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# SCIENCE

**By Mallie Toth**

JESSICA GRELL'S FOURTH-GRADE CLASS AT Seatack Elementary in Virginia Beach, Va., was learning about the role of oysters in cleaning the Chesapeake Bay when it teamed up with the Norfolk District of the North Atlantic Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The students raised oysters and measured their growth, applying the science skills they learned from their textbooks to real-world applications.

Keith Lockwood, deputy chief of water resources in the Norfolk District, visited Grell's classroom and said he walked away "amazed at the creativity the students had and the understanding they had of all the things that were in play (affecting the ecosystem), including economic factors."

Seatack Elementary, with an enrollment of nearly 400 students, is located in a less-affluent area of the city, which means students may have decreased access to the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. The Corps makes a point to actively reach out to schools like Seatack to expose students to STEM skills.

Kristen Donofrio, a biological scientist at the Norfolk District Office, organizes projects involving the oyster gardens. "We enjoy having the children out on the project, introducing the students to our jobs and planting some ideas in their heads," she said.

The ideas seem to have taken root with students like Megan, one of Grell's former students. "I was able to learn from the real world instead of just a textbook," she said.

Her mother, Katie, added that she and other parents appreciated the opportunity the Corps offers the kids, helping to expand their horizons and introduce them to advanced science and math ideas they might otherwise not encounter. She said she thinks this has influenced Megan's potential career path as she is now expressing interest in areas like environmental law.