

# Denbigh High School Aviation Academy touts wind tunnel upgrade plans

By: Jane Hammond, Contact Reporter  
ejhammond@dailypress.com

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Denbigh High School Aviation Academy's wind tunnel is about to get a major lift.

The magnet program announced Thursday night at an open house for interested students that it has secured a \$58,000 grant from Alcoa Foundation to upgrade the current tunnel. Right now, it occupies the space of a classroom at the campus at the Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport.

The money will be used to purchase equipment that will help the more than 300 students in the academy better understand what happens to planes in flight. A helium bubble generator will show how force and pressure affect an airplane model, while cameras and computer screens will let students view what's happening inside the tunnel.



(Joe Fudge and Kaitlin McKeown / Daily Press)

Money from the grant also will fund materials to build models, and lesson plans will be reworked to integrate the new capabilities.

"It's going to be exciting," said junior Cameron Jones. "We get to build bigger models, test higher wind speeds. It'll be fun."

Junior Jasmine Lewis agreed.

"It means we get more opportunities, and I think more jobs or colleges will like to look into us to see what we're doing and actually want to have us work with them," 17-year-old Lewis said.

The Alcoa Foundation, Alcoa Howmet's philanthropic arm, wanted to get involved with the Aviation Academy to help prepare students interested in a vocational career. With its nearby plants that manufacture parts on almost every commercial plane flying today, it was the right fit.

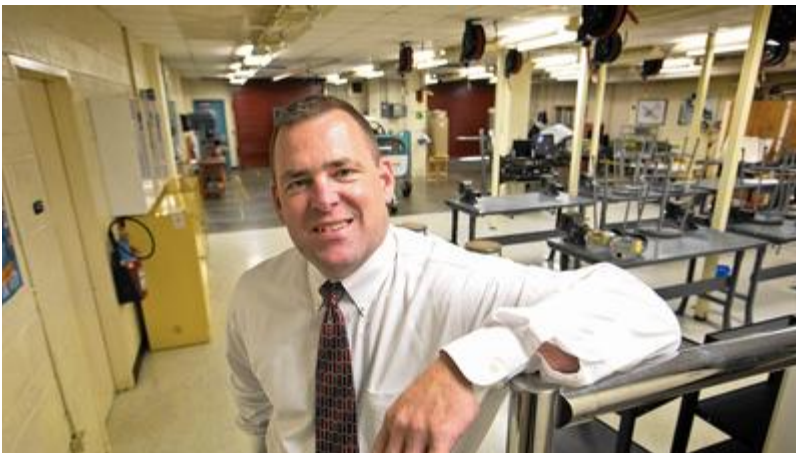
"The whole purpose of the program really needs to be to get kids geeked up about STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and about careers in technology, and this is exactly the thing to do that," said John Schaub, plant manager of Alcoa Howmet's structural castings center. "You could develop a dream off of this. ...



[Denbigh Aviation Academy RV-12 airplane project to be completed in the fall](#)

"In many schools across the country, they've been pulling out technical programs, they've been pulling out home economic programs, they've been pulling out everything that's outside of the core competencies, unfortunately. There's a large portion of the student body that needs those and it's what they're cut out to do. We're trying to hire people with that technical knack, the desire to learn more, do more."

The additions may not be over for the Aviation Academy. Later this month, the Newport News School Board will vote on legislative positions for the 2016 General Assembly. The proposed package includes supporting the Peninsula Airport Commission's request for \$3.5 million in state funding to help construct a new facility for the program.



[Denbigh Aviation Academy director shares lessons learned there in new book](#)

The expansion of the school into a new Virginia Center of Aeronautics, which would include a partnership with a university, a flight school and more, was first proposed in 2014 and is estimated to cost between \$20-\$22 million total.

*Hammond can be reached by phone at 757-247-4951.*