

Students to explore science program

ScienceQuest is an unusual after-school option coming to Hand Middle School

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Staff Writer

Students at Hand Middle School will have a rare opportunity to experience science in a new after-school program this fall.

The Fast Forward Community Technology Center at the school was one of just 18 technology centers across the nation chosen to participate in the ScienceQuest program.

"Anything that we can do that opens science up to children has a communitywide impact," said Fast Forward director Dee Albritton. "This allows them to succeed and be competitive with their peers nationally."

ScienceQuest blends scientific inquiry with information technology. Student groups will conduct scientific investigations by interviewing community members, visiting local science institutions and researching on the Internet.

SEE SCIENCE PAGE 2

SCIENCE

FROM PAGE 1

They will then showcase their documented discoveries on multimedia Web sites. The sites will feature the Hand students along with their fellow ScienceQuest peers across the country.

"The students love learning about technology because it's interactive and not like learning with only paper and pencils," said Canisha Fletcher, a Hand teacher.

The new program is welcomed by the middle school.

"Every teacher tries to incorporate technology into their curriculum," said Fletcher, who teaches eighth-grade science and introduction to computers at Hand.

"As technology becomes more

sophisticated, it's an ongoing struggle to find enough time in the academic school year to teach kids who don't always have access to these resources at home," she said.

The organizers of the program plan to start with two teams in late August and hope to expand to four teams by the end of the semester. The program may be opened up to students from other schools if transportation can be found.

Although Fast Forward has been at Hand for three years, the community center is not operated by the school district or limited to serving only middle school students.

"Our youngest student is 2, and oldest, 87," Albritton said.

The center gives low-income members of the community exposure to technology through classes and summer camps. Fast Forward

offers classes targeted toward teaching older citizens computer literacy.

Unusual programs like robotics and Internet classes provide interactive learning opportunities.

ScienceQuest is being funded by the National Science Foundation and supported by the Education Development Center Inc.

Fast Forward is operated through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The Nord Family Foundation will provide funding for next year's summer program. Fast Forward is also made possible by other grants and donations from the community.

For more information on Fast Forward or ScienceQuest, contact Dee Albritton at (803) 254-2345.

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