

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Low Muckle Elementary School Students Learn Coding From Group Of Male Professionals

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ST. CROIX -- A group of male professionals on St. Croix facilitated a coding workshop in Amanda Burton's sixth-grade class at the Low Muckle Elementary School on March 15 with hopes of garnering the interest of young men in the science, math and technology fields, the Department of Education (D.O.E.) has announced. The group, dubbed Gentlemen of eSTEAM, is an evolvement of the D.O.E. Division of STEAM Education's Boys of the eSTEAM initiative, launched in January 2019.

According to Director of STEAM Education Shamika Williams-Henley, the term eSTEAM is a type of homonym to the word esteem. "We want boys to have "good self-esteem—to be confident and to believe in themselves. Additionally, the goal is to get

boys excited about STEAM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics),” she explained.

Presenters that facilitated the workshop were David Tonge, a front-end Web developer and designer at an Economic Development Commission (EDC) company, Michael T. François, Ph.D., assistant professor of computer science at the University of the Virgin Islands, and Everett A. Ryan, Ph.D., district coordinator of technology and multimedia with VIDE.



The two-hour session catered to a cohort of approximately 25 boys. They were engaged through hands-on demonstrations from Mr. Tonge on web development using Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). Among the skills demonstrated were the insertion and editing of images and text, padding website content, formatting elements, and rapid Web development.

Mr. Francois, who specializes in cybersecurity, taught students programming and best practices when using the Internet. He explained how students could become paid ethical hackers to foil ongoing threats from cyber terrorists, according to the release. Both men shared their educational and other professional background experiences with the boys and highlighted the importance of developing good academic and interpersonal habits, to include listening as a means to learning, reading to learn, proficiency in math, and practical communication skills.

The boys were engaged and asked questions throughout the presentations. A very ambitious Mohamed Dawod stated that he intends to pursue a career in coding and gaming and had recently received a coding book from his sister. Mohamed and his classmates Curtis Charlery, Miguel Guzman, and Eddie Rivera plan to launch a digital firm with a focus on information technology products and services.

Ryan provided additional instructional support throughout the workshop and planned to follow up with students seriously interested in pursuing careers in the information technology field, D.O.E. said.



In January, Ryan and Williams-Henley, along with Jeselle Cruse-Peter, elementary programs coordinator in the St. Croix district, facilitated a coding workshop at the Claude O. Markoe Elementary School to provide an educational component to the D.O.E.'s Crucian Christmas Festival Children's Parade entry. During the parade, the "Boys of eSTEAM" donned coding t-shirts and gaming masks. Following the inaugural workshop, the decision was made to change the term to Gentlemen of eSTEAM, with the thought of appealing to a broader spectrum of male students and participants in the Kindergarten through 12 grade levels and beyond, and to incorporate the concept of male role models, D.O.E. said.

On Saturday, April 13, a similar workshop on Swift Playgrounds, an iPad-based coding application, will be held in the St. Thomas-St. John District at the Lockhart Elementary School library.

The Division of STEAM Education is actively recruiting interested persons to join the eSTEAM initiative. Interested participants should contact Director Williams-Henley at shamika.williams@vide.vi or Dr. Ryan at everett.ryan@vide.vi.

STEAM-related jobs and careers are forecasted to grow and emerge exponentially over several decades. The overarching vision, therefore, is to nurture young minds within the Virgin Islands, both among females and males, to possess the requisite knowledge and skills to become leaders and creators of the burgeoning information age.