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Pioneer Program Exposes Youngsters to Marine Life on the College Level

BY DR. CLAUDIA V. SCHRADER

For most of us, the wonders of the ocean, seas and lakes are a mystery left to the imagination – until now. Youth Engagement Summer STEM at Sea!, also known as the YESSS! program, is an initiative geared to youngsters ages 11-17 that explores local marine life off the sandy beach of Kingsborough Community College. Earlier this month, I dropped in on a class where students identified over 10 species of fish caught along the shore at KCC. They even did a little bit of chemistry on the water quality as a part of their study on the human impact on marine biology in our area.

I could see incredible enthusiasm in the faces of this group of local middle school and high school students as they used various scientific techniques to sample different aspects of the ecosystem, analyze it and understand the causes and effects of changes to the ecosystem.

It's the first time KCC has offered the YESSS! program.

The initiative seeks to empower students who show promise in STEM by providing them with foundational scientific experiences to inspire their educational and career paths in maritime biology or maritime technology. Kingsborough partnered with BioBoat, a non-profit organization that specializes in teaching students about aquatic life using maritime technology. Tuition was free for the students, thanks to \$100,000 in NYS funding from Assembly Members Jaime Williams and Stacey Pheffer Amato.

Twelve-year-old James Saad, who expressed that he has had an interest in marine biology since the third grade, said the program gives him the opportunity “to dip my feet a little bit in marine biology and it feels like you are a real marine biologist. I get to see how things impact the water. I get to see marine life; I think it's really amazing.”

“The ocean gives us a lot of things; without the ocean, all of us would die. To pre-



Students attending the Youth Engagement Summer STEM at Sea! (YESSS!) program at Kingsborough Community College test the water quality as a part of their study on the human impact on marine biology in our area. Photo Credit: Kingsborough Community College

serve our oceans and the life, we need to learn a little more about it,” James said.

“It's really fun; we get to go outside, look at water and go on a boat soon,” said William Flanders, another 12-year-old student.

In this 20-hour program,

and biodiversity in our oyster garden; and collect and categorize beach and water plastic using our microplastic trawl and share findings with like-minded organizations to support efforts in the collection of plastic pollution data on oceans and sandy beaches around the world.

I'm very proud KCC was able to offer this summer program to youngsters. When we announced it, more than 309 New York City students applied. Some 200 students will have participated in the program when it wraps up next month.

Dr. Claudia V. Schrader is president of Kingsborough Community College (KCC), a 72-acre academic oasis in beautiful Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn that offers students over 50 academic programs, 100 percent online degrees and affordable two-year degrees for their future. For more information about the YESSS Program click on the following link: <https://cew@kbcc.com/.../2023/05/YESSS-Flyer-Updated-1.pdf>.

students get the chance to fish and perform invertebrate identification; investigate shoreline habitats with field tools; perform plankton tow identification; assist in the restoration of oysters to New York Harbor; monitor growth, water chemistry