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Fort Drum to support STEM education for students with DoD STARBASE Academy

FORT DRUM, N.Y. – It may sound sci-fi, but the educational opportunities are real.

Fort Drum recently received Department of Defense approval to locate a STARBASE Academy on post for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education.

DoD STARBASE is a premier educational program sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, aimed at challenging students with “hands-on, minds-on” STEM activities, while also exploring diverse and critical career fields.

“By engaging this generation of students in STEM education, we can help pave the way for the next generation of critical thinkers and innovators that our nation requires to be successful,” said Brig. Gen. (P) Milford H. Beagle Jr., 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum commander. “At the same time, this allows us another opportunity to be positive role models and inspire the younger members of our communities.”

More than 70 military installations across the U.S. support the DoD STARBASE program, with more than 90,000 students participating annually. Fort Drum is the first installation in New York state to host DoD STARBASE.

“This is a game-changer for students and educators in our communities,” said Sharon Addison, Fort Drum Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation director. “It’s a huge win for Fort Drum and the North Country, and we are so grateful for the opportunity to support this DoD program.”

Currently, 14 North Country school districts have committed to participating in the STARBASE Academy at Fort Drum, and the program was endorsed by Fort Drum and 10th Mountain Division (LI) leaders, district superintendents and New York state elected officials during the application process.

Wendy O’Sullivan, Fort Drum school liaison officer, said that the installation was eligible to apply for DoD STARBASE because the North Country meets the mandate to support students in Title 1 schools.

“The program seamlessly blends the goals and objectives of Fort Drum and the school districts’ standards of learning objectives and strategic plans,” she said. “STARBASE is a true Partners in Education initiative as it increases the bond between the community and the military installation, while providing STEM educational experiences for students and teachers in a hands-on, high-tech discovery- and inquiry-based environment.”

The initiative focuses on fifth-grade education, with peer-reviewed curriculum designed to improve STEM knowledge, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The program engages students through the inquiry-based curriculum with experiential activities. It can also serve as an outreach program to increase STEM education awareness within the Northern New York school districts.

“Barbara Koscak, the founder of STARBASE, conducted research which went into the discovery that fifth grade was the best grade to target for this program,” O’Sullivan said. “She traveled throughout the U.S., attending teacher, superintendent and specialty workshops, and they all said ‘Create your program for fifth-graders.’”

DoD STARBASE was developed in 1991 and has been DoD-funded since 1993. In fiscal year 2019, participating students’ performance in physics, chemistry and mathematics improved by 36 percent, 32 percent and 19 percent, respectively. Additionally, there was an improved attitude about the military in 80 percent of students.

“The 2018-2019 DoD STARBASE program was successful in achieving its major goals, as measured by the assessment of STEM-related student attitudes and knowledge before and after attending the program,” O’Sullivan said. “It produced measurable changes in students’ positive attitudes toward STEM subjects, and those positive attitudes are likely to be helpful in encouraging further STEM learning throughout their academic careers.”

Addison said that the concept is to host a minimum of 60 classes per year (approximately 30 students per class), each receiving 25 hours of interactive instruction, hands-on activities and specialized on-post tours. Schedules will be tailored between the STARBASE Academy and school districts. Bussing to and from the academy will be furnished by the schools.

While the intent is to primarily serve disadvantaged, underserved students within the school districts, the STARBASE program also will be available to parochial school students and to homeschool families.

“Every fifth-grade student will have this opportunity to participate in this ‘hands-on, minds-on’ STEM curriculum,” Addison said.

The Academy, located in Bldg. 1029 on Lewis Avenue, will undergo more than $1 million in renovations, partially through DoD funding. The building has two dedicated classrooms, with potential for a third. It is ideally located near 10th Mountain Division (LI) training and simulations facilities, as well as other sites that could offer educational, historical and military experiences for students.

The STARBASE Academy is expected to open in spring 2022.

“We are excited to partner with DoD and our school districts to shape our future generation’s potential to discover individual gifts and talents,” Addison said. “The STARBASE Academy will allow them to explore career opportunities they may never have considered, especially after exiting COVID lockdown.”

To learn more about STARBASE, visit [www.dodstarbase.org](http://www.dodstarbase.org).

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