Prospective Teachers Attend NASA Pre-Service Teacher Conference:

Inspiring the Next Generation of Explorers

Students from the Institute for Families in Society’s Catawba Indian Nation “Catawba Connections” project attended the NASA Pre-Service Teacher Conference administered by the NASA Langley Pre-Service Teacher Program in Alexandria, Virginia, February 12-14, 2004. Catawba Connections is a collaboration between the Catawba Indian Nation-ISWA Department of Children and Youth, USC and Winthrop University. Principal Investigator for the project is Dr. Elsbeth Brown of the Institute at USC. As faculty advisor to the NASA conference, Dr. Brown accompanied student representatives Lacey Sanders and Sheila Heatley of USC-Columbia; John Burnett and Alex Jackson of Winthrop University; Heather Wolf of Wingate College; Shannon Boyd of Pitt Community College; and Stephanie Heatley of Airport High School. Over 750 students and faculty from 31 universities and colleges across the United States participated in this exciting event.

The National Pre-Service Teacher Program (PSTP) is a partnership between the Langley Office of Education and Norfolk State University's School of Science & Technology. The aim of the program is to provide prospective teachers and faculty members opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skill in teaching mathematics and science using technology at the pre-kindergarten, elementary and middle school levels. The program partnership has grown into several conferences and the more in-depth institutes. The Pre-Service Teacher Conference is held each spring and hosts students from selected Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and some majority institutions. For more information on the PSTP please visit their website at http://edu.larc.nasa.gov/pstc.

Asked why is the program so important to the future of our children, Dr. Elsbeth Brown stated, "Science, Math and Technology curricula provides students with opportunities to discover the world and engage in critical thinking. These skills are essential for current students so they can become the problem solvers of tomorrow".

All students agreed that the conference certainly lived up to its theme: “Inspiring the Next Generation of Explorers… As Only NASA Can” and inspired them to meet their goals. Students and faculty were exposed to invigorating sessions, hands-on workshops, and a diverse group of first-rate, inspirational speakers, including Dr. Calvin Mackie, winner of numerous awards such as the 2002 Black Engineer of
the Year Award for College Level Educators; Dr. Ellen Ochoa, the first Hispanic woman in space; and Litefoot, the first Native American Rap Artist and voted “Best Indian Role Model” for his work in the Native American community. An action packed three days of opportunity, the conference culminated in a Career Day where students had the chance to interview with recruiters from public schools and graduate schools from across the country.

“The conference was an excellent fit for our students,” says Dr. Brown. The Catawba Connections project is focused on improving early childhood education for the Catawba Indian Nation. The goal of the work is to enhance existing curriculum through ongoing training and technical assistance, grounded in the Catawba culture and aimed at meeting the Head Start Performance Standards, Head Start Positive Outcomes for Children, and the Creative Curriculum guidelines. Dr. Brown adds, “We look forward to attending next year.”

For more information and photos, please see the Institute website at http://ifs.sc.edu.

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