

Scientists, Engineers Help Elementary School Teachers



Deborah Block

Maryland teacher Fred Tenyke discusses science as retired engineer Dave Weiss looks on

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This is the VOA Special English Education Report.

A program in the United States brings scientists and engineers into elementary schools to teach teachers more about how to teach science.

DAVE WEISS: "Welcome to science class. So good to see you guys today."

Dave Weiss is a retired engineer. One day each week he volunteers at Georgian Forest Elementary School in Silver Spring, Maryland, near Washington.

DAVE WEISS: "But the experiment we're going to do, we want to keep all of our variables constant."

He works with teacher Fred Tenyke on science projects for ten-year-olds.

DAVE WEISS: "Fred is so enthusiastic and he's so much fun with the kids. I can see that he really loves what he's doing. I get as much pleasure from helping the teachers as I do helping the students."

Student Jada Lockwood she says enjoys Mr. Weiss' visits to her classroom. She likes the drawings he uses to explain scientific ideas.

JADA LOCKWOOD: "Mr. Weiss, like, he would go in the back and draw, like, these pictures and, like, he helps us a lot."

The American Association for the Advancement of Science sponsors the Senior Scientists and Engineers program. Dave Weiss has been a volunteer in that program for many years. The scientists and engineers help teachers in elementary schools improve their skills.

Mr. Weiss says he and the other volunteers help teachers by providing hands-on expertise.

DAVE WEISS: "In this experiment, I think it might be confusing to the kids that we're dealing with two masses."

He notes that science is an area in which many elementary school teachers have limited experience.

DAVE WEISS: "In elementary school, for the most part, your regular classroom teacher is responsible for teaching science, along with reading and math, and if they don't have a strong science background, just by nature, they're going to tend to underrepresent science in the curriculum."

Fred Tenyke agrees. He just started teaching science classes a few months ago.

FRED TENYKE: "A lot of time I'll spit out information I learned in the book, or things that are part of the curriculum. Dave helps me learn how to supplement that information so that it's more relevant to them, so that it will be more relevant to their work experience later on in life."

American fifteen-year-olds scored about average in science among countries that took part in testing by the OECD in two thousand nine. The OECD is the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Dave Weiss says he is concerned about such results, but hopeful for the future for American students learning science.

DAVE WEISS: "In elementary school I try to just give them a solid foundation. I hope they'll develop a curiosity about what's going on around them."

Fred Tenyke thinks volunteers like Dave Weiss are helping students do that.

FRED TENYKE: "And if you can develop a passion for science, then eventually the grades and the test scores, then that will follow."

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