

Middle school students tackle global challenges

Climate change, pollution, epidemics, child abuse—these are just a few of the global challenges that 7th-graders at Howard Bishop Middle School have been tackling over the last five months as part of ExploraVision, a national competition designed to promote an interest in science among young people.



With guidance from scientists from the University of Florida and other community



volunteers, students in both the Academy of Technology and Gifted Studies and the major program teamed up to study critical social and environmental problems and develop possible solutions to those problems. Every Friday the students would meet in the media center, where they researched their chosen issue, then

collaborated on a research paper and a display that they presented to expert judges during the school's recent 'Future Fair.'

One of those judges was Jason Smith, an associate professor with the UF School of Forest Resources and Conservation.

"I think this is an excellent program," said Smith. "The students are very enthusiastic, are clearly very engaged in their projects and they've done a fantastic job. I'm very, very impressed."

The program was organized by science teacher Tonya Camaratta in collaboration with fellow science teacher Terri Cornelison and media specialist Diane Colson. Camaratta says she wanted all 7th-graders to experience for themselves the value of science by researching an issue that was important to them.

"It's important for students to see that science isn't just something that's taught from a book," she said. "We want them to think about it as a solution to problems they see in the world. That makes them more excited about science in general and more likely to become scientists."

"It's been a life lesson," said Kevin Fisher, Jr. "One of the judges asked if I'd like to be a scientist, and I said 'yes' because this project enlightened me and motivated me to keep learning more."

"It's setting us up for when we get older," said Cayden Parker. "By the time we're 17, 18 or 19, there's no telling what we'll be thinking of and the ideas and solutions we'll be coming up with."

Camaratta will now be submitting several of the students' projects to the ExploraVision competition. Those entries will include an abstract, their ten-page research paper outlining the problem, potential solutions, a bibliography and even sample web pages to communicate their vision. Regional winners will be announced March 10, and students have the opportunity to win a spot in the national competition and various prizes.

First place winners in the school's Future Fair included:

Life Sciences: Rayann Hollingsworth, Kourtney Hutchinson, Anijah Browning-Williams and Jermari Pollock (not pictured) for their project 'Vaccine 3000: The Ebola Aerosol.'

Physical Sciences: Cayden Parker, Tyler Lemeer, Kevin Fisher, Jr. and Melvin Boyd (not pictured) for their project 'The Solution to Chemical Pollution.'

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