MARLBOROUGH — Gov. Deval Patrick and other state education leaders visited Whitcomb Middle School yesterday to applaud the district's new Science, Technology, Engineering and Math program, as well as to celebrate the first anniversary of the Race to the Top program in the Massachusetts.

Patrick toured two STEM Early College High School classrooms before speaking to a group of students and officials in the school library.

"Education is the single most effective long-term investment we can make," he said yesterday. "I'm proud of the achievements all of us together have made in education."

Patrick was accompanied by Secretary of Education Paul Reville, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Mitchell Chester, Superintendent Anthony Pope and Mayor Nancy Stevens.

The STEM program debuted this school year in grades six and nine, enrolling nearly 200 students. School officials say the program has been going well so far and will eventually be offered from sixth through 12th grade.

The program is funded by a $120,000 planning grant that's spread over four years. Marlborough also received about $400,000 in federal Race to the Top money to pay for initiatives like curriculum planning and developing teaching assessment methods.

Marlborough's portion of Race to the Top money came from a pot of $250 million, which was awarded to the state last year, and will be spent over four years.

There are 258 districts participating in the Race to the Top program in Massachusetts, including about 1,300 schools.

Reville said the program supports closing achievement gaps, a vital undertaking.

He also said school districts and state education officials are making important headway in establishing new ways to assess teacher performance by combining traditional observation methods with student performance data.

"We're really in the process of inventing a 21st-century education system that truly prepares our students for success," he said.

Chester said the strides will ensure that Massachusetts students are prepared to compete in a global market with relevant skills.

"We are at the one-year mark of having received the Race to the Top grant, and what's been accomplished has been outstanding," he said. "It's about making sure our students really are prepared for opportunities after high school."

"This is an exciting time for Marlborough public schools," Pope said. "The Race to the Top funding has had a huge impact on the work we do here."

(Kendall Hatch can be reached at 508-490-7453 or khatch@wickedlocal.com.)

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Gov. Deval Patrick greets eighth-grader Bernadette LaFollette and other members of Whitcomb Middle School’s student council during his visit to the Marlborough school on Wednesday.

By Kendall Hatch/Daily News staff
The MetroWest Daily News
Posted Sep 29, 2011 @ 12:20 AM

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Gov. Deval Patrick chats with student Meira Woodel during his visit to Whitcomb Middle School in Marlborough on Wednesday.

By Kendall Hatch/Daily News staff
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Gov. Deval Patrick observes Marlborough sixth-graders Leslie Cruz, left, and Larissa Rodrigues in their math class during his visit to Whitcomb Middle School in Marlborough on Wednesday.

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Gov. Deval Patrick visits a science class at Whitcomb Middle School in Marlborough on Wednesday.

By Kendall Hatch/Daily News staff

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