



MathScience Innovation Center

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SPOOKTACULAR – A VIRTUAL FESTIVAL OF MATH & SCIENCE

1102 Students in 6 School Districts Learn
About Plant and Animal Adaptations

In the fall, students see bats, spiders and pumpkins everywhere, but may know little about the science of these exciting organisms. As part of its distance learning initiative, the MathScience Innovation Center created *Spooktacular!* The one-hour virtual lesson focused on the unique adaptations of these creatures and their role in the environment.

In October, the Center broadcast one-hour virtual lessons to 63 classrooms in 6 different school districts using the *Elluminate Live!* videoconferencing system. Unique opportunities abounded, beginning with the opportunity to hold a specially preserved bat. “Soft”, “furry”, “leathery,” and “cool” headlined the reactions. Building upon students’ immediate interest, MSiC staff members Rhonda Hawley and Crystal Clark engaged the students in describing the bat’s physical properties, comparing the skeleton of bats and humans, and analyzing how bats fit into the food web. Students interacted with each other and the teachers by using microphones, drawing on the virtual whiteboard, sending live video from their classrooms and texting messages .

Students found “the ability to hear other students” and “to talk with someone in another classroom” exciting. Their competitive sides emerged when challenged to record the time needed to wrap a prey (stuffed animal) with 32 yards of twine, which is the typical amount of silk produced by a spider at one time. Although quick times of about 2 minutes were reported, none beat the spider’s time – 10 seconds! Many classes used webcams to send videos of the students wrapping the prey, or photos of the wrapped prey.

Using a polling feature, students predicted if a pumpkin would float. About half were correct – it will! All classes received pumpkins from Ashland Berry Farm to float, as well as using in follow-up experiments. To teachers, “technology integration” and “having real bats to hold” were highlights. “Kids” were excited to learn this way” and “learned so much about spiders, bats, and pumpkins.”

The MathScience Innovation Center developed Spooktacular! and other virtual student lessons as part of its 2015 Strategic Plan. Each robust lesson includes participating teacher training at the MSiC. There, teachers learn to use the *Illuminate Live!* videoconferencing system, experience the lesson components, and receive materials for experimentation.

The 63 participating classes were from the following school divisions and schools:

Chesterfield County: CC Wells (1), Ecoff (2), Reams Road (3), Robious (1), Winterpock (3), Woolridge (2);

Hanover County: Cool Springs (2); Washington Henry (1); Beaverdam (1);

Henrico County: Crestview (2), Echo Lake (2), Glen Lea (1), Maybeury (1), Twin Hickory (1), Pinchbeck (4), Rivers Edge (2), Seven Pines (3), Short Pump (1), Trevett (2), Tuckahoe (5);

King William County: Aquinton (1);

Richmond City: Broad Rock (3), Clark Springs (2), Fairfield Court (2), Fox, Stuart, Woodville (6), Ginter Park (1), Jeb Stuart (2), Summer Hill (5);

Institutional Members: Charles City County (1).

The MathScience Innovation Center is a 42-year-old organization dedicated to futuristic math and science education for K-12 teachers and students. Its vision for 2015 focuses on implementing new programs in fractal geometry, engineering, nanotechnology, environmental modeling, and distance learning. The MathScience Innovation Center is an educational consortium comprised of eight school divisions: Chesterfield, Colonial Heights, Hanover, Henrico, King William, Petersburg, Powhatan, and Richmond. Other divisions also participate through abbreviated memberships: Charles City, Hopewell, Prince George, and the Steward School.