

Superintendent Taylor and his Puppy-in-Training Visit Students at Connecticut Farms School Summer Program

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UNION, NJ – Frie-Frie, a nine-month-old golden retriever puppy being fostered by Union's new schools superintendent, was special guest of the day when she visited students at the Connecticut Farms Summer Ed-venture Program on Friday.

Dr. Scott Taylor brought his puppy Afriyie (nicknamed Frie-Frie) to Connecticut Farms School to share her story with the students and to continue to socialize the dog to others. Taylor said he and his family will foster Frie-Frie until she's about a year old, when she'll be returned to The Seeing Eye, an institution in Morristown that trains dogs to enhance the independence, dignity and self-confidence of people who are blind.

"Our job is to love the puppy, let her interact with lots of people, expose her to sounds, cars," said Taylor to the students. "Then we give her back to The Seeing Eye. It's very hard to do. But the people there then train the puppy so they can be a helper for people who are blind. It makes me sad to think of Frie-Frie leaving, but she's going to help someone." While in training, Frie-Frie wears a vest that reads "Seeing Eye Puppy".

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Taylor told the students that Frie-Frie gets anxious and afraid sometimes. "She might back away a little bit, but once she gets to know you, she'll love you. She would never hurt you. We take her everywhere, even restaurants. People love her." Taylor said the puppy's name, Afriyie, is popular in Ghana, meaning 'good luck for a new year'. "So far she's brought pretty good luck to my family," he said.

Taylor said Frie-Frie is the second puppy his family has fostered for The Seeing Eye. The first, Zuma, is now living with a blind man named Jim. "Zuma is not with us anymore. She is with this man Jim now and helps him do many things in his life," said Taylor.

Students also had an opportunity to ask Taylor questions about fostering a puppy. Frie-Frie then spent the remainder of the morning in the school library while small groups of students came to read to her.

The Summer Ed-venture Program at Connecticut Farms runs half-days, Monday through Friday morning, for three weeks in July. According to Connecticut Farms Title 1 Coordinator Christina Lam, the program is free, and students are sent home with lunch and breakfast for the next day provided by Pomptonian. Students are also provided with a backpack (donated by Costco) with STEM supplies (scissors, erasers, pencils, rulers, and a folder).

Lam said the program is centered around the Engineering is Elementary curriculum, developed by the Museum of Science in Boston. It is a hands-on program, with students producing a product around environmental sustainability. "We are focusing on the units about water conservation and building water filters, pollination and constructing hand pollinators, as well as renewable energy and building windmills," said Lam.

"The program is highly engaging and provides the students with many opportunities to work collaboratively to build models and work through the engineering process," Lam said. She said students are also reading the book "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind" and are having discussions and completing activities around the book. The students also have a physical education class that focuses around team building and social skills.