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Senior Pentagon leaders visit AFTAC's community school

By Susan A. Romano, AFTAC Public Affairs

PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Senior officials from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) toured Endeavour Elementary School in Cocoa, Fla., Brevard County's first and the State of Florida's only elementary-level community school during their visit to the Air Force Technical Applications Center Sept. 7, 2016 for the center's annual Women in Science and Engineering Symposium.

Dr. Jarris L. Taylor Jr., Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Strategic Diversity Integration, Col. Angela Giddings and Maj. Denisha Darcus, both with the Air Force Diversity and Inclusion office, and Ed Lee, program coordinator for historically black colleges, universities and minority-serving institutions, traveled to the school, with which AFTAC has had a community partnership since May 2015. The quartet, accompanied by AFTAC's human resources program manager Rose Day, met with Endeavour's principal and assistant principals, Rachad Wilson, Doreen Carlo-Coryell and Christy Meraz. Also in attendance was Michele Scott, planning director for Children's Home Society.



After pleasantries and introductions were exchanged, the group sat down in Wilson's office to discuss specifics of Endeavour's community school program and to answer questions the visitors had about AFTAC's mentorship and the school's demographics.

"Two things come to my mind when I think about AFTAC and the impact they've had on us as a school," Wilson said. "The first thing is last year's Math and Science Night. We had the largest turnout of both parents and students for as far back as anyone here can remember. It went beyond our expectations and we couldn't have done it without the folks from AFTAC making it as interactive, educational and entertaining as they did."

Wilson continued. "The second thing is the opportunity AFTAC gave us by taking 'our babies' to the Science Bowl in Orlando. They restored faith in these kids by bringing home the point that just because our students come from poverty doesn't mean they lack great minds."

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After discussing various aspects of the community school concept, Wilson and his staff brought the group on a tour of the campus, including a visit to two math classrooms and the school science lab. They also stopped by Endeavour's "Responsibility Room," a portable trailer where students who are struggling with behavior issues can come to re-vector their thoughts and cool down before returning to their classroom.

The Responsibility Room is also where children receive needed items that have been donated, such as uniform shirts, gym shoes, school supplies, backpacks, and even healthy snacks. Several of AFTAC's private organizations have contributed to the cause with various donations.

Jacqueline Nichols oversees the room and takes great pride in the assistance she provides to the students.



"Many of our kids just need a little extra help since their families might not be able to afford simple things like pencils and notebooks," she said. "We also offer weekend meals to certain children who might have to go home to an empty refrigerator. Little things like that really make a difference."

Taylor requested to visit the school to see the work being undertaken between AFTAC and Endeavour, specifically from his vantage point as the Air Force's senior official responsible for oversight of all programs affecting diversity integration and outreach in the Air Force. And while he had heard and read about the partnership, he was quite surprised to see for himself the depth of their program.

"As I look around and see what's being accomplished here, I realize this is precisely the kind of program I want to see benchmarked throughout the Air Force," said Taylor. "Airmen are volunteers by nature, and dedicated to service. This partnership is something that needs to be replicated, and I hope my office can play a role in spreading the word about this enormous success story."