

## Upper Dublin School District receives grant from NASA

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The latest lessons and information from NASA will now be touching down in Upper Dublin classrooms.

The Upper Dublin School District has received a \$2,500 Summer of Innovation Mini-Grant from NASA, which the district will use for teacher development to improve its meteorology curriculum.

Kim Small, director of the district planetarium, applied for the grant at the end of the 2010-11 school year.

The grant, according to Small, is awarded to schools for either a summer opportunity for students, such as a science summer camp, or professional development opportunities for teachers.

The district learned it had received the grant in July and has until Dec. 15 to spend the funding on both professional development and supplies, according to Small.

"The bulk of it is being used for teacher training," she said.

A component of the grant is a train-the-trainer approach, in which a small group of district staff are trained and then pass along that training to other teachers.

During the summer, Small, a district math specialist and a first-grade teacher at Thomas Fitzwater Elementary received training on different NASA programs and curriculum activities, specifically the Weatherbug equipment.

Weatherbug equipment was installed on the roof at Thomas Fitzwater Elementary this spring thanks to funding from the Upper Dublin Education Foundation and the school's PTO, while one was installed at Fort Washington Elementary School a few years back, according to Small.

The Weatherbug equipment allows teachers and students to have access to up-to-date weather data from that location, which can be integrated into lesson plans. The equipment also gives teachers access to a variety of interactive lesson plans.

"The equipment was there and the program was there, but no one had the time to learn how to use it," Small said.

And that's where the NASA grant came in. The three faculty members were trained on how to use the program and will now be passing that knowledge onto the rest of the district.

"The three of us were the leads to explore all the different avenues to bring weather and meteorology to the elementary level particularly, but it will trickle up to the middle school and high school levels," Small said. "We are training the other teachers on how to use the Weatherbug program.

"I believe it's an amazing program that has a complete list of lesson plans, interactive lessons," Small said, noting teachers can search by grade level and area of science. The data from the Weatherbug also can be accessed by both teachers and students via the Internet.

Beyond dealing with just meteorology, the Weatherbug features lessons on how meteorology impacts other subject areas, such as geography, math and social studies, according to Small.

So far, teacher training has focused on the elementary level, with the four schools beginning to use the program this month. Thomas Fitzwater Elementary has already begun using the program in lesson plans.

"The feedback I'm getting from them is that they'll definitely use it in the classroom," Small said.

The professional development will transfer to the middle and high schools, as the Weatherbug has lessons up to the 12th-grade level, according to Small.

"My personal goal is after the groundwork has been laid at the elementary schools, I'll introduce this to the middle school teachers," she said. "I do want to take it also to the high school."

Small said the enhanced meteorology programs and having interactive lessons will be a major benefit to the district's curriculum.

"One topic in science that is covered at most grade levels, if not all, is weather," she said, noting its connections to national and state standards. "When you pull up an interactive lesson, it's accessing immediate data off the roof at Thomas Fitzwater or Fort Washington. It's constantly pulling in live data into lesson plans."

Additionally, the Weatherbug will help integrate science across subjects in a more interdisciplinary approach.

"They can still make connections into the science and make it cross-curricular, which I think makes it more real world from the students," Small said.

This mini-grant is actually the second the district has received from NASA, the first coming in 2005, and Small said it's nice for the district to be recognized by a top-level organization like NASA.

"It's always nice when we're recognized for the hard work that we do, and I think grants like this are given to schools that show they have achieved certain levels and show they are willing to try new and innovative programs," she said. "It assures us we're going in the right direction in the sciences and we're striving to continually improve."