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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SRS Engineers “Buddy-Up” with Jackson Middle School Teachers

AIKEN, S.C. (March 17, 2016) – With the help of Savannah River Site (SRS) engineers, Jackson Middle School teachers are revolutionizing the way classes are taught by introducing science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) into all areas of their school curriculum, including English, history and art.

Jackson Middle School Principal Jason Holt is leading the way to increase his students’ thirst for knowledge using a STEM-based system designed to significantly change the way the information is delivered, processed and then understood.

“This is a grassroots, teacher-driven, first of its kind program in Aiken County,” said Holt. “One of our primary goals is to create a ‘school of engineers’ and let the students reap the benefits, which is why we are so pleased with the SRS Engineering Buddy Program.”

Managed by Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) personnel, this new program connects SRS engineers with Holt and his staff of teachers.

Holt explained that the Buddy Program is designed to help create relationships between the students and site engineers, experts in fields related to STEM. Participating SRS engineers are asked to engage and challenge students to reveal how academics are applied in real life situations.

Even the arts program at the school often reinforces what the students are currently learning in traditional STEM-based classes. For example, a science class may be studying photosynthesis in nature, while art teachers assign



SRNS Engineer Michael Mitchell assists Jackson Middle School student Le'Landra Jarvis with a science project as her teacher Sally Brady looks on, all part of a new SRS outreach program known as the “Engineering Buddy Program,” designed to create relationships between the students and site engineers, experts in fields related to STEM.

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tasks requiring a form of artistic expression, whether painting, sculpture or another discipline, to further reinforce how plants obtain energy.

“We no longer want our teachers to continually pour out information in a form of one-way communication, be it mathematics, history or any other subject area,” said Holt. “Our teachers have embraced this innovative concept of primarily being facilitators, encouraging an investigative, give and take approach that creates a questioning and discerning attitude towards learning. The increased student interaction and potential benefits related to this shift in perspective are endless.”

Twice a year, student growth will be measured. Holt and the school staff will use this data to demonstrate to parents that the program is practical and effective.

“Our kids are really pushing us to take it to the next level,” said Holt. “They want to be challenged, and we want to create as many junior scholars as possible.”

Recently, JMS sixth grade students had to stretch their collective knowledge and skills when the entire building used for their classes was shut down after the water was intentionally shut off. As a result, affected students were challenged to work together as a team to develop an innovative and efficient alternate water system.

“It was pretty exciting,” said Holt. “I was proud of them. They took it in stride and performed well.”

According to Kim Mitchell, SRNS Education Outreach and coordinator for the Buddy Program, the alternate water system exercise provides a good example of where JMS teachers can tap the wisdom and experience of veteran SRS engineers.

“Our engineers can ask the students constructive and probing questions to further increase the overall value of solving a task,” said Mitchell. “We want the SRS Engineering Buddy Program to result in the creation of a new instructional model involving SRS engineers working within the STEM system.

Mitchell believes this cooperative partnership will be stimulating for the kids and rewarding for site employees who choose to help optimize this special program.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions is a Fluor-led company whose members are Fluor Federal Services, Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy's Savannah River Site, including the Savannah River National Laboratory, located near Aiken, South Carolina.

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