By Sam Bonacci

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Massachusetts Secretary of Education Paul Reville praised the implementation of the STEM Early College High School program during a visit Tuesday.

"Educators here and the educational leadership in this district have been willing to reach out and embrace a new concept and tackle it in a team way," said Secretary Reville. "This is what we are about right now, is build school systems that prepare young people for careers and college success in the future."

Marlborough had the first Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics program up and running in the state. There are currently six in operation.

The visit from the secretary coincides with the state being half way through Race to the Top funds — which provides part of the funding for the STEM program.

Education is not only about conferring knowledge, but teaching skills and inspiring students, said Secretary Reville, which is what this program can do.

"We need innovators and what makes me proud of what is happening here in Marlborough is that educators have really stepped up and said we are going to try to do things differently," he said.

As the secretary toured classrooms, the program was universally praised by both students and officials alike.

"It's been a great addition to the city," said Mayor Arthur Vigeant who explained it ties in with the technology heavy businesses in the area that need qualified employees. "That's one of the things they are looking for is biotechnology and technology."

The program wraps all of the student's subjects together along with critical thinking and a stress on group work. This is exactly what the students will encounter when they enter the workforce, said STEM Instructional Specialist Bill Rigney.

"If we have kids who know how to work in a group and be successful they can be so much advanced later," he said.

Ninth graders Jason Plaunt and Matt Ruggiero — who were working on a motion diagram — said that the integration and project-heavy nature of the classes helps them learn.

"Every class has to do with everything else," said Ruggiero explaining that a science lesson will tie in with history.

The program is not just for the elite students, said officials. In the middle school a lottery was even set up to ensure that the population in the program was representative of the school district, said Instructional Leadership Director Maureen Greulich.
Tenth Grader Gladys Alvarez said she struggled with school before entering the STEM program last year. One of the biggest skills she has taken away from it is learning to work with others. Alvarez' teachers have also become a source of inspiration and support especially since her immediate family members never went to college.

"The teachers; they all come together as one and try to help you," she said.

Those teachers were important to the learning process for tenth grader Jonathan Maciel as well.

"If your teachers aren’t excited about the subject you are learning why would you want to learn?" he said to Secretary Reville.

There are currently 389 students at the middle and high school enrolled in the program.

"I've seen students at work," said the secretary of his visit. "You don't see sleepy students. You don't see bored students. You see students that are excited and challenged and interested in solving the problems that are put in front of them."