

A History of Excellence and Leadership

In 1989, Barbara Koscak a recognized leader in education, was invited to the White House by President Ronald Reagan and awarded the Federal Aviation Administration's National Educator of the Year Award. The President selected her because of her ability to excite her students to learn science, math, engineering and technology and to develop their potential for challenging careers. Knowing that all children love airplanes, she had created a curriculum built around space and the physics of flight – a curriculum that was "hands-on, mind-on."

Taking her dream to the next level, she contacted Brigadier General David Arendts, who was the 127th Wing Commander at Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Michigan. Together, they discussed the possibility of students seeing the application of classroom knowledge by observing the work of the men and women of the Air National Guard. They agreed that military personnel could explain and demonstrate the use of science, math, engineering and technology in their careers. National Guard personnel would also be great role models who could reinforce the importance of education, teamwork, goal setting and self-discipline. General Arendts embraced the idea and lent his full support for the creation of the project.

Rico Racosky, an accomplished F-16 pilot and author, was working on a project to inspire students to achieve their dreams through taking action. General Arendts recognized that Racosky's ideas would be a perfect match for STARBASE and the model of "dreams plus action = Reality®" or "d + a = R®" became a critical component of the STARBASE curriculum.

Rick Simms, a local university student, and individuals at the Mount Clemens School District completed the team. Together they created an educational program that offered stimulating "hands-on, mind-on" activities focusing on science, math, technology, personal development, teamwork, and drug awareness and prevention.

In order to make the dream a reality, the team needed funding. In 1990, the Scott Crossfield Foundation awarded Koscak the prestigious A. Scott Crossfield Teacher of the Year Award. The award honors the famous pilot's personal heroes-- teachers. Koscak used the award money to fund a one-week pilot program. She bought supplies, rockets, and treats for the students of the pilot program called "Project STARS." Teachers around the area donated their time and talents to the summer program in 1990.

The team's next step was to apply for funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to offer a year-round program for students, as well as a one-week training for teachers. Project STARS was awarded a three-year grant on March 1, 1991. The response and results of the program were impressive. In 1993, Congress allocated funds to expand the program to seven states. This was a momentous occasion, launching the program into its expansion. The military and educational communities enthusiastically embraced the program, and by year's end, it grew from its original site at Selfridge to seven academies. The program changed its name to DoD STARBASE. The dream of DoD STARBASE, to create a program that would respond to the needs of today's youth by providing stimulating, "hands-on, mind-on" science, technology, engineering and math, as well as motivational goal setting and self-esteem activities, is now a vibrant reality. Military volunteers continue as role models who donate their time to the program showing students how classroom concepts apply to "real world" situations.

After 17 years of success, the DoD STARBASE dream has blossomed from a single classroom to classrooms in five regions of the country, in 34 states, the District of Columbia, Indian Reservations, and U.S. Territories. To date, the program has provided 20-25 hours of stimulating experiences at military bases for over 450,000 students. National Guard, Navy, Marine, Air Force Reserve and Air Force bases are home to the program. This rapid growth truly affirms the children of America have a need and that DOD STARBASE meets that need.

DoD STARBASE continues to be a premier program in science, technology, engineering and math. Today's students not only study flight, but also use computer-assisted three-dimensional software to design space stations, land rovers, submersibles and unmanned aerial vehicles. DoD STARBASE… making tomorrow happen today!