

# Egg Harbor Township schools' aviation camp goes virtual

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EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP — Seventh and eighth grade students in township schools are getting a glimpse into the field of aviation as the district continued its Aviation Summer Program this year, virtually.

In a weekly Zoom call Wednesday, 26 students met to hear from Lt. Col. Michael Castania, director of aerospace education at New Jersey Wing Aerospace Education for the Civil Air Patrol U.S. Air Force Auxiliary, who gave them a brief history lesson on flight before delving into the different aspects of flying a plane.

The students also watched a video of Castania's recent flight over Blairstown airport in North Jersey.

This year's activities are less hands-on than what was offered at last year's inaugural camp, but district Director of Career and Technical Education Carmelita Graham said she wanted to offer something for students despite COVID-19 social distancing requirements.

"I wrestled with do I just not have it this year? The students might be a little spent from being online in the spring; will I get students even interested?" Graham said, but she decided to forge ahead.

To her surprise, she had 26 students participate. The program began July 8 with a presentation by Kurt Stofko from the New Jersey Aviation Education Council. Other presenters include the Federal Aviation Administration William J. Hughes Technical Center's AvSTEM team and Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Moseley from the 177th Fighter Wing, a unit of the New Jersey Air National Guard stationed in Egg Harbor Township.

The camp coincides with the district's roll-out of an Aviation Academy at the high school. Graham said the camp is designed to help students get acquainted with aviation before high school.

"We wanted to give students an opportunity to hear 'what is aviation?' before they had to make a choice," she said.

She also noted the big push within the county government for more aviation-focused educational programs as Atlantic County hopes to become a hub for the field. In addition to the airport, Tech Center and 177th, Egg Harbor Township is also home to the National Aviation Research and Technology Park.

"We want to expose our students to marketable careers ... and we think this is the best way to do it," Graham said.