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Beech Hill School Pilots Science Program with Vanderbilt University

By Fenceviewer Staff

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A lot of business cards make their way to state Rep. Brian Langley (R-Ellsworth), but something told him this one from a Vanderbilt University professor was something special. It was.

As a result of Langley's fateful decision to call Dr. Billy Hudson — and the enthusiastic participation of Beech Hill Principal Cathy Lewis, math and science teacher Megan Macdonald, Ellsworth High School guidance counselor Linda Fuller and Otis School Committee Chairman Jen Cammack — Beech Hill is piloting a science program taught by Vanderbilt faculty via videoconferencing.



Beech Hill math and science teacher Megan Macdonald monitors a video conference between a Vanderbilt University professor and the laboratory classroom at Beech Hill School in Otis. — JACQUELINE WEAVER

It is the first such partnership between the Aspirnaut Initiative at Vanderbilt and a Maine school. “What I like about this project is it’s between people, not bureaucracies,” said Langley, who taught culinary arts at the Hancock County Technical Center for 27 years.

And it is likely that Aspirnaut, which was founded at Vanderbilt and is being Skyped from the Nashville, Tenn., campus, may soon be extended to up to four additional schools in Hancock County. Vanderbilt is applying for a National Science Foundation grant to make that possible.

Langley said what appeals to him about the program is that it identifies capable children in rural communities and helps raise their aspirations.

“When I met Billy Hudson I immediately thought of Ron Wheeler, the teacher who saved me from falling through the cracks,” said Langley. “He cared enough to kick me in the butt when I needed it and was there to talk to long after graduation.