ISD students to learn through new Science of Flight curriculum



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Teachers filled the lobby of Frontiers of Flight Museum, craning their necks toward the two-story ceiling.

Standing on the balcony, their colleagues dropped mini parachutes sheets of white paper tied with strings to paperclips to the group below.

As the papers glided toward the floor, their counterparts scribbled notes about how fast each descended.

The exercise wasn't merely a team-building drill: It was training for a new curriculum to be introduced in several Dallas ISD elementary classrooms this month.

Through a partnership with Blue Sky Educational Foundation, the district is launching Science of Flight. It is a hands-on, inquiry- and project-based six-week science curriculum for fourth- and fifth-graders at 14 DISD schools. In all, about 665 students in 30 classrooms will participate.

The students won't be flying planes, but they will be learning about the four forces of flight: lift, drag, gravity and thrust.

During the lessons, students will follow flight through a focus on birds, historical perspectives including the Wright Brothers and pioneering test pilot Chuck Yeager, and the use of satellites in daily life. Materials will be provided for the teacher to use with students, along with a manual that is integrated with the existing science curriculum. Each of these kits cost\$1,000.

Blue Sky provides the curriculum kit for free to the district. Dallas philanthropists Jim and Angela Thompson donated \$1 million to launch the Dallas initiative.

It's important for young students to start thinking early about their educational and professional futures, the teachers said.

"I like it very much. I'm having a lot of fun," said Rafael Zapiain, a teacher at Paul L. Dunbar Learning Center in southeast Dallas, of the program training. "We need to get the kids thinking of high school and college. If we can get them hooked into these fun things, they can start thinking about it as a career."

Blue Sky started preparing teachers Jan. 6 at the flight museum and will continue to train them throughout the semester at their campuses.

Deanna Dupuy, a fifth-grade science teacher at C.F. Carr Elementary School in West Dallas, said she could already incorporate what she had learned into her own classroom.

"I'm very appreciative that they're not just giving us a binder of what we should do, but actually showing us how to do it," she said.

Vincent Reyes, DISD's executive director for curriculum, said he's pleased with the approach.

"Superintendent [Mike] Miles talks about the importance of collective impact ... No collective impact is going to work if these teachers

aren't properly prepared and supported," he said. "The first step is professional development for teachers; the other part is getting the families involved."

The 14 participating elementary schools weren't chosen at random. They are part of the district's Imagine 2020 Strategic Feeder Pattern Initiative.

The strategic feeder patterns include many of the schools that have the most opportunity to improve, according to district officials. They are schools with students who district staff members believe could benefit most from highly focused resources and support.

"When Blue Sky came to us, they wanted to pilot it somewhere, so we said, 'Why don't we start the SFP schools, the elementary schools ... We're hoping to expand it to other campuses later,'" said DeeDee Lozano, director of the the district's STEM department.

Lozano said teachers are able to present this new curriculum any way they wish.

"The 14 campuses have an extra hour in the day," she said. "They can do it during their regular science hour, in that additional activity hour or even do it as an after-school activity program."

Skyline High School already has an aeronautics cluster for students interested in aviation careers. Sammie Perez, 21, went through the program and is pursuing a career in the field with the help of Blue Sky, which gave him a scholarship in 2009. He is now a flight instructor, working up to earn his professional pilot's license.

"It changed my way of looking at aviation," he said. "I'm sure the students here are going to be appreciative."

Perez said the four-year Skyline program gave him a good foundation and has really helped his career.

It's never too early to spark students' interest in science, technology, engineering and math careers, Lozano said.

"The nation has this big, huge STEM initiative, and so we know that STEM jobs increase all over and we need to get our babies prepared and equip them with the necessary tools to compete [for] all of the STEM-related jobs," Lozano said. "Our babies don't always know what they might be interested in, so it's nice to be able to expose them to these things and to spark interest in these kind of things."

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