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Contact:

Erica Taylor 843-937-6303

Media Release

CCSD Students Launch School Year with NASA

Office of Strategy and Communications

Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Erica Taylor
Chief Officer

Charleston, SC – Nearly 1,000 Charleston County School District (CCSD) students from over 20 schools attended the STEM Career Fair at the North Charleston Convention Center Wednesday, August 29, 2018. The event, hosted by Charleston County, allowed students to explore STEM-related businesses, participate in hands-on learning experiences, and interact with NASA staff.

One of the highlights for the middle school and high school scholars was watching demonstrations of NASA's new heavy-lift rocket, the Space Launch System. Another highlight was the opportunity to speak with retired astronaut Dr. Don Thomas.

Students listened intently as Thomas described his time in space and the many space flight experiences he had. Selected by NASA in January 1990, Dr. Thomas became an astronaut in July 1991.

Asked by a scholar what he took from those experiences, Thomas replied, "It changed me in two ways. I now have a keen appreciation for how fragile the earth is. Secondly, ask yourself how you view your place on planet Earth. When I am asked where I'm from I say, 'I'm from earth.' We all are. We are all earthlings here and we all have to do our part to take better care of our planet."

Dr. Thomas will be visiting CCSD elementary school throughout the rest of the week, including St. Andrews School of Math and Science, Angel Oak Elementary, Mary Ford Elementary, Sanders-Clyde Elementary, and North Charleston Elementary.

Chad Vail, CCSD's Work-based Learning Partnerships Coordinator with the Career & Technology Education Support Team, said career exploration of this nature not only improves academic performance, but also improves students' knowledge of career options during the critical years when they are also beginning to venture beyond the orbit of their parents.

SPAWAR was one of over 25 business vendors on hand. Kelly Thompson, Career Fairs and Career Academies Project Lead for SPAWAR, said they participate in the STEM Career Fair and similar events for a number of reasons.

"It helps not only in the workforce but in the community as a whole," explained Thomas. "The goal is to get kids interested in science and math, introduce them to SPAWAR, and show them that this is a place that they can come and work locally. We want to keep kids in this area for our workforce."

Their booth featured Meeper Bots, which demonstrated mechanical engineering aspects of toys made of Legos with Bluetooth capability. The students learned about aero-dynamics, load, and various aspects that in turn introduced them to the SPAWAR robotics program.

Wando High School 10th grader Ian Barrett was excited to attend the career fair with his engineering class and listen to a real astronaut speak about living in space. Barrett has not yet determined his career path, however he thinks engineering seems like a fun choice.

"This is an amazing opportunity for our community for collaboration and commerce," said Charleston County Government Operations Officer Kevin Limehouse, one of the organizers of the event. "We feel this expo was more than just connections with NASA. It allowed like-minded businesses and organizations to meet and work together."

Photo Caption

Dylan Brockman, a freshman at Wando, speaks to retired astronaut Dr. Don Thomas.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools that span 1,000 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 86 schools and specialized programs. With approximately 6,100 employees district-wide, CCSD is the fourth largest employer in the region.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools, and is divided into three Learning Communities. Options include specialized programs in science, engineering and mathematics; liberal arts; music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military and other public service enterprises.