

# STEM Expo Enchants Students with Science, Games and Fun



Kids raise their hands to answer a question during a Mad Science presentation

The annual STEM Expo kicked off Sea-Air-Space 2026 by giving students of all ages a look at the various technologies that underpin the maritime world of the sea services.

Attendees got examples of chemical reactions from Mad Science presentations, learned some of the principles of aerodynamics, saw how many marbles an aluminum foil boat could hold, and more, including getting a close-up look at welding to build ships.

STEM Expo sponsor HII featured a variety of exhibits at its booth, including the marble-carrying boats and welding

systems. John Walker, 043 facilities manager at Newport News Shipbuilding, helped students work with an introductory welding program.

“This introduces these kids to things that they’re probably not exposed to on a daily basis,” he said. “Even at the schools, they probably don’t talk a lot about welding, or fitting up steel, or even shipbuilding. So, STEM is very important to expose these kids to this type of technology and the things we do at the shipyard.”

The Navy League created the STEM Expo to give students interested in science, technology, engineering and math an opportunity to enjoy interactive workshops and hands-on demonstrations while accessing real-world career information.



Students are captivated by dry ice during a Mad Science demonstration at STEM Expo.

HII’s Buzz Donnelly, vice president of customer affairs and a former Navy carrier pilot and ship commander, said he

has “spent a lot of time reaping the benefits of forums like this.” He said the STEM event is a great lead-off event for local visitors and for Sea-Air-Space attendees from all over the world to share with their families.

“It’s extremely important to what we need as a defense industry, because these are the future engineers, the future tradesmen and laborers, that our heavy labor-centric force structure depends on. Regardless of how much we modernize with technology, automation, robots and cobots, we still rely on the people,” Donnelly said.



An attendee gets up close and personal with a pair of virtual-reality goggles at STEM Expo

“Having these young folks here today to see how exciting all the different aspects are, from the shipbuilding to the missiles and aerospace industry, [and] medicines here, is just a real motivating opportunity for them to get them excited about all the things that we do in this industry, to get excited about school, and I know for certain we’re going to have some of them that come in and benefit our nation and this

industrial base in the future.”

Exhibitors at the event, which was also sponsored by Smart Learning Solutions, included universities, defense-related government agencies, science organizations and others.