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Camps build science skills

BY MECHELLE HANKERSON

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ZEBULON — For some students, a break from school means no more science and more computer games.

For others who participate in STEM for Kids, about one week of their track out time is all about science and in some cases, building small computers in robots made out of Legos.

Last week, STEM for Kids held a camp at East Wake Academy. Students built robots out of Legos and programmed them to do specific tasks.

STEM for Kids is a local nonprofit group that holds camps around the Triangle during schools' track outs. Each session focuses on different topics within the science, technology, engineering and math fields.

Moni Singh, founder and CEO of STEM for Kids, said activities like building robots is what the weeklong camp is all about: making science, technology, engineering and mathematics "fun and real."

"I might get a job one day and I could use some of what I learned here if I get a job like this," said 11-year-old Rhone Oldham, a sixth-grader at East Wake Academy.

Early in the week, students learned how to make their robots move.

"We've learned to program (the robot) so that it will follow a black line on the floor, but we could program it so it follows something else," said 10-year-old Aubri Sprouse, a fifth-grader at East Wake Academy.



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Singh, who used to be an engineer herself, said most children become interested in STEM fields around the age of 8. Even if the child is interested, it can still sometimes be hard to explain how STEM knowledge extends outside the classroom, Singh said.

At one camp over the summer, Singh said camp counselors asked students if they knew how science was applied outside of school.

Less than half the children said yes.

By the end of the camp, which focused on programming, Singh said there was an increase in students who said they understood science's real-world application.

At the camp at East Wake Academy, students' robots were programmed to move, which helped them understand how robots can be used.

"It's fun, you make things and you see the result," Singh said. "(The children) are making that real-world connection and it's something we need to do more of in the schools."

In addition to learning how to program robots, Singh said the camps emphasize skills to make sure students can interact with more than just robots.

Much as the scientific knowledge is applied to students' everyday life, STEM for Kids focuses on the importance of being able to function and communicate in teams. The camps' projects are created to teach students social skills like teamwork and communicating with peers.

"Collaboration is important to work in the real world," Singh said. "I could be a great engineer, but I may not work well in a team."

Source: <http://www.easternwakenews.com/2013/09/30/3242071/camps-build-students-stem-and.html>