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MEDIA RELEASE

HCSD Students Enjoy a Maritime Expedition in Key Largo at MarineLab

Key Largo, Fla. – Twenty-two incoming 7-9th grade students from throughout the Hernando County School District traveled to Key Largo, Fla. June 14-16 to attend a summer camp at MarineLab.

During the camp students learned about the different types of marine habitats in the area and studied the many species of unique flora and fauna while getting to experience what they learned up close.

“I liked being able to see the fish and coral in person because you can understand things better when you see them in-person rather than in just a textbook or picture,” said London Levison an incoming 7th grade student at Challenger K-8.

The Key Largo area is unique as it is one of the few places on the planet that offers such a wide range of biodiverse habitats.

“Salt marshes, mangrove forests, coral reefs, seagrass beds and more are centralized around us which brings a lot of biodiversity in a unique and accessible area. This allows students to see how remarkable the different environments are during their visit,” said Rachel Carrier, Director of Operations for MarineLab.

Students also studied ongoing coral reef conservation efforts and learned about the many environmental impacts caused by humans and natural causes that are affecting the many marine habitats.

“The exposure gained from their experiences helps prompt students to think about the impacts on the environment they have in their everyday lives and encourages them to care for and protect the environment they had the opportunity to see,” said Carrier.

Visits like these are critical to increase students understanding of the environment and provide enriching learning opportunities.

“My favorite part was getting more familiar with the actual things we are seeing out in the ocean while learning the importance and the extent of what microplastics and other environmental impacts have on the ocean versus just going snorkeling and not knowing anything,” said Tatum Heisler an incoming 8th grade student at Powell Middle School.

MarineLab has been providing these types of enriching opportunities to students nationwide for more than 30 years. Trips are supplemented through organizational grants, scholarships and title one funding. To learn more about MarineLab and the experiences they provide visit <https://www.marinelab.org/>

Beth Lastra, Hernando County School District supervisor of college and career programs expressed that camps like the MarineLab experience are selected based on their ability to enhance and extend what students are already learning in the classroom thus providing invaluable hands-on learning experiences that enrich students' education and foster a deeper understanding of the subject areas.

“By tying hands-on field experiences to CTE programs, we help students see real-world applications of their coursework and expose them to potential future careers,” said Lastra.

Hernando Schools plans to continue this camp next year, however one of the primary challenges to offering camps such as this one is financial sustainability. While grants often fund most of the cost when available, supplementary fees can be necessary to cover logistical considerations.

“The future of these enriching summer learning opportunities is promising, but largely dependent on the availability of funding. With continued grant support and potential community partnerships, we hope to expand access to a wider range of programs that align with student interests and career pathways,” said Lastra.

Current HCSD educational summer camps can be found here <https://www.hernandoschools.org/departments/college-career/cte-summer-camps> .



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