

Classroom Controversy

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signing up. She also points to a passage in the Army's recruiting handbook that stresses that kids need to see joining up as a positive choice as soon as they "begin to think about the future."

According to program's website, in 2008 there were 60 Starbase academies across in 34 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. It reached more than 54,000 students in 200 school districts. The website also points out that the job market will increasingly need people skilled in math and science, and this program gives kids a leg up.

Last week, the Portland Public Schools board voted to renew the Starbase program, and the \$320,000 to fund it, over the objections of protestors who gathered outside.

Bobbie Regan, a school board member who has opposed recruiting in the past visited the program herself before the vote.

"What I saw were kids working on science and science-based projects," said Regan, who voted for the program.

She argues that Starbase is meant to help kids develop technical skills that will be highly needed in the global economy. Regan also points out that PPS' Mandarin and Russian immersion programs are also funded by the Department of Defense, and speakers of these languages will be highly sought after.

Marilyn Sholian, the director of Portland's Starbase, rejects the notion that the program is a recruitment tool, and points out that six people who staff the program, half of which have teaching credentials, aren't even employed by the Department of Defense.

Typically, the program sees 45 classes a year, according to Sholian, who come from across the city and neighboring school districts.

Kids engage in a variety of hands-on activities- many of which you wouldn't find in a classroom. They use computer programs to design hypothetical sneakers, airplanes, and parts of space stations. The facility also has a 3-D image printer, a machine that cuts objects designed on a computer out of plastic. They also do other exercises, like lifting a teacher seated on a table

with a balloon, and designing a protective layer for an egg that is launched into a wall.

"The kids kind of go, 'I get it,'" said Sholian, who sports a pink vest with an embroidered Starbase logo. She adds that few schools have these resources, let alone the space or time.

But the kids do get a tour of the Air National Guard Base, where uniformed personnel show them F-

15 ject, armored vehicles, and a robot used to detonate bombs.

"Yes, they are in uniform," said Sholian. However, who stresses that no one ever goads the kids into joining up.

Instead, the kids are told that math and science can lead to a broad range of careers, said Sholian, who adds that the program is so full that there wouldn't be time for recruiting anyways.


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