



Staff photos by TINA FORBES

Academy for Science and Design students present Gov. Maggie Hassan with a "Time for STEM" wall clock during her tour of the Nashua school on May 28. FROM LEFT: ASD Director Jennifer Cava; students Nikkil Vootkur, Jack Ayer, Governor Hassan, Fiona Doyle and Aasha Krishnan.

# Day of Science & Technology

## Gov. tours Nashua STEM school

By TINA FORBES

Staff Writer

NASHUA – Gov. Maggie Hassan's first time visit to the Academy for Science and Design charter school came with a chance to tour the school, meet faculty and students and – of course – test drive a robot.

The science, technology, engineering and math-based charter school hosts a STEM field day for students several times a year.

The SPARK Day, or Symposium Promoting Advancement of Real-World Knowledge, are meant to cultivate interest in STEM careers.

The governor's office has supported STEM education, particularly in addressing the need for skilled labor in New Hampshire.



Gov. Hassan drove a robot built by FIRST robotics students at the Academy for Science and Design. Hassan toured the Nashua charter school on May 28.



# Spark | Robot stacks objects with 2 arms

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“One of the things we’re really trying to focus on is STEM education,” said Hassan to students and staff during the tour. She explained the task force she created and tasked with ways to empower students and teachers in pursuing STEM education.

Created by executive order in April 2014, the group of business and community leaders and educators explored ways to promote science and technology education in the state.

Hassan said it is particularly important to close the gender gap in science and technology careers, which struck ASD sophomore Aasha Krishnan.

“We really appreciate what you’re doing for women in STEM,” she told

Hassan.

Members of the Phoenix FIRST Robotics team, comprised of ASD students and other Nashua students, invited Hassan to drive their robot, and talked her through the controls.

The wheeled robot can drive and stack objects with two straight arms on a vertical track. Although she said she’s never so much as played a video game, Hassan successfully navigated the robot to move and stack a container on a tower of bins.

“She’s better at driving it than I am,” joked Krishnan, a member of team Phoenix.

SPARK Day sessions are run by staff, parents, students and community members for students across grade levels to not only highlight STEM fields,

but the arts, travel and other interests.

SPARK sessions cover a lot of ground, presenting talks on the “history and lore of Middle Earth,” to physically engaging workshops on dance and yoga. STEM-based sessions include “introduction to Ham Radio,” a “Siesmograph Presentation at the Merrimack Library” and a car-racing activity in which students build cars out of fruits and vegetables.

Amy Bewley, ASD coordinator of admissions, ran the veggie race with a pack of 50 sixth graders.

“The top three finishers used celery. Celery was the best, because it was the lightest. Potatoes were the worst,” said Bewley.

ASD Director Jennifer Cava said the governor showed a genuine interest

in the students’ work.

“I was thrilled to have the opportunity to open what I hope will be an ongoing conversation with her about how we can all work together to improve STEM education here in the state,” said Cava.

Hassan said with the success of the 2014 STEM task force, the group might continue its effort to search for ways to improve science and technology education in New Hampshire.

“We’re going to reconstitute the task force because the group wants to keep going,” she said. “There’s a lot of value in education that’s important no matter what, but we want to teach in a way that’s valuable to the job market. You guys are going to solve a lot of problems.”



