



Masonboro Island Explorers enters its seventh year

Every fifth grader in North Carolina learns about ecosystems and weather systems in science class. In New Hanover County, even though students live on the coast, many have never visited the ocean or explored the neighboring Masonboro Island - the largest undisturbed barrier island on the southern coast – right in their backyard.

To remedy this, Masonboro.org created the [Masonboro Island Explorers](#) program and took 50 students from Wrightsville Beach Elementary to the Masonboro Island Reserve in the fall of 2013.

The program evolved to include the N.C. Coastal Reserve and [Carolina Ocean Studies](#). With funding from Duke Energy, now every 5th grader in New Hanover County gets to see their science curriculum in action with a visit to the Masonboro Island Reserve.

The Masonboro Island Explorers program connects the content from the classroom with hands-on experiences in the living laboratories of the Reserve. After taking a Carolina Ocean Studies ferry to the island, students participate in three learning labs that cover water quality, shoreline stabilization, and weather patterns – aligned with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. Instructors from Carolina Ocean Studies lead students through hands-on activities at the ocean front beach, salt marsh, and inland tide pool. A favorite, includes collecting crabs after learning about water quality and tides.

Since 2013, the program has grown to almost 2000 students annually and includes students from every eligible school in New Hanover County.



Photo: Masonboro.org

Students experience learning labs at a saltwater marsh, ocean front beach, and inland tidal pools.

North Carolina Coastal Reserve & National Estuarine Research Reserve

The goal of this program is to create the next generation of North Carolina coastal stewards. “We would not be able to provide this wonderful experience for these students if it wasn’t for the partnership with Masonboro.org and Carolina Ocean Studies,” says Lori Davis, the education coordinator for the Reserve. “Masonboro Island is a perfect place for students to learn about estuaries and their importance to North Carolina.”

The Reserve is pleased to be a part of this initiative that provides students, who may not otherwise have an opportunity to explore this living laboratory, a chance to witness the valuable economic and environmental services estuarine ecosystems provide firsthand.

Field trips are underway. Masonboro.org is looking for [volunteers](#) to chaperone field trips.



Students measure the water quality of Masonboro Sound.



Students show off a blue crab they captured in a tidal creek.